

[1] The Sikkim State Legal Services Authority (SSL SA) under the directions of Hon'ble Mrs. Justice Meenakshi Madan Rai, Judge, High Court of Sikkim and Executive Chairperson, Sikkim State Legal Services Authority conducted a sensitization of Para-Legal Volunteers of Sikkim SSL SA who have been designated as Support Persons in terms of Rule 54 sub-clause 14 of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Model Rules, 2016.

[2] In her welcome address, Mrs. Matilda Issacs, Consultant, Sikkim SSL SA, apprised that the PLVs while acting as Support Persons have to provide pre-trial counselling and to accompany the child victim for recording of the statement. They also have to familiarize the child victim with the Court and its environment in advance, and where the child is found to have been disturbed by the experience of coming to the Court, orders for video-conferencing may be passed by the Court, on an application moved by the support person or para-legal volunteer or by the Legal Services Authority, on behalf of the child. She also highlighted that the programme was in consonance with Hon'ble Executive Chairperson's prime concern on POCSO survivors and missing children.

[3] Hon'ble Executive Chairperson, Sikkim SSL SA, in her inaugural address gave an insight on the history behind enactment of the POCSO Act, 2012 and the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015. Her Ladyship stressed on the trauma faced by the child victim and the importance of their mental health and sought the intervention of the Support Persons to mitigate the survivors from being re-traumatized.

The PLVs were informed that separate rooms have been designated in the STNM Hospital and all the District Hospitals upon the initiation of Sikkim SSL SA for medical examination of POCSO survivors. They were thus urged to ensure that POCSO survivors are examined only in such rooms to avoid unnecessary delay and stigmatization.

The Para Legal Volunteers were also requested to work with the POCSO survivors with compassion and in the best interest of the child as per Section 2(9) of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015.

[4] Ms. Subarna Rai, Member Secretary, Sikkim SSL SA and the Resource Person enumerated on the various provisions contained in the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 and Juvenile Justice (Care & Protection of Children) Model Rules, 2016. She stressed on the role and responsibility of the Support Persons during investigation and trial of the case. They were informed about the set-up of the Vulnerable Witness Deposition Centre in the District Courts. They were further urged to ensure that as Section 24(1) of the POCSO Act, 2012, the statement of the child is recorded by the police at the residence of the child or at a place of his/her choice.

[5] Resource Person, Dr. Sonam O. Lassopa, Senior Clinical Psychologist, Psychiatric Wing, New STNM Multi-Specialty Hospital, Sochakgang, Gangtok, explained in depth on how to deal with the trauma faced by POCSO survivors and elaborated the different ways in which the survivors are likely to respond. She also discussed the secondary trauma faced by the family members and explained the modes in which one can communicate with child victims and help them cope with their trauma. She further requested the PLVs to refer the survivors for clinical and psychological counseling.

[6] The programme was followed by an interactive session between the participants and the Resource Persons. The vote of thanks was proposed by Shri Praveen Pradhan, Deputy Secretary, Sikkim SSL SA. The programme also had the presence of Officers and staff of High Court of Sikkim and Sikkim SSL SA.