
Organised child abuse in south Punjab

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DERA GHAZI KHAN, Feb 26: Eight years ago, one night when Yasir was wandering on a road as he had nowhere to go, a man offered him shelter. Yasir, then eight-year-old, was homeless and his parents had died. Having no other option, he accepted the offer. The man took him to a house where he was given shelter and food. In return, he had to satisfy the lust of homosexuals who thronged the place every night. The place called Munda Khana or child prostitutes' den housed such 10 to 15 child sex workers who had to sleep with their customers. The master of the den namely Dushman would charge Rs50 from each customer and give Rs25 to the child as wages.

Times went by and every night left its ghastly traces on Yasir and his colleagues. Four years ago, Yasir was run over by a rickshaw when he was returning to Munda Khana after serving his customers and lost one of his legs. Consequently, he was abandoned by Dushman. After a week, another Munda Khana adopted Yasir. Here sodomites made him a heroin addict. Five months ago, he was thrown out of Munda Khana as he had lost his charm to his clients.

"Every child sex worker has to retire from the occupation after attaining puberty," says Yasir, now 16-year-old who begs and sleeps on roads.

"I can recognise many people who used to be my clients and now they just pass by without noticing my plight," said Yasir.

Four months ago, said Yasir, five people gang-raped him and threw him at a deserted place.

"I was crying with pain when Sheikh Waheed heard my cries. He took me to a doctor," he said.

Waheed, a social worker, said that even though he had got a case registered against the alleged rapists, nothing had happened. Yasir is suffering from cancer and a lot of other diseases. Such fate is awaiting many others who are now serving at brothels in the city.

Presently, over 50 child sex houses are functioning in the city where nearly 500 children are at service. These children are either street boys or orphans and abandoned by their families. Things have much changed now and the masters of sex dens charge Rs100 per customer and a half of the money is given to the child.

Child abuse at a commercial level is not only done in DG Khan but in other nearby towns like Taunsa and Kotaddu.

In Taunsa, it was considered to be a status symbol to accompany a boy, said Waheed. Some hotels in Multan provide child sex workers on demand.

Multan District Police Officer Munir Chishti said sodomy was very rare in his district. A spokesman for the DG Khan DPO said that the DPO had asked all station house officers to cope with the abuse. He said that special warrants were needed to raid child sex houses and police could face problems if it raided such places on its own. He said police had never received any complaint regarding functioning of such brothels in the city.

Multan District Nazim Faisal Mukhtar said that the government had paid attention to the problem and had set up the Labour Department, which held meetings regularly.

"We have asked the people to come out and work against child abuse but the people shy away and seldom take part in such activities. They don't even pursue such cases wherein their own children are exploited," he said.

He said poverty should be eradicated by raising education level and producing a skilled lot.

DG Khan District Nazim Sardar Maqsood Leghari called child sex an abominable practice in the area and said he had set up community boards to help such victims.

Multan District Coordination Officer Mukhtar Babar admitted that child abuse had reached an alarming level in southern districts, adding that the Punjab government was also paying attention to the problem.

He said that the chief minister's adviser, Faiza Asghar, had ordered the setting up of a shelter house for children in Multan. The centre will start functioning in March.

DG Khan DCO Iram Bukhari said that she was aware of the problem and a plan had been hatched to rehabilitate such children. She said social taboos and lack of awareness among the public about child rights had left damaging effects on

society. She said that the government would set up a centre for slow learners.

Dera Social Welfare District Officer Ghulam Abbas Dasti said a children's home was being set up and another centre sheltering children, Nigehbaan, would set up at a cost of Rs198 million.

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