

The Sikkim State Legal Services Authority under the aegis of National Legal Services Authority, in coordination with District Legal Services Authority, South organized a *Mega Legal Awareness and Outreach Programme* on 22nd April, 2023 at Jorethang Community Hall, Namchi District on NALSA (Legal Services to the Victims of Drug Abuse and Eradication of Drug Menace) Scheme, 2015 and NALSA (Victims of Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation) Scheme, 2015.

Hon'ble Mr. Justice Biswanath Somadder, Chief Justice, High Court of Sikkim & Patron-in-Chief, Sikkim SLSA was the Chief Guest in the programme while Hon'ble Mrs. Justice Meenakshi Madan Rai, Judge High Court of Sikkim & Executive Chairperson, Sikkim SLSA was the Guest of Honour. Judicial Officers, officers of district administration, teachers and students of Government Senior Secondary School Jorethang and St. Francisco School, Panel Advocates, Para Legal Volunteers, NGOs: Karma Sudhar Sang, Drugs Safai Abhiyan, Sai Samiti, Panchayats and the residents of Jorethang and neighbouring areas were also present at the function.

Hon'ble the Chief Justice in his address urged the police to stress on apprehending the substance peddlers/suppliers/traffickers who are responsible for bringing drugs into our society and exploiting the vulnerable sections particularly children who are at an impressionable age. The Chief Justice observed that victims of trafficking are enticed by monetary gains shown to them by the traffickers. It was suggested that Non-Governmental agencies should introduce self-help groups and give incentives to generate employment to the masses at large by which they can sustain their livelihood and avoid getting roped into trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation.

Hon'ble Judge, High Court of Sikkim & Executive Chairperson, Sikkim SLSA informed that the programme relating to drugs was being conducted at Jorethang given the high number of SADA cases registered from this area. Her Ladyship also stated that children emulate by example hence, the acceptance of social drinking is an impetus to impressionable minds. That tobacco is a gateway drug and children should avoid experimenting with such substance. Parents present at the function were urged not to be in denial in the event that their child was reported to be abusing any substance and in fact resort to reformatory management. The students were advised not to experiment with any form of drugs or substances due to peer pressure or curiosity as this could result in abuse and later addiction. The Police Officers were requested to ensure that arrested substance abusers be sent to hospitals for detoxification as withdrawal symptoms are best treated by

medical professionals. That counseling of family members is as important as counselling of the users for their rehabilitation and the atmosphere for children at home is to be made conducive so that they do not become victims of drug abuse.

Resource Person, Ms. Dhan Maya Subba, Superintendent of Police of Anti Human Trafficking Unit while explaining the process of human trafficking which is a pre-planned operation and how our people fall prey to it apprised that the Sikkim has a high number of trafficking cases. The high amount of money involved in this unethical trade and that it is a pre-planned operation was highlighted. She urged parents and teachers to pro-actively monitor the company their children kept and their activities. The consent of children below the age of 18 years is no consent as per law and such cases have to be reported to avoid commercial sexual exploitation of children she further urged.

Dr. Kunzang Bhutia, Senior Psychiatrist from District Hospital Gyalshing sensitized the gathering on the difference between drug use and drug abuse. She informed that dependency on alcohol or drugs is when someone has loss of control which is a health issue and needs medical treatment. She informed that all the hospitals in Sikkim are equipped to help substance abusers come out of addiction and urged the participants to spread the message so that they can get proper help. That, as per a survey conducted in 2018, alcohol, sedatives, cannabis and brown sugar are highly abused substances in Sikkim and explained the various ways in which addiction issues can be cured. Support of family members during treatment of a substance abuser is imperative and stigmatization should be avoided.

The welcome address was delivered by Ms. Subarna Rai, Member Secretary, Sikkim SLSA and the vote of thanks was proposed by Mrs. Rohini Rai, Civil Judge-cum-Judicial Magistrate, Jorethang Sub-Division.

Stalls were set up by the Education Department, Food & Civil Supplies Department and Women & Child Development Department with information on the various schemes and on the spot assistance was given to the public by the Panel Advocates and Para Legal Volunteers of Sikkim SLSA for availing these schemes. The students keenly attended the stalls attended by Education Department to learn about the various scholarship programmes of the State Government. A free health camp was also set up by Sikkim SLSA where free services were rendered by the doctors and staff of District Hospital Namchi and prescribed medicines distributed free of cost.