



**R-13/8/2020-PRPP (RU-2)**  
**National Human Rights Commission**  
**Research Unit –II (PRP&P Division)**

**Minutes of the Meeting of the Core Group on Women on the agenda “Missing Women and Girls in India” held on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2024 at Manav Adhikar Bhawan, New Delh**

The meeting was chaired by Hon’ble Member of NHRC, Smt. S. Vijaya Bharathi. The list of participants is placed as Annexure.



2. **Smt. Anita Sinha, Joint Secretary, NHRC**, welcomed all the participants and began her address by highlighting the importance of the agenda for the meeting of the Core Group on Women, “*Missing Women and Girls in India*”. She began by bringing attention to the concerning statistics across India, with nearly 13.13 lakhs women having been reported between 2019 and 2022. She detailed the factors that play a role in this regard, like poverty, forceful abduction and trafficking by luring young women in the name of high paying jobs in big cities. She noted that while many of these women have been traced, there are still lakhs of women who are caught in the net of traffickers who force them to do domestic work, engage in prostitution, and/or sell their organs in the black market.



3. **Smt. S. Vijaya Bharathi, Hon'ble Member, NHRC** began her inaugural address by stating that in a country where we worship goddesses, and where women are seen as the embodiment of “shakti”, it was saddening to see the insecurity faced by women. She noted that it was particularly distressing for the families of these women, who often do not have the wherewithal to deal with such situations. She pointed out that the attitude of the police is often dismissive in such matters. She was of the view that since there are no Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) when it comes to tracing missing women and girls, it would be beneficial to have such procedures to assist the state machinery in tackling this issue.



4. **Dr. Meena Gopal**, began by pointing out that in it was important to look at dropout rates for young women in rural areas. It is imperative to have hostels, and other support from the state for these women. Additionally, the role of educators was key when it came to sensitising both the young girls and their families. She asserted the importance of providing vocational training, through mediums like Yuvati Mela. It was crucial, she said, to have convergence of already existant schemes and local bodies, who had a strong role to play in protecting and promoting the rights of these women.

5. **Dr. Sabiha Hussain**, addressed the issue of older missing women in India. These elderly women, Dr. Hussain noted, faced financial insecurity, poor health, and destitution, and are often seen as a burden and a liability by their families. It is imperative to have age-wise segregation of data, and better coordination among agencies. Additionally, it is also important to adequately sensitise families about the rights of women.

6. **Mrs. Shatabdi Pande** focussed on Chhattisgarh, where a high number of women and girls have been reported missing in the last few years. She stated that traffickers have been coming up with a new tactic wherein they stay in villages for extended periods of time and befriend the locals, and then target young women in the name of “high paying jobs” in the field of construction, or in brick kilns, in big cities. It is important for the Panchayats to keep young women engaged in some form of work if they drop out from school at a young age. It is also crucial that State Human Rights Commissions and NGOs at the state and local level work towards identifying threats, and raising awareness amongst ordinary people.

7. **Ms. S. Yamini Sharma**, began her session by pointing out the rising number of cases in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, and the role of factors like poverty, lack of education, poor implementation of laws, etc. **The solutions provided to the victims and their families should be long-term in nature**, in terms of socio-economic support, and educational institutes should provide adequate awareness and sensitization to children from a young age.

8. **Smt. Meenakshi Negi**, commenced by pointing out that it is crucial to identify hotspots for such crimes, because the reasons for the high number of missing women in different states might be different in different places. According to her, **solutions ought to be area and problem specific. The training that is given to survivors' as part of their rehabilitation must also be tailored to their needs rather than being generic in nature.** She also stated that **women's cell in police stations should have more outreach**, and provide legal aid if needed. She also noted that it is **important to sensitise stakeholders like airline staff, railway staff, and other security agencies** if they come across a potential crime like this.



9. **Shri Daya Shankar** began his address by listing out the important initiatives taken by the government to address the issue of missing women and girls in India. He listed out the **preventive measures** which include laws, 759 dedicated One Stop Centres (OSCs), women's helpline number (112) to provide emergency services and support to women, the Nirbhaya Fund, Anti-Human Trafficking Units (AHTUs), and women's desk at police stations. The **investigative measures** include training programmes for police personnel and medical officers for dealing with crimes against women. He noted that recognising trafficking as an organised crime under the new CrPC was a step in the right direction.

10. **Mrs. D. Neeharika Reddy** stated that raising the punishment for such crimes has not had a deterrent effect. The key problem is the poor implementation of laws. A missing person's complaint is registered is not treated as a priority. **It is important to register a Zero FIR in such matters, and ensure constant follow-up.** She recommended **that at the district level, there ought to be a special squad for dealing with missing persons' cases, with the SP regularly monitoring these matters. These efforts also ought to be coordinated with the district legal authorities, so that a lawyer and a social worker may be assigned to such cases**, to provide the necessary assistance to the families. She

also added that we should have **stronger linkages with Interpol** for tackling the issue of international trafficking.

11. **Dr. Manisha Kothekar** also stated that as it is important to have an **age-wise segregation of data** when it comes to missing women and girls to understand the targeted groups. It is important to have **area-specific remedies**, and **steps should be taken to reduce dropouts from schools**. Often, despite the existence of mechanisms like AHTUs and OSCs, district authorities do not have the resources to run them. It was the need of the hour, according to Dr. Kothekar, to increase engagement with civil society, especially at the local level.

12. **Dr. Vandana Mishra** focussed on the importance of moral education in today's day and age and expressed the view that **moral education should be imparted to children from a young age**. The weak economic condition of victims' families, their lack of knowledge, intimidation by perpetrators, etc. are factors that affect the victims' ability to get justice.

13. **Dr. Shweta Khandelwal** categorised the road ahead through the acronym **BOLD- B for building of safe spaces** in a holistic manner, **O for outreach** and raising awareness about the issue at hand, **L for leveraging technology** like facial recognition, networks across borders, etc. and **D for disaggregated digital data**, which would help in coming up with detailed and specific solutions to address the problems.

14. **Shri Ajay Bhatnagar, Director General (Investigation), NHRC** also addressed the meeting by giving his views from a police perspective. He stressed that it was due to practical constraints like time, lack of dedicated manpower, and high case load, that laws were not being properly implemented. **He stated that the issue of missing women and girls must be made a priority both bureaucratically and politically. Incentivising high school education, ensuring that minimum wage laws are implemented, and avoiding duplication of work are some of the steps that may be taken to tackle the issue.**

15. The meeting ended with a formal vote of thanks by Dr. Rajul Raikwar, Consultant (Research).

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## **List of Participants**

### **Officials of National Human Rights Commission**

1. Smt. Vijayabharathi Sayani, Hon'ble Member, NHRC
2. Dr. Dnyaneshwar Manohar Mulay, Hon'ble Member, NHRC
3. Shri Ajay Bhatnagar, Director General (Investigation), NHRC
4. Ms. Anita Sinha, Joint Secretary, NHRC
5. Smt. Ilakkiya Karunakaran, SSP, NHRC
6. Smt. Monia Uppal, DSP, NHRC
7. Dr. Rajul Raikwar, Consultant (Research)
8. Ms. Madhura Naniwadekar, Junior Research Consultant

### **Representatives from Ministries/ Government Institutions**

1. Shri Daya Shankar, Director, Ministry of Women and Child Development
2. Smt. Meenakshi Negi, Member Secretary, National Commission for Women

### **Core Group Members**

1. Dr. Sabiha Hussain, Professor and Director, Sarojini Naidu Center for Women's Studies, Jamia Islamia University
2. Dr. Meena Gopal, Associate Professor, Pondicherry University
3. Dr. Shweta Khandelwal, Senior Advisor, Jhpeigo

### **Special Invitees**

1. Mrs. Shatabdi Pande, National Head of Women's Cooperative Cell, Sahakar Bharati
2. Ms. S. Yamini Sharma, President, SINGC Trust
3. Mrs. D. Neeharika Reddy, Advocate, High Court of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh
4. Dr. Manisha Kothekar, All India Organising Secretary, Bharatiya Stree Shakti
5. Dr. Vandana Mishra, In-charge, Pragma Pravah Women, Aayam Bharat Madhya Prant