

# MERI ABHILASHA

**“Equality & Empowerment for Girls & Women”**

**An initiative supported  
by DSP Asset Managers  
Pvt. Ltd.**



**Half yearly report - April to  
September, 2023**

**Martha Farrell Foundation**

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# INTRODUCTION: MERI ABHILASHA

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Meri Abhilasha: Equality & Empowerment for Girls & Women, supported by DSP Asset Managers Pvt. Ltd. focuses on empowering Girls & Women using an integrated system approach to create a safe space for their growth and empowerment. The project aims to increase adolescents' ability to comprehend and recognize violence. With a particular emphasis on the POCSO Act 2012, Meri Abhilasha seeks to support adolescents and their mothers in understanding the reporting process in cases of sexual and gender-based violence. The project aims to strengthen school systems by putting in place safeguards that make them a safe environment for learning.

Drawing on the foundation's previous work and experiences working with adolescent girls, it has been underlined that adolescent girls in India are going through significant changes. Norms and behaviors based on entrenched patriarchy limit their economic participation and mobility in schools and public areas due to insecurity, sexual harassment, and violence. Sexual assault prevents them from accomplishing their full potential. Despite laws, regulations, and institutions intended to promote gender equality, most school educational programs are gender-blind, with teenage boys and girls failing to learn and practice equal gender relations.

Keeping the lived experiences of adolescent girls and women at the forefront of its strategy, design, and implementation, this unique program seeks to implement an inclusive and resilient model of recovery, growth, and empowerment that will not only focus on building the capacities of adolescent girls through awareness, voice, and space but will also work with adolescent boys to gain an understanding of and practice equal gender relations so that they emerge as allies in combating sexual and gender-based violence.

## **The main focus of the program is to:**

- Focus on girls' empowerment by creating safe spaces for their growth and well-being.
- Engage and sensitize boys to enable them to accept and support empowered women and girls.
- Prepare mothers to support their daughter's aspirations while empowering them with information and leadership building to support their daughters' aspirations.
- Support school systems to institutionalize mechanisms to enable safe learning spaces for adolescents.

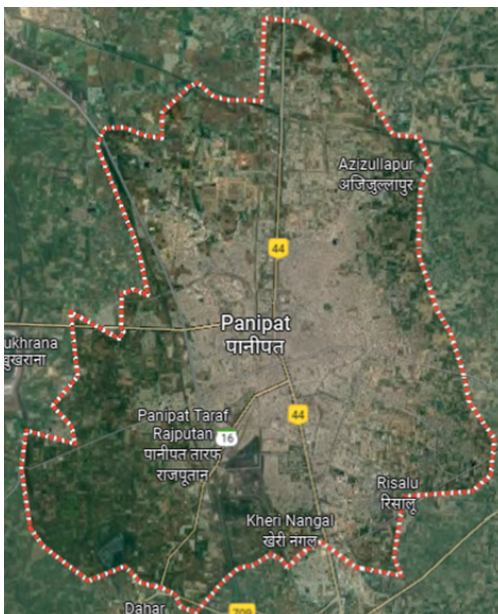
# OBJECTIVES

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- 6000 students from 40 schools will be sensitized on gender, gender stereotypes and gender-based violence.
- 20 intervention schools will commit to providing safe learning spaces for girls and boys and institutionalize policies for the safety of women and adolescents.
- 100 mothers of adolescent girls are empowered, build leadership to support the empowerment of adolescent girls and to end/report sexual and gender-based violence.
- 60 school teachers and 20 school principals are aware and taking action to create safe and conducive learning and working spaces in their schools.
- 400 adolescent girls will build leadership, understand, identify and report violence after participating in the participatory learning programmes.
- 400 adolescent boys will build leadership, understand, identify, report violence and become allies in ending sexual and gender-based violence after participating in the learning programmes.
- Adolescent girls and their mothers in Delhi and Gurugram will continue to be engaged and empowered with leadership building and awareness to prevent/report sexual abuse and violence.

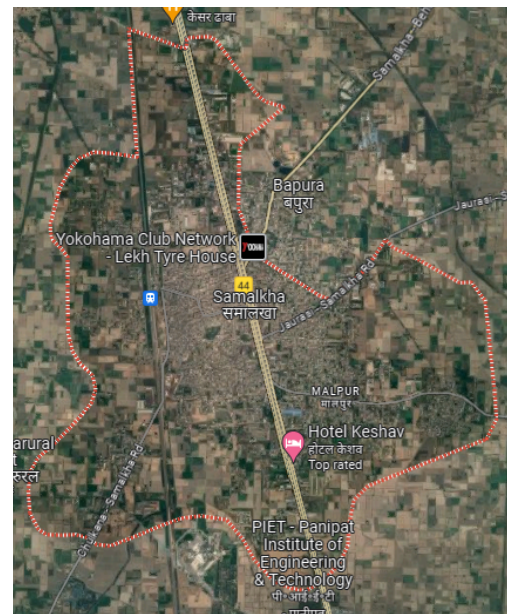
# PROJECT LOCATIONS

According to the National Crime Records Bureau, there was an increase of 27% in the cases related to crimes against women between 2020 & 2021, which includes 1716 rape incidents reported in 2021 as against 1373 in 2020 in Haryana. In 2019, Martha Farrell Foundation conducted a survey in Haryana with 944 students studying in 10 Government schools. 69% girls said that they wanted to pursue higher education but were unable to do so due to the lack of resources, lack of information, lack of family support & permission to continue their education. As per these students, their school environments were also hostile and discriminatory. The statical data & feedback have made it more evident that there is an urgent need to implement a program which fosters and builds safe, gender just and empowering spaces for women and girls at work and school.



## PANIPAT CITY, HARYANA

Panipat city famous for its weavers and textiles has an estimated population of 4,04,000 of which 206,822 are females.



## SAMALKHA, SUB DISTRICT HARYANA

Samalkha is a town and sub district of Panipat with a population of 1,35,550 of which 62,266 are females. The city is divided into 16 wards. Total Workers percentage is 35.15 percent, out of these 27.19 percent is male workers and 7.96 percent is female workers.

# MEET OUR FACILITATORS



**SONIA**  
**Field officer, Panipat**

Sonia is a passionate women's rights activist who has consistently championed the cause of gender equality and the fight against violence targeting women in Haryana. Her commitment to this vital mission led her to join Martha Farrell Foundation 7 years ago. She has worked with informal workers and adolescents, building their capacity on gender-based discrimination and violence, sexual harassment at workplace, their rights and laws like DV, POSH, POCSO etc. Her dedication extends beyond advocacy. She has played a pivotal role in fostering change through a variety of hands-on activities, campaigns etc.

**PAYAL**  
**Field Facilitator, Panipat**

Payal is a resident of Panipat, Haryana who has done her graduation in JBT and then pursued L.L.B. Payal has been actively involved in various social organizations, demonstrating her unwavering commitment to making a positive impact on her community. However, she feels that gender mainstreaming truly defines her path. Payal's strong conviction in the importance of gender equity has driven her to align her career with MFF.



## Trainers understanding built on POCSO Act, 2012

Our trainers have undergone comprehensive training on the POCSO Act, its reporting procedures, the recognition of signs indicating abuse, and the appropriate language to use when conducting POCSO training sessions. A major emphasis during this training was on equipping our trainers with the skills to effectively address disclosures in cases related to POCSO, ensuring that they are well-prepared to handle such sensitive and critical situations with care and professionalism.

# IMPACT OF THE PROJECT

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1

6400+ adolescents (3533 girls and 2895 boys) from 40+ schools trained on understanding gender, gender stereotypes and gender-based violence through orientation workshops in schools. 800 students have self-nominated themselves for attending further sessions.

2

Self-nominated adolescent leaders are trained on identifying violence amongst adolescents and women, child sexual abuse and their rights under the POCSO Act 2012.

3

Adolescent leaders formed groups in 20 schools to conduct participatory safety audits of their schools in the upcoming months and make safety related recommendations to the school authorities.

4

170 government schools teachers from Panipat district trained on child sexual abuse, POCSO Act and their roles in creating safe school systems. Some teachers organized trainings in their respective schools, some initiated conversations with the school authorities for creating safe space.

5

Principals of more than 20 schools partnered with MFF in building safe and inclusive learning environments in the schools. MFF is supporting the schools in strengthening their institutional mechanisms by forming Child Protection Committees and Anti- Sexual Harassment Committees in the schools.

6

60 students (39 girls and 21 boys) nominated themselves to become Meri Abhilasha leaders. They have been trained as primary responders to identify and report cases of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). They have emerged as powerful leaders from their communities and schools.

7

100 mother have been identified and have attended two survivor circles.





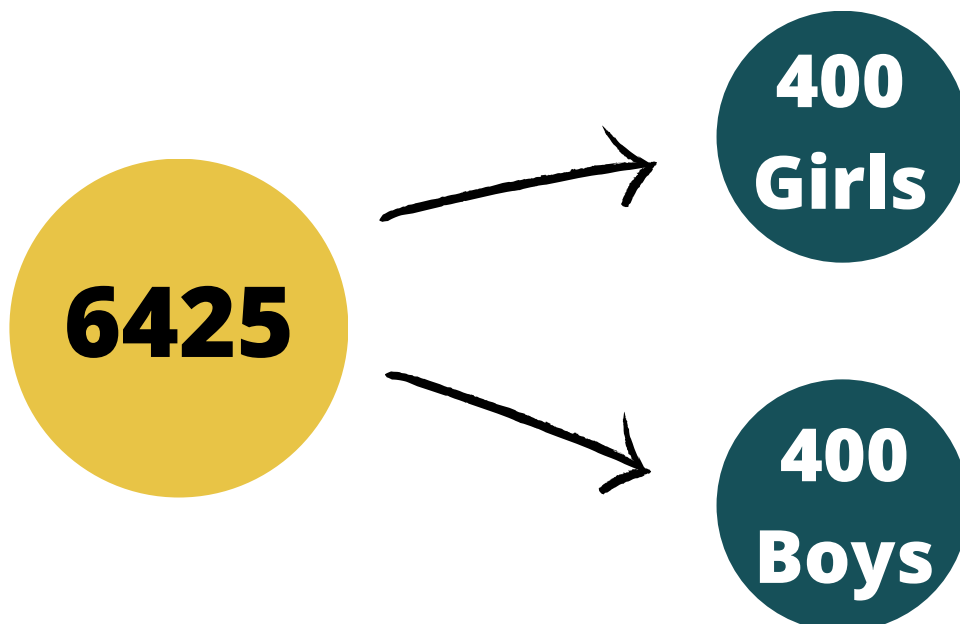
# OUTREACH

## ADOLESCENTS COLLECTIVISED

A total of 6,425 adolescents actively participated in gender sensitization workshops conducted across 41 government schools in Samalkha and Panipat. Among these oriented adolescents 400 girls and 400 boys self-nominated themselves to take on leadership roles as Meri Abhilasha leaders. These adolescent leaders are committed to co-leading program initiatives within their schools, communities, and homes, to make them gender-sensitive and safe spaces.



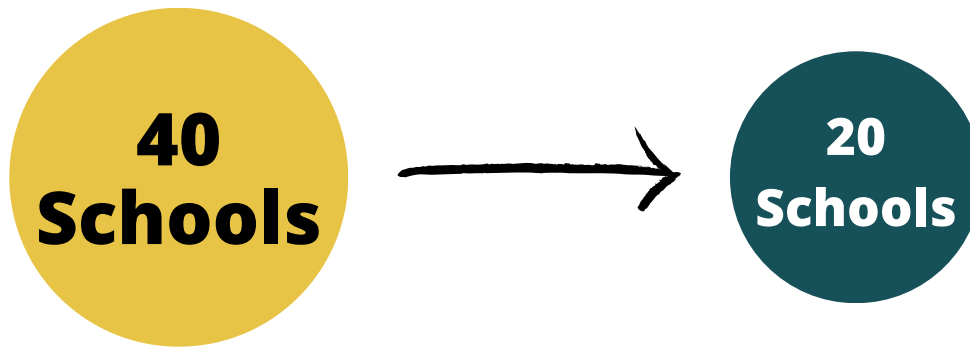
Of 6425 adolescents, 3533 identify as girls & 2895 as boys



Of 6425 Students, 400 girls & 400 boys Self nominated for becoming Meri Abhilasha leaders.

## SCHOOLS COLLECTIVISED

The school administration actively collaborated with the program team and supported them to facilitate gender sensitization sessions in their schools. These sessions also served as a platform for fostering strong relationships with 40 school administrations. 20 schools have made the resolute commitment to form Child Protection Committees.



Of 40 Schools, 20 Schools committed to provide safe learning spaces through a robust mechanism by creating Child Protection Committee and Anti Sexual Harassment Committee

## ADOLESCENTS' MOTHERS COLLECTIVISED

Engaging with a group of 100 mothers of adolescent girls, the program team established a connection with them, fostering relationships and building rapport that paved the way for organizing listening circles.



# HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE PROGRAM

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## 01 — Liaising with government schools of Panipat district with the support from the District Education Officer.

The District Elementary Education Officer (DEEO) of the Panipat district extended support for collaboration with the government schools. This collaboration has established a partnership where the main objectives are creating safe and conducive learning and working spaces in schools. The ultimate output of this collaboration is a better system that benefits the students as well as the community, promoting safer schools.

## 02 — Training of government school primary teachers on the POCSO Act 2012.

On 8th May 2023, A workshop on the POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offenses) Act, 2012, delivered by the Foundation was attended by 168 Trained Graduate Teachers (TGT), who are responsible for ensuring safety of children in schools. The training's objectives were to increase the participants' understanding of the POCSO Act 2012's provisions and to aid them in understanding, identifying, and reporting instances of child sexual abuse. After the training, teachers acknowledged that it helped them become more cognizant of children's needs and to establish an environment where children feel comfortable disclosing any kind of abuse and teachers are equipped to handle the disclosure.



Training of Trained Graduate Teachers on POCSO Act, 2012

### 03 — Profiling of 40 Government schools.

Profiling of 40 government schools was undertaken as a strategic initiative aimed at planning long-term engagement. The profiling aimed to comprehensively assess the resources and safety protocols of the 40 government schools. Another critical aspect of the profiling was to examine the mechanisms in place to ensure the safety and conducive learning spaces within these schools.

## School Safety Profiling

### Major Findings

All the school have separate toilets for boys and girls but the condition of the toilet was deplorable. Most of the toilets had broken doors, unhygienic conditions and no provisions for hand wash or sanitary napkins and menstrual health management.

The girls toilets are next to the boys toilets and some of them don't even have roofs.

None of the school had Child Protection Committees and they had not received any training on the issue.

None of the schools have guidelines or SOP related to safety and well-being of the students.

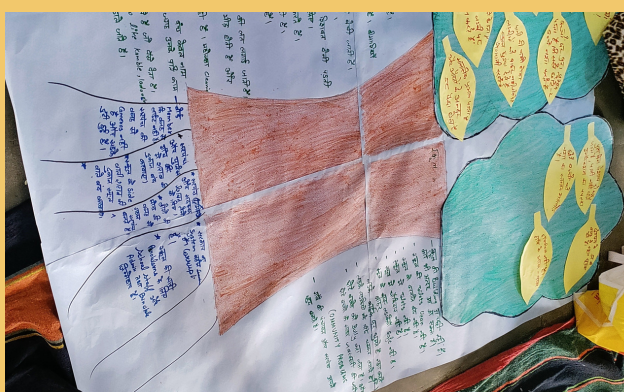
None of the schools had anti-sexual harassment committees and they had not received any trainings on the issue.

Though there is a guard on the school gate, but there are men of questionable character from the community which makes the girls feel unsafe when leaving or entering the school.

No education of children on gender in any school.

## 04 — Training of 60 Meri Abhilasha leaders on their roles as primary responders in their schools and communities.

The Panipat district's adolescents from several villages took part in a training program to become Meri Abhilasha leaders. In addition to being informed about the POCSO Act, these leaders who received training as safety officers also learned how to effectively address larger community issues and promote their rights. Through various art-based techniques and the creation of an action plan for the issues' solutions, the program encouraged participants to reflect about the numerous problems that exist in their communities. These Meri Abhilasha leaders, who had already self-nominated as leaders in their schools, are pivotal as primary responders in helping schools and communities against issues related to Gender-based violence.



**Problem tree prepared by the participants during the training**



**Participants building their understanding on the POCSO Act through video**

## 05 — Training of Trainers for facilitators

A two-day Training of Trainers was conducted with the facilitators, who are further going to implement Meri Abhilasha project in Panipat city and Samalkha district. The training focused on building knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to effectively facilitate Gender Sensitive & Gender Inclusive training. The two-day intensive training program sought to foster a deeper understanding of gender issues, analyze power dynamics and understand and implement participatory training methodology in future training sessions.



**Participants discussing Traits of a Good Trainer**

## 06 — Orientation Sessions on Understanding Gender, Gender stereotypes and violence

A series of orientation sessions were facilitated to enhance awareness and understanding of gender-related issues, with a specific focus on the role of gender-based stereotypes as a contributing factor of violence. These orientation sessions were designed to open up conversations amongst adolescents about gender roles, gender-based stereotypes which leads to gender discrimination and violence.

Participants exhibited increased awareness of the complexities of gender roles, and many expressed a willingness to challenge traditional gender norms and stereotypes.

School principals and teachers expressed their interest to form Child Protection Committees to make school systems a safer and more conducive environment for the adolescents.



**Understanding Gender Based Violence through the movie screening.**

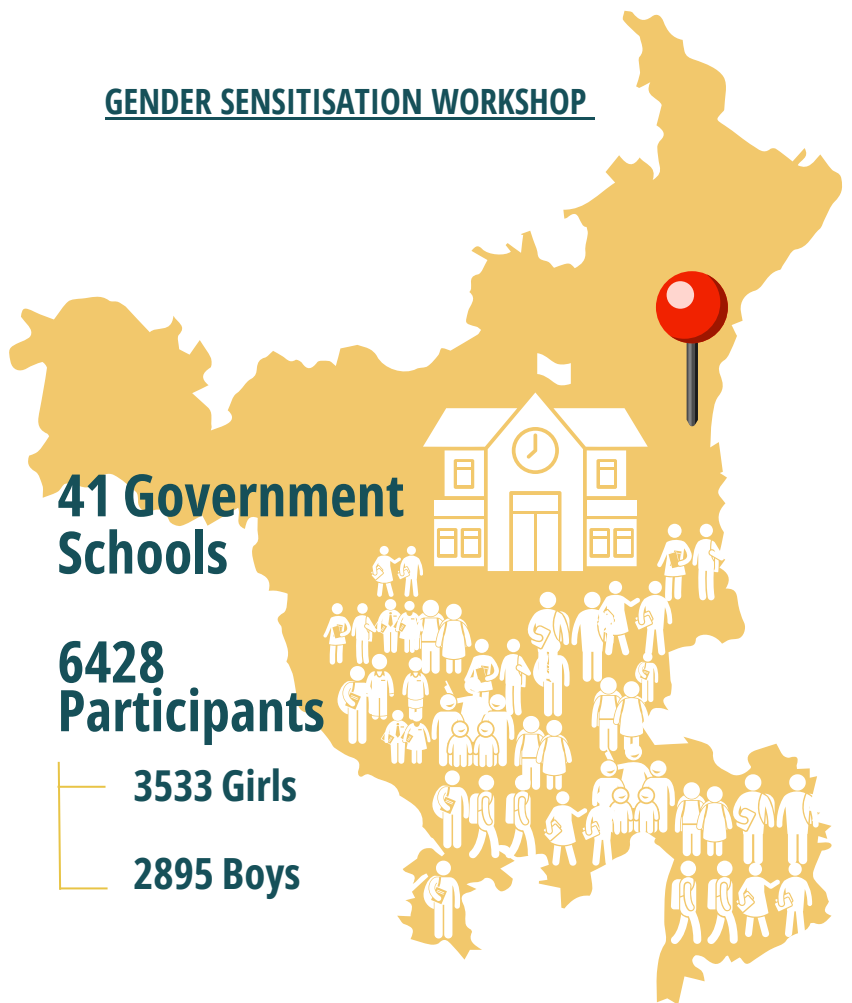
### GENDER SENSITISATION WORKSHOP

**41 Government Schools**

**6428 Participants**

**3533 Girls**

**2895 Boys**





**Adolescents participating in the visualisation exercise during the session to understand different forms of Gender Stereotypes.**

## **07 — 800 Adolescents leaders emerged through self-nomination.**

One of the most remarkable outcomes of the gender sensitisation sessions was the significant emergence of adolescent leaders emerged from 40 schools through self-nomination. It highlighted the impact of the engagement leading to these adolescent leaders nominating themselves to address the critical issues related to gender and POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences). These adolescent leaders expressed their interests to make their schools more inclusive and a safe space for all.



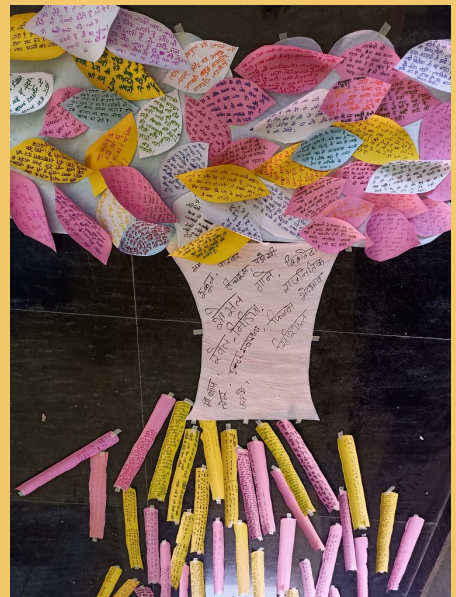
**Adolescent Leaders participating in a sport-based sessions to reflect on their learnings from the workshop.**

## 08 — Participatory learning training on understanding, identifying and reporting Sexual and Gender based Violence

Two participatory training sessions have been conducted identifying and reporting signs of SGBV and to build a comprehensive understanding of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, its provisions, and implications. A significant focus was placed on the reporting mechanisms under the POCSO Act. Their capacity was built with the information related to the law and they became aware about the types of sexual abuse. They came forward and expressed their interest to conduct safety audits of their schools and present the recommendations to the school authorities to form approachable and empowered child protection committees.



Self- nominated girls building understanding on POCSO Act, 2012



Tree depicting the causes and effects of violence



## 09 — Group Formation of Adolescent Mothers

Two learning circles were facilitated bringing together adolescent leaders' mothers to engage in meaningful conversations on the issue of sexual and gender-based violence, using the transformative power of the learning circle methodology. Within this safe space, these women were able to open up and share their deeply personal experiences of violence, for the very first time. They shared that, until this point, they had never felt comfortable discussing these experiences with anyone, even within their own families or their children. The process of the circle not only provided a platform for these conversations but also shed light on how violence has been normalized within their lives.



Adolescent Mothers collectivized through learning circle.

## 10 — Swabhiman Kendra Gurugram

At the Swabhiman Kendra, women and adolescents were collectivized through engaging art-based and sports sessions, resulting in the formation of the groups. Furthermore, a significant step was taken to address their health and well-being. A health camp was organized, by a doctor from the Primary Health Centre (PHC) who conducted health checkups, within the community also ensuring that they are aware of the PHC and are able to access its health services.

An informative session was facilitated for women informal workers, led by a dedicated social worker from the One Stop Centre, Gurugram. During this session, the social worker discussed the critical role and responsibilities of the One Stop Centre, emphasizing the support it offers to survivors of violence and its overall significance. As a direct result of this session, two women who had been facing domestic violence were empowered with this knowledge and subsequently reached out to and received support from the One Stop Centre. This highlights the immediate positive impact of such awareness initiatives.

Sessions were facilitated with the adolescents to foster a deeper understanding of self among the adolescents. These sessions delved into strengths, weaknesses, future goals and possible challenges, building a strong sense of self-esteem and confidence. Various sports-based activities were also incorporated to establish a rapport with the adolescents. Through these engaging activities, the facilitators built connections with the adolescents encouraging them to become a part of the group.



**Adolescent girls understanding self through sports based activity.**



**Domestic Workers engaging in discussion on sexual harassment at workplace.**

# QUOTES FROM THE PARTICIPANTS

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Knowing about difference between sex and gender was something very new for us. We never thought that gender stereotypes can lead to gender-based violence. These kind of session must happen in schools regularly as it help us in understanding other issues of the society, which we might be also facing.

- **Sulekha, 16 years old, Government School Pawti, Panipat**

We as boys always being told to not show our emotions, to be tough but this is also a violence . Why are we not allowed to show emotions? This pattern of behavior condition us to behave in a way which is insensitive. We grow up as humans who don't show emotions, if we don't show emotions we will not understand others emotions.

- **Masoom, 14 years, Government School Beholi, Panipat**

The information received during the training on the POCSO Act is very important. Now, I am aware about my rights under POCSO Act. I will support other children in my village if they face any for of abuse. I will support them in reporting to the Police.

- **Sanjana, 17 years, Girls Senior Secondary Government School, Juras, Panipat**

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“

The discussion on the root cause of violence has helped me and my other classmates to understand the effects of gender based violence. I came to know about my rights under the POCSO Act. I am going to aware others about this Act as everyone has the right to live in a violence free environment.

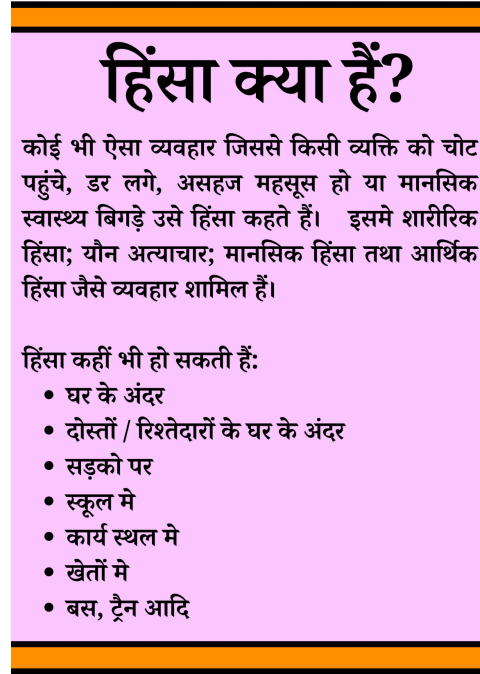
**-Aanchal, 17 years, Government Girls Senior Secondary School, Namunda village, Panipat**

This is a high time that we must talk to children about the sexual abuse. We know that its a reality, its happening everywhere. The sad part is children do not know what to do , where to go. These trainings are going to help children in knowing their rights.

**- Joginder Singh, Principal of Government Girls Senior Secondary School, Chulkana village, Panipat**

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# KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTS PRODUCED



A flipbook on violence



A informational poster on POC SO Act, 2012

A poster on composition of Child Protection Committee and its roles and responsibilities