

Child sex abuse and sexual exploitation continues unabated: Report
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PUNE: A report released recently by the Working Group on Human Rights in India and the UN (WGHR) has stated that various studies in India have indicated high prevalence of child sexual abuse and sexual exploitation in the name of religion.

"53.22% of children have reported some form of sexual abuse, amongst which 52.94% were boys and 47.06% were girls. Abuse started at the age of five years, with the incidence increasing with age, peaking at 12 to 15 years" states the report.

The report adds that sexual abuse is reported under rape and incest by the National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) but only in the context of girls. The NCRB does not maintain data on sexual abuse of boys, as it is not covered under the IPC, creating serious gaps in data compilation. Sexual abuse of boys is registered under Section 377 of the IPC, which criminalises homosexuality.

Stating that sexual exploitation in the name of religion is rampant in parts of the country the report mentions the Devdasi system prevalent in Maharashtra and Karnataka - wherein a girl, usually before reaching puberty, is ceremoniously dedicated or married to a deity or to a temple.

The National Legal Service Authority (NALSA) stated that 250,000 girls had been dedicated as Devadasis to temples on the Maharashtra-Karnataka border including 16,624 girls from Andhra Pradesh, 22,941 from Karnataka and 2,479 from Maharashtra. The remoteness of many of the villages, and the continuing rise in demand from organised traffickers for young girls, is thwarting efforts to combat the system.

" The Devdasi system still prevails in the border villages of Maharashtra and Karnataka. The governments of Maharashtra and Karnataka have framed many laws and Acts to ban the system, but in vain" says activist R S Kamble from Miraj who added that social awareness has not penetrated in rural parts of these states.

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