

A Legal Awareness on Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 and Human Trafficking was organized by the Sikkim State Legal Services Authority for the students of Class IX and X and accompanying teachers of thirteen schools in Gangtok on 12th November, 2022 (*Saturday*) on the occasion of National Legal Services Week and “*Empowerment of Citizens through Legal Awareness and Outreach*” campaign .The National Legal Services Authority has launched the campaign for bridging the gap between the institutions and the underprivileged by spreading legal awareness and ensuring delivery of legal entitlement to eligible beneficiaries. Justice Meenakshi Madan Rai, Judge, High Court of Sikkim and Executive Chairperson, Sikkim SLSA, was the Chief Guest on the occasion who enlightened the gathering on the stringent provisions of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO, Act 2012) and the various types of sexual assaults as defined under Sections 3, 5, 7 and 9 of the POCSO Act, 2012 and the long period of incarceration provided if found guilty.The precautions which a male and female children should take so that such offence is not committed by them knowingly or unknowingly and how one ought to protect themselves from sexual assault was also discussed by her Ladyship.

Emphasis on mental health and its importance in the evolving society was also discussed along with the growing concern of substance abuse, the provision of the Sikkim Anti Drugs Act, 2006 and the stringent bail provisions under both the POCSO and SADA were highlighted.

Resource Person Ms. Dhan Maya Subba, Superintendent of Police, Anti Human Trafficking Unit, Sikkim Police, spoke at length on Human Trafficking, the modern slave system and the penal provisions contained in Section 370 of the Indian Penal Code, 1985 which deals with Trafficking of persons. Cities which are the destination for trafficked children and awareness of such places was given to the gathering.She urged the school children not to ostracize victims of trafficking who may be in their class or in their schools. Anti Human Trafficking Clubs have been formed in various schools wherein the students from Class IX and above are enrolled as members.

Ms. Subarna Rai, Member Secretary, Sikkim SLSA gave a brief background on the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015, its formation and various amendments and changes made in the Act. She informed all participants of the are four Juvenile Justice Boards and Children Courts established in Gangtok, Namchi, Mangan and Gyalshing and of the two operational Juvenile Observation Homes in Gangtok and Namchi. The role of a Child Welfare Police Officer, Special Juvenile Police Unit under the Police Department and Child Welfare Committee, District Child Protection Unit and Probation Officer under the Women & Child Development Department was also explained to the students, as also the difference between a Child in Conflict with Law and a Child in Need of Care & Protection, nature of crime and penalties. The helpline number **1098** through which anyone could report any incidents concerning a child was also disseminated.

The welcome address was delivered by Mrs. Matilda Isaacs, Consultant, Sikkim SLSA and the vote of thanks was proposed by Mr. Praveen Pradhan, Deputy Secretary, Sikkim SLSA. The programme concluded with a vibrant interaction and queries by the students.

The programme also had the presence of Teachers accompanying the students, Officers and staff of Sikkim SLSA and Press and Media.
