

SAFE SCHOOLS

Schools are places for children to learn and grow. But many girls all over the world go to school fearing for their safety dreading humiliation and violent treatment simply hoping to get through another day.

Schools reflect wider society. The same forms of violence which women suffer throughout their lives – physical, sexual and psychological are present in lives of many girls in and around their schools.

Girl children are especially at risk of violation of their protection rights simply because they are girls. They are assaulted and eve-teased on their way to school. They are prone to face harassment by friends, classmates, teachers, administrative employees or visitors to the school. They are teased, humiliated, mocked, and harassed by rumors, lewd MMS and SMS by their peers. They fall prey to corporal punishment, sexual abuse, assaults or even lured into sexual favors.

Girls with disabilities or special needs become targets for pranks which are often demeaning than innocuous. Most cases are not reported for the fear of more humiliation and if reported, they are met with inaction. Allowing violence to persist, gender stereotypes are reinforced and gender discrimination is entrenched in the next

generation. It sends a message that violence against girls and women is inevitable and that quality, safe education for girls is not a priority. All forms of abuse, discrimination, neglect and even lack of action culminate into violence.

Girls are discriminated more severely if they come from a minority or from a lower socio-economic background. Discrimination on basis of caste, untouchability, ethnicity, religion or region still spate the society despite the laws in place. Girls belonging to marginalized groups are twice discriminated-once on basis of caste/class and then again on being a girl.

Violence against girls causes not only fear and pain, but also lowered self esteem, poor performance at school, sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancies and depression. It damages both the mental and physical health of victims and survivors.

This results in low enrolment rate in schools. In sub-urban, rural or conflict affected areas, any instance of violence against girls instills fear in family and added excuse not to send them to school. Hence, countless girls are kept out of school, dropped out or do not fully participate in school.

Status of Girl Child in India

India is home to almost 19% of the world's children. More than one third of the population, around 440 million is below 18 years. This implies almost 212 million comprise of the unequal "lesser half" of India's children.

Provisions in Constitution of India

Equality, freedom and protection of young girls is enshrined in the Constitution of India and enjoined with Fundamental Rights and Directive Principles to provide the framework for child rights. Several laws and national policies have also been framed to implement the commitment to child rights. The girls are also protected under the IPC act which upholds the modesty of women.

Based on UN Convention of Rights of the Child, the adoption of resolution "A World Fit for Children" and National Charter for Children, the Commissions for Protection of Child Rights Act, 2005 came into being and the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights was formed in 2006.

Yet, India has the dubious position of having the world's largest number of sexually abused children. And being a girl child in India, adds further to the misery. While on one hand girls are being killed even before they are born, on the other hand those who are born and survive suffer from a number of violations starting at tender age. It is reported that a child below 16 years is raped every 155 minutes, a child below 10 every 13 hours and one in every 10

children sexually abused at one point of time. Girls' enrolment in school at primary level is 47.79% - only 4 out of 10 children going to schools are girls.

In the recent survey: Study on Child Abuse: India 2007, the states of Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar and Delhi have almost consistently reported higher rates of abuse in all forms as compared to other states.

50% of the girls have reported emotional abuse of one form of the other emotional abuse though humiliation or comparison and this is as high as 70% in Gujarat. In Delhi, 87% of the female young adults have reported facing one or more form of emotional abuse during their childhood.

This shows that existing legislations are clearly not enough. There is a need develop a responsive, participatory and accountable system of

educational governance and management at the school, community and national levels.

The first step is to create an environment in schools where they are safe, are protected from abuse, violence and discrimination and are healthy and encouraged to learn. Schools should ensure that education programmes and materials reflect fully promotion and protection of human rights and the values of peace, tolerance and gender equality.

10 steps to safe schools

1 Create awareness about Convention of Child Rights, Instruments and Standards of Child Protection laid by the government especially in context of adolescent girls.

2 Prohibit all forms of violence against girls, including verbal abuse, harassment, physical violence, emotional abuse and sexual violence and exploitation.

3 Develop programmes to ensure access to school for girls from marginalized groups.

4 Schools to formulate guidelines/code of conduct for all school staff and students in and around their premises.

5 Ensure that schools have sex-segregated toilets and washrooms, secure dormitories, supervised playgrounds and sport fields and adequate security in and around the premises.

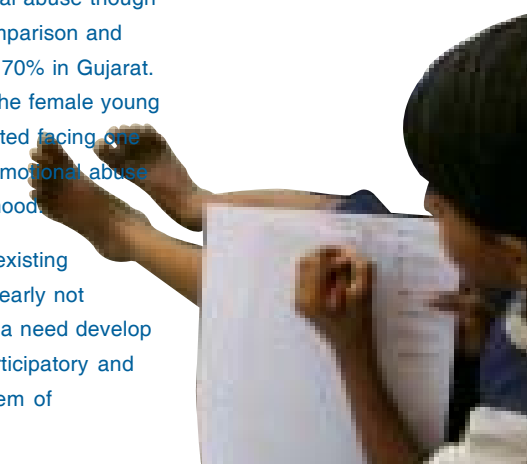
6 Appoint counselors, train school staff in early intervention strategies to address harassment and violence in schools.

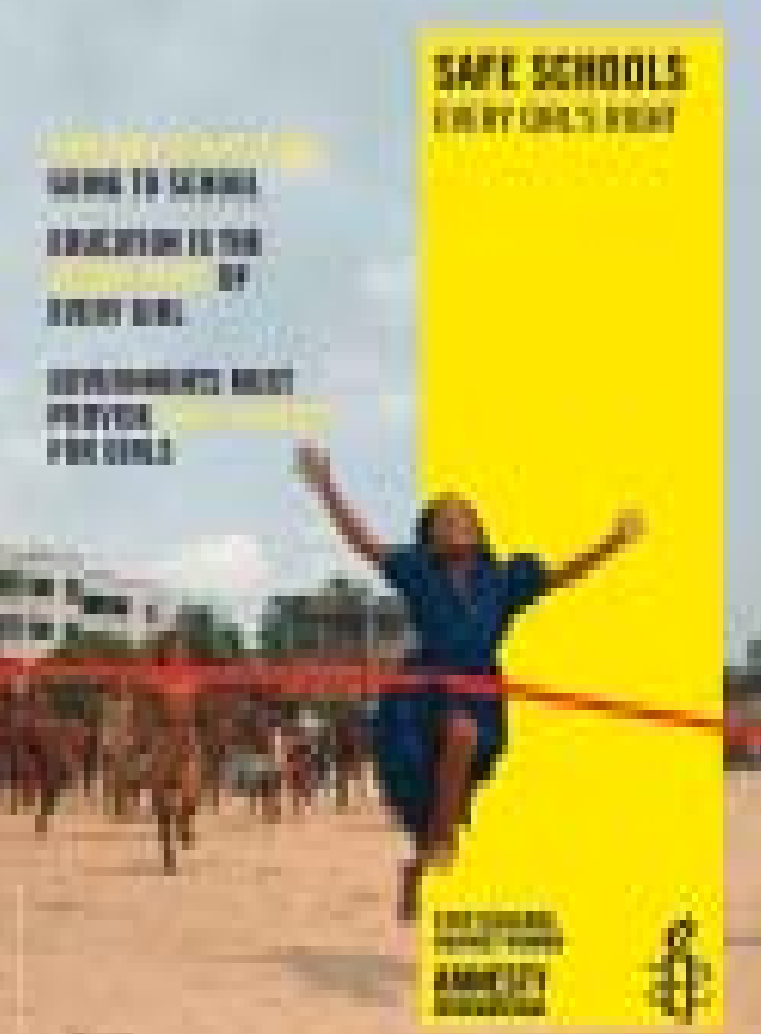
7 Respond to incidents of violence against girls through confidential and independent reporting mechanisms, effective investigations and coordinate with concerned authorities like police, child welfare commissions etc.

8 Ensure that all incidents of violence against girls are reported and recorded, and that people convicted of rape, sexual assault or other criminal offenses against children are not employed in schools.

9 Provide support services for girls who have suffered violence, including counseling, medical treatment; HIV/AIDS information, medication and support services.

10 Enact and enforce appropriate laws, policies and procedures.





International Legislations

Preamble to the Declaration of the Right of the Child adopted by the UNDP in 1959, provides that the child by reason of his or her physical or mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care including her appropriate legal protection before as well as after birth.

UN Convention of Rights of the Child ratified by 192 countries sets out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of children.

It sets forth basic standards which individual nations agree to pursue on behalf of children, including providing assistance to parents as they fulfill their child-rearing responsibilities. These norms rest on the Convention's four underlying principles:

- The Right to Survival,
- The Right to Develop to the Fullest Potential,
- The Right to Protection from Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation, and
- The Right to Participate in Family, Cultural, and Social Life

"A World Fit for Children" – a resolution adopted by UNGA, 2002, asserts that no child should be left behind- every boy and girl is born free and equal in dignity and rights; therefore all forms of discrimination affecting them to end.

Member states have pledged to protect children from harm and exploitation- children must be protected against any acts of

violence, abuse, exploitation and discrimination, as well as forms of terrorism and hostage-taking.

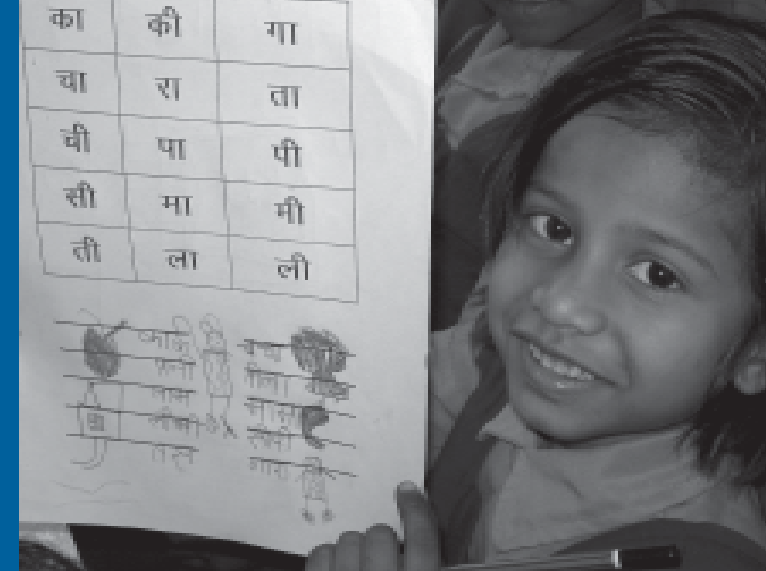
It also urges the governments to put in place, as appropriate, effective national legislation, policies and action plans and allocating resources to fulfill and protect the rights and to secure the well-being of the rights of the child; and enhance widespread awareness and understanding the rights of the child.

Eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005; and achieve gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

CEDAW, also called the international bill of rights for the women, establishes an agenda of action for putting an end to sex-based discrimination: States ratifying the Convention are required to enshrine male/female equality into their domestic legislation, and enact new provisions to guard against discrimination against women. It is also applicable to girls under 18 years of age.

India has ratified all the above conventions.



You can

Help spread awareness through your forums, clubs, email groups, etc or simply discuss about girl child rights with your friends, family, colleagues, neighbors esp. to your children in your community;

Organize debates, discussions, plays, programmes in schools in your locality and encourage them spread awareness of rights and sensitizing young children about violence and abuse.

Participate in our opinion polls and express your views on our blog.

Join hands with Amnesty International India and make schools safe for girls.

Amnesty International India

Amnesty International in India is part of a worldwide movement of people who campaign for internationally recognised human rights to be respected and protected. AI works independent of government, political ideology, economic interest or religion. It fights for every person's right to basic human rights *everywhere* where human rights violations are perpetrated.

AI does campaigns, research and join hands with other likeminded organisations for promoting and protecting economic, social and cultural rights, protecting human rights defenders, and against death penalty, torture and impunity granted by security legislations; marginalization and displacement of indigenous communities and violence against women.

AI India conducts human rights education training to develop the understanding and abilities among human rights defenders and other professionals.

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