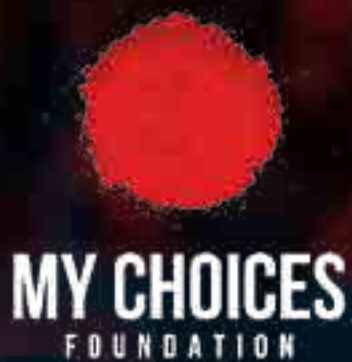


December 2017



# 2012-17 IMPACT REPORT

By My Choices Foundation

# 2012 - 2017 JOINT IMPACT REPORT

FOR THE COMBINED OPERATIONS OF MY CHOICES FOUNDATION

Over 5 years of providing choices to women, girls and families facing domestic violence and human trafficking in India; of choosing and championing hope; and of wonderful transformation.

CUMULATIVE DATA AS OF DECEMBER 2017

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### ADDRESSING SEX TRAFFICKING

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“

THEY  
SAY  
A DREAM  
IS SOMETHING  
YOU WANT TO DO, BUT  
A CALLING IS SOMETHING YOU  
HAVE TO DO.

It was out of this calling, that we founded the My Choices Foundation nearly 6 years ago. We are truly honoured and grateful to share our 5-year Impact report with you. This report is filled with numbers and data that reflect the extensive reach and impact of our work. But more importantly, in the following pages, you will read about the courage and bravery of thousands of women, girls and families who have been impacted by our work. You will get a glimpse into the hearts and work of our team - without whom none of this would have been possible. To our team: we honour and thank each one of you - you are true Dragon Slayers!

India can overwhelm you with her love, but she can also destroy you with her violence - **especially if you are a woman or a girl.**

**Over 40% of Indian woman face abuse & violence in their home.**

It is difficult to believe, but research shows that **over half** of Indian men, women, boys and girls believe that a man hitting his wife is a justifiable expression of his masculinity.

Globally, violence against girls and women is **the most widespread and destructive pandemic on earth.** One out of three women has survived sexual or physical abuse. This violence touches all of us. It touches generations of individuals, families and communities.

Yet, we have seen firsthand that change is possible. In the pages that follow, you will read the stories of brave survivors like Sarojini, of thousands of school girls who are equipped on their rights and how to keep themselves safe, of mothers who are being informed and empowered to keep their girls safe, and of fathers who are trained to be Good Fathers and given the tools to protect their girls.

For more than 5 years, our team has worked bravely to equip thousands of families on how to live a life free from abuse and exploitation. We have built 5 Counseling Centres that have served and counseled with over 4,300 families.

Our team has invested close to 120,000 hours of counseling into transforming the reality of families and helping them establish peace. We have trained over 74,000 school girls and community members on how to keep themselves safe and their communities violence-free.

In our sex-trafficking prevention program (through our flagship Safe Village Program) we have conducted over 1,300 programs reaching 912,000 beneficiaries. While these numbers reflect the exponential growth of our programs, they are not what drive us. We are inherently driven by a deep desire - an obsession - to keep every girl child safe.

# NOTE FROM THE FOUNDER

We WILL NOT allow that on our watch a 12-year old girl goes missing every 3 minutes - beaten and raped brutally more than 30 times a day by grown men!

I hope you are inspired and deeply moved as you read through these pages laying out our work. I have to admit, the work we do is not easy. Our work deals with immense pain & suffering, and in the process our hearts are repeatedly broken.

**But doing what we do every day also gives us courage;** and courage transforms not just us, but also those around us. The good thing about courage is that it is contagious. Courage can change families and communities and villages and cities!

My team and I have been given the privilege to step into thousands of families' lives and homes and help them slowly repair the broken pieces, and replace violence with PEACE.

Will you join us on this journey to bring an end to gender-based violence?

If those who can act, remain inactive  
If those who should know better, remain indifferent  
And if the voice of justice is kept silent when it should speak up

Then evil will triumph

As a human race, we may falter and we may fail  
And we sometimes take too long to do the obvious  
But ultimately, we DO know deep inside what is right and what is wrong

Let's start DOING what is Right!

”

ELCA GROBLER





**Archana Brian, Head of Operations**

Each year continues to be one of growth, but 2017 has been a special year! Operation PeaceMaker turned 5 years old in early 2017, and we have taken our partnerships to the next level.

In the past year, Operation PeaceMaker has increased focus on prevention work. Intervention remains our main focus, but we have expanded our prevention efforts with a new College Program to reach girls at risk of controlling relationships and human trafficking. We have also partnered with Naandi Foundation to reach out to 3,200 adolescent girls per year through their N-Star Program. Our Shakti Program also expanded to three new areas, adding more vulnerable girls to this long-term mentorship and community development program.

We handled over 1,000 police-referred cases in 2017 alone! In our last report, I announced the formalization of our partnership with the police. Now, our partnership with the police encompasses Women Police Stations from all zones of Hyderabad. Domestic violence cases reported at special women's police stations are directed to Operation PeaceMaker Centers for the court-mandated counseling. Cases referred from the police are especially challenging, for many reasons, but our Counselors are doing incredible work to provide these survivors with the legal guidance, counseling and case management needed to establish peace and rid their lives of abuse.

We conducted two PeaceMaker trainings in the last year, reaching a total of 204 trained PeaceMakers. We added to our teams in Warangal and Secunderabad, expanding our support in these strategic areas.

Finally, one of our big highlights of the past year is that we developed PeaceTracker, our very own, customized data-management system. Through PeaceTracker, we have achieved key improvements on our previous system, and this is helping our Counselors with live tracking and management of their day-to-day caseload.

The journey to impact the state of Telangana and provide women and families with choices to end abuse and live lives of peace is one that takes every bit of perseverance, patience, and prayerful pushing forward, but it is tremendously rewarding to know what an impact we are making!

# OPERATION HIGHLIGHTS

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

**SEX TRAFFICKING**



**Sudha Upadhyayula, Head of Operations**

In 2017, Operation Red Alert pushed the boundaries of the possible and launched its programs into a new level. The achievements of the past year were only possible because of the pioneering groundwork accomplished in 2014-2016, giving us the confidence and capacity to expand rapidly.

In 2017, we grew from having 10 active Implementing Partners conducting our Safe Village Program to 72. The Safe Village count, through the impact of Safe Village Programs, grew from 207 villages to 1,375. We also added the state of Maharashtra to the geographic coverage.

Two brand new initiatives were launched in 2017. The first was the addition of a layer to the Safe Village Program - the village Rakshak Program. Rakshak means "protector" in Hindi, and we have designed this program to build a team of volunteers in the village who will be on watch and provide support to the girl's safety. We have trained 106 Rakshaks and begun piloting of the program in 20 partner areas.

The second initiative introduced in 2017 is the Red Alert Anti-Human Trafficking Network Forum. Operation Red Alert aims to be the unified voice in the fight against sex trafficking and we are working towards building a coalition of NGOs and other key stakeholders. The first forum was hosted in West Bengal in August and was attended by many NGO representatives and government and police officials. This is a huge step towards building solidarity in the fight against trafficking.

We are ever-grateful to our strategic partners, especially Justice and Care and IJM, who have been providing us with continuous support for the entire cycle of our programs.

These highlights cover only the grassroots program side of our work! There is so much more to celebrate across our other initiatives. Our work appeared in the news over 40 times, our team spoke at several high profile events, and we released the world's first VR documentary on sex trafficking. This Impact Report covers these highlights in detail.

With so much momentum behind us, we are tirelessly optimistic about the coming year. We plan to expand our partner network, adding implementing partners as well as strategic partners. Within India, we plan to move into Jharkhand, Bihar and Rajasthan. Outside of India, we plan to begin working around the porous border areas along the Nepal and Bangladesh. We are working towards making the prevention movement the most fearful part of a trafficker's day.

**MY CHOICES**  
FOUNDATION



# AWARDS AND ACCOLADES



GRAND JURY AWARD FOR WOMEN  
EMPOWERMENT



50 MOST IMPACTFUL INNOVATORS



AGSM SOCIAL IMPACT AND PUBLIC  
POLICY AWARD



BALIKA BANDHU AWARD

Awarded to Vivian Isaac, Operation Red Alert  
Program Director



EXCELLENCE AWARD FOR BEST  
PAPER



SM4E SPECIAL MENTION AWARD  
FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT



TOP 10 FINALIST FOR THE  
JUSTICE PRIZE #WALKTOGETHER  
PRIZE FOR COURAGE

## NOTES TO MY FATHER

My Choices Foundation is proud to have partnered with Oculus to create the VR film Notes to My Father by Director Jayisha Patel.





# EVIDENCE FOR TRANSFORMATION

**OPERATION PEACEMAKER  
AIMS TO REDUCE DOMESTIC  
VIOLENCE IN INDIA THROUGH  
THOUSANDS OF PEACEMAKERS  
WHO ARE TRAINED IN FAMILY  
AND MARRIAGE COUNSELING  
AND ALL ASPECTS OF THE  
DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACT.  
OUR INNOVATIVE APPROACH  
USING LOCAL WOMEN AS  
CHANGE AGENTS HAS PROVEN  
EXTREMELY SUCCESSFUL  
ACROSS TELANGANA.**

**CUMULATIVE PROJECT DATA**  
5 years of peace in the making





**5 YEARS**  
OF FOCUSED WORK  
IN TELANGANA



**204**  
PEACEMAKERS  
TRAINED



**4,359**  
CASES HANDLED



**119,938**  
\*FIELD HOURS



**74,842**  
COMMUNITY MEMBERS  
AND SCHOOL GIRLS  
TRAINED



IMPACTING SEVERAL  
**THOUSAND**  
**OTHERS**

# IMPACT SNAPSHOT

\*Field hours is the time spent by a Peacemaker providing "in-field"/"in-the-community" support through counseling, basic legal aid and case management to clients outside of the counseling center. This support is often provided inside the home of the client, or another safe space preferred by the client.



# SHAKTI PROGRAM



13

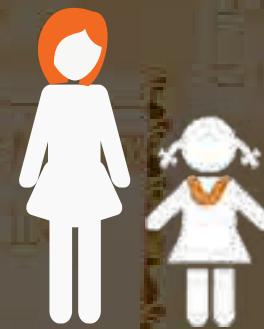
SHAKTI CIRCLES  
ESTABLISHED



206

GIRLS IN LONG TERM  
MENTORING PROGRAMS

**IMAGINE** if Indian girls could be given Shakti. Shakti literally means “to be able”, conversationally translating to power or empowerment. The Shakti Program is a program designed specifically for vulnerable adolescent girls to give them the support and education they need TO BE ABLE to take control of their lives and make decisions about their future that will keep them safe from violence, abuse and exploitation. It is in essence a long-term (12 - 15 month) mentorship program for girls journeying through adolescence. They face harsh realities, and usually have no one to turn to who will help them problem solve. Through Shakti we use a multifold approach in helping girls, where girls are: connected to a peer network; supported and empowered to recognise risk and develop strategies to resist pressures of child marriage, dangerous work, and being pulled out of school; provided access to services; trained to negotiate for themselves; supported to articulate aspirations and take steps towards achieving their life goals. The peer network that provides the girls a safe space to talk about their lives is the foundation of the Shakti program. It is incredible to see the girls giving and deriving strength from each other!



28,099

SCHOOL & COLLEGE GIRLS TRAINED



46,743

COMMUNITY PARTICIPANTS

**OPERATION PEACEMAKER** is now reaching a greater number of girls, in a wider age range. We are doing this through partnerships with local NGOs.

The girls we train get so excited that someone is finally talking to them about issues like relationships, abuse, and harassment. Most teachers are well-meaning, but they do not feel equipped to talk about important safety issues. The older girls are especially interested in discussing these issues. At one college, the girls asked to lock the doors, so they felt safe sharing their experiences of dating violence and abuse.

When we talk to school and college girls about gender discrimination and domestic abuse, we can see them nodding in agreement that these are real issues to them. It is so important for young girls to be taught about their right to safety, and to have the confidence to raise their voice. We are so grateful to be able to train these girls at such a young age and equip them to be knowledgeable and confident in their rights.

**USHA KIRAN, PROGRAM OFFICER**

**DURING** our Basthi Meetings, I can visibly see the participants become more relaxed and calm. The fact that topics of abuse and right to safety can be spoken about in public is a big relief to them. Most participants are shocked that someone wants to hold a meeting to discuss domestic violence, because all their lives they have been asked to keep quiet about it and accept it. These women don't have any information about abuse, or about services available to them. Our sessions are so informative that the participants eagerly ask us to come back so that they can bring other women from their community to attend the next meeting.

**ANNA VILASINI, SECUNDERABAD COUNSELING  
CENTER COORDINATOR**

# GRASSROOTS PREVENTION



# COUNSELING PROFILE

84%

INDIVIDUAL  
COUNSELING

38%

FAMILY  
COUNSELING

63%

\*COUPLE  
COUNSELING

25%  
RECEIVED ALL FORMS  
OF COUNSELING

\*We are very proud that well over half of our clients are able to include their husband (usually main perpetrator) in counseling. This inclusive approach to solutions is what we believe is the hallmark of our success in finding permanent peaceful solutions to domestic violence.

OUR Counselors are the backbone of Operation PeaceMaker. They are responsible for the case work for every client. In addition to handling their own cases, they also support between 7 -15 PeaceMakers in their case management, field work and capacity building. Our Counselors offer so much of themselves to each and every case. Each case demands something different from them: Sometimes they have to stand up to a police officer who refuses to file a case; sometimes they have to be fearless in the face of violence that comes from the home to our Counseling Center; and other times they have to hold the hand of a client through the process of ending abuse and starting a new life "from scratch". We are grateful for the incredible women who carry this load on behalf of the thousands every year who benefit directly from their courage.

EACH CASE UNDERGOES AN AVERAGE OF  
**6.5** SESSIONS BEFORE CLOSURE

A CASE IS OPEN FOR AN AVERAGE OF **122 DAYS**  
FROM START TO CASE CLOSURE

**77% OF CASES** REACH A  
**PEACEFUL RESOLUTION**

**14/1000** OF ALL CASES WENT TO COURT

\*Mid-2017, Operation PeaceMaker hired one additional full-time legal aid and decided to strategically expand the range of legal support we can provide. In 2018 we expect to see the percentage of cases that have received legal support to increase sharply.





Top Left to Right: Aparna Adhikari, Kavitha Krishnaraj and Reena Doulaghar  
Bottom Left to Right: Noorjahan Siddiqui, Tajwar Lodhi and Ratna Sri

**WE DID AN 8 QUESTION RAPID-FIRE INTERVIEW WITH EACH OF OUR COUNSELORS TO HELP YOU GET TO KNOW THEM BETTER!**

**Q. Tell us about you, your background and what brought you to My Choices Foundation.**

A. I have my MPhil and am working on my PhD in psychology. I have also completed two decades of work in the development field. Yet, I had a strong passion to find a job that would allow me to work towards empowering women and girls. My Choices Foundation has helped me satisfy this passion. I found my purpose here, supporting disadvantaged women and their children with meaningful rights education. - Aparna Adhikari

**Q. Every day you meet women facing very serious issues and heartbreaking abuse. What keeps you from filling with bitterness after hearing so many stories like this?**

A. I would be lying if I said that I never have bad days when I experience bitterness towards the abuse my clients face. Self-care is essential for each of us Counselors in order to manage our stress and emotions. Personally, I make sure that my weekends are full of things that keep my mind joyfully occupied. Above all, I feel blessed that I am given the opportunity to help these women. I stay rooted in the cause I'm working for, and that is my inspiration to keep going. - Kavitha Krishnaraj

**Q. Use only 5 words to describe your emotions during a "normal" work day.**

A. Hopeful, Angry, Empathetic, Frustrated and Sympathetic. - Combined Answer

**Q. To get through the day, you must need a great deal of patience, strength and inner serenity. Despite having these things mastered, what can still seriously frustrate you?**

A. Sexual abuse being used as a tool or technique to control and punish a woman. Abusers use sexual violence against women, knowing that they will hesitate to tell others about their pain due to embarrassment, lack of awareness about rights, and fear of public perception and ridicule if they say something so "gross" and "personal". These tactics of manipulation make me so upset! - Kavitha Krishnaraj

**Q. You are a beacon of hope for so many women and girls who rely on your guidance and support. What is something that you think every girl needs to know?**

A. I would like to tell her, that she is the most beautiful person in the whole world. She is unique, she is irreplaceable, there is a purpose for her living, and she must never, ever give up no matter what happens. She must always believe in herself and keep discovering the purpose for which she is created for. Each person is responsible for her happiness, which is an attitude. No one can take that away from her if she decides to be happy. - Aparna Adhikari

**Q. As a Counselor with Operation PeaceMaker, you've worked on many cases. Do you feel any change in society or a change in the situations and stories of the women who come to you?**

A. I wish I could say that I do see comprehensive, systemic change, but in reality this is going to take more time. At a societal level, we are seeing the same experiences of abuse affecting women's lives. There is hope, though! What I do see is a change in the women themselves. They are more aware of their rights and choices available to them, and they are more aware of what they want for their marriages, families and homes. This is a big step towards empowering communities, and eventually society as a whole. When enough women are talking about change and living out examples of transformation, it starts to inspire those around them. Word of mouth is powerful, and we're seeing sparks of hope being lit in communities where our work has brought peace to the lives of women and families. - Tajwar Lodhi

**Q. Hearing so many statistics and stories of abuse against women can paint a negative picture of men and boys. Men could even start feeling guilty for just being a man. How do you ensure that negativity isn't the only aspect of men's involvement in this issue?**

A. I totally agree with My Choices Foundation's belief that men are at least 50% of the solution, and NOT just a part of the problem. While each individual case of a man abusing a woman infuriates me, I cannot use those stories to generalize or conclude that all men are evil. If we don't look at men as stakeholders in the solution, we will never be successful in transforming society as a whole. We can't afford to leave half the population out of this conversation. We need the good guys, and we need to work with men as much as possible to create more good guys. - Kavitha Krishnaraj

**Q. What motivated you to work as counselor?**

Before joining Operation PeaceMaker, I worked on various issues to help the community but I always had the desire to work exclusively on domestic violence issues not just to empower/help women to live abuse free life, but I also wanted to help men understand the negative impact of violence on women. Counseling provided me with this excellent opportunity to engage men every day through the sessions to bring change in their perspectives and bring for them a peaceful solution. - Noorjahan Siddiqui

**Q. Where would we find you when you are not at the counseling center?**

A. With family, cooking, hosting friends, at movies, concerts, and much more! - Combined Answer

# MEET OUR COUNSELORS



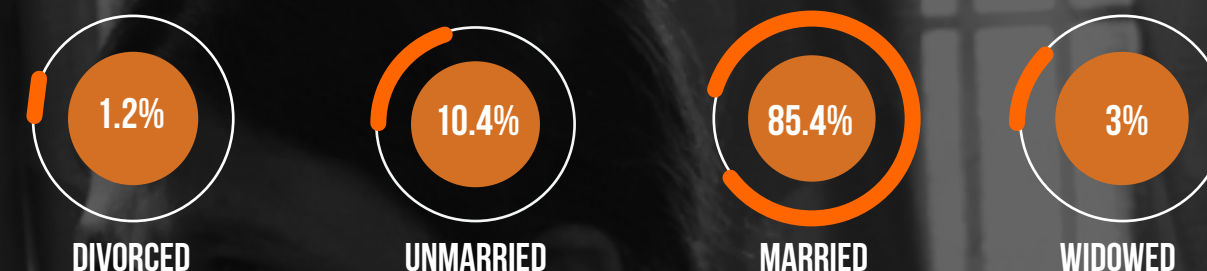
# PEACEMAKER PROFILE

**WE** have trained 204 PeaceMakers, in just over 5 years of operations. Currently, we have 71 active PeaceMakers at our 5 Counseling Centers and will be training more in the coming year. To have 71 strong, passionate and capable PeaceMakers is something we are very proud of.

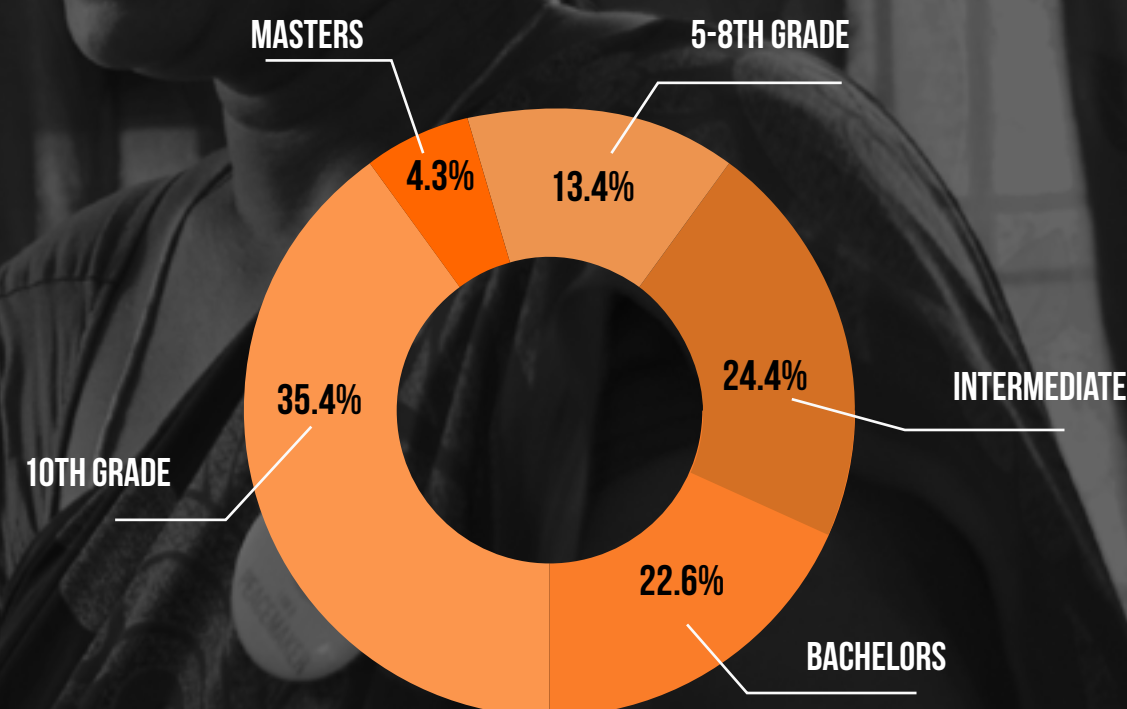
Our PeaceMakers are exceptional in their communities. Most of them do not come from communities or households where women are encouraged to work. Many have personal histories with domestic abuse, which they were strengthened to overcome during their PeaceMaker training. Whether they work outside of their role as a PeaceMaker or not, they are busy women with a myriad of responsibilities as mothers, wives, and members of tight-knit, traditional families. When there is a major life event in their life or that of their family members, they are often required to prioritise other responsibilities. For example, if a PeaceMaker becomes pregnant or if her sibling gets married, she is expected to stop working in order to fulfill duties for that life event.

Each of our PeaceMakers is different, and some of them choose to keep working, no matter what event comes and goes. However, some prefer to follow family traditions. So, while 70 PeaceMakers out of 204 may seem like a low retention rate, it is actually remarkably high. Given the background and communities that these women come from, it is amazing that many of them begin work to begin with, let alone with an organisation that empowers them to be change agents. Many of our PeaceMakers who “drop out” due to life events, eventually come back to work. For those who don’t, we know that their communities continue to benefit from having an empowered, well informed, change agent in their midst.

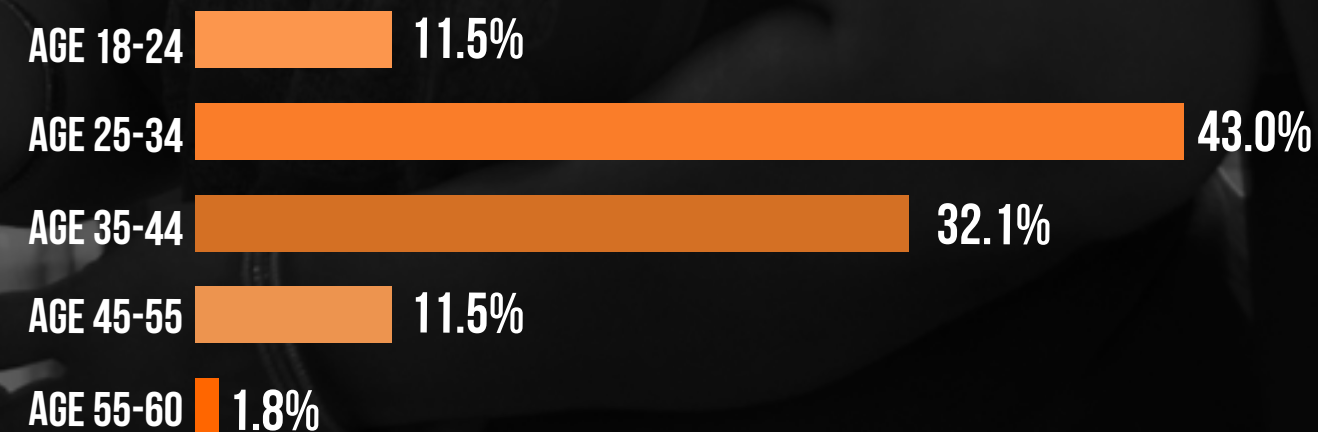
## MARITAL STATUS



## EDUCATION



## AGE BREAKDOWN





# SURVIVOR PROFILE

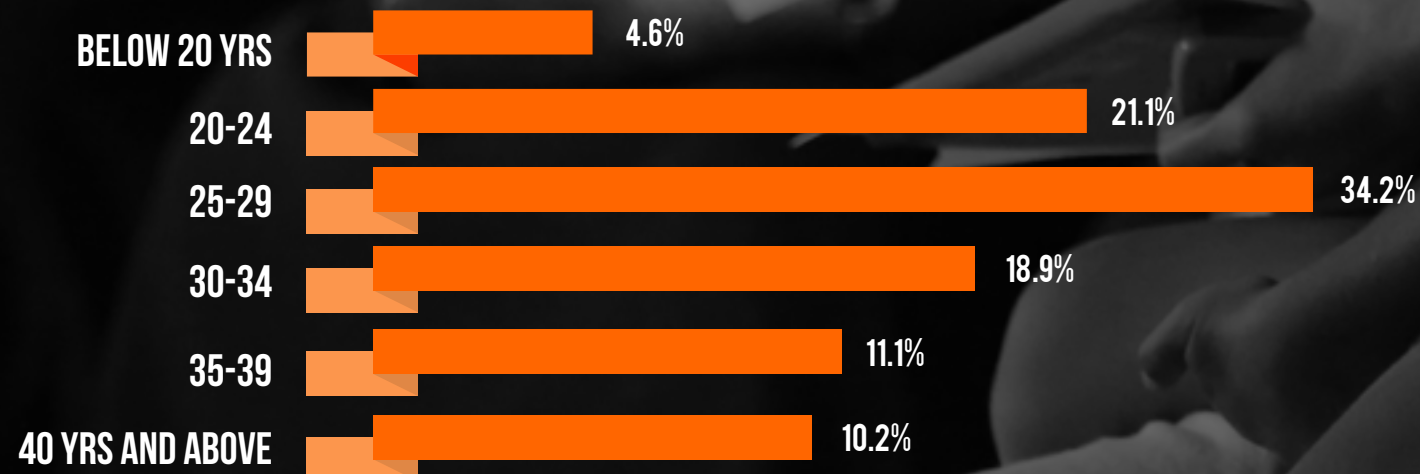
**THIS** is the first year we are not providing the full survivor profile. Instead, we are highlighting a new data set focussing on a more in-depth understanding of the intersection of the issues of domestic abuse, early marriage and childbearing.

If you have looked at previous Impact Reports, you already know that the data we collect on our PeaceMakers, our clients, and the abuse profile is extensive. What we are now expanding into is more complex analytics. This year, we are giving you a preview of this work.

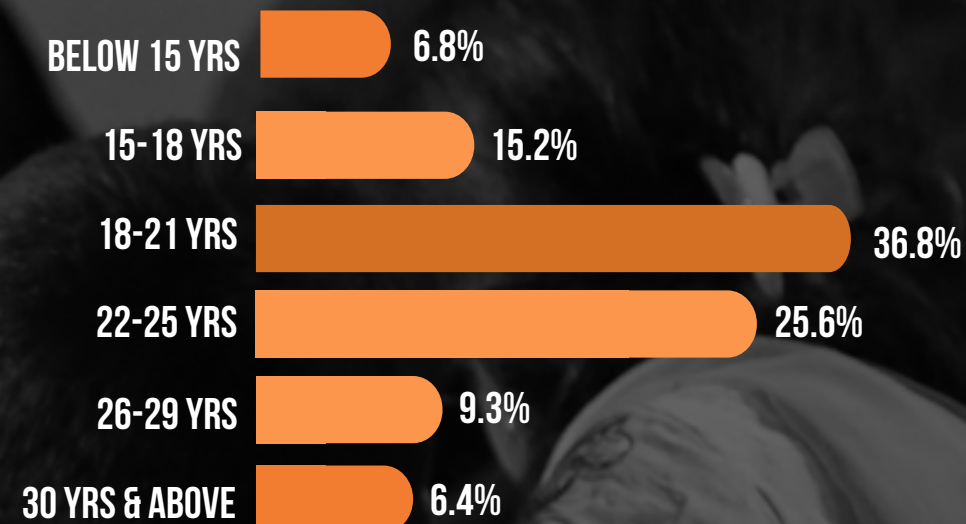
Since May 2017, we have collected a more detailed age profile on a section of our 1,390 clients for this year. We now know MORE than how old the client is. We know what age they were when they got married, and when they had their first child.

22% of our clients were married before the age of 18. This is not only illegal in India, but also has severe implications for their health and susceptibility to violence at home. 17% of our clients had their first child before the age of 18. Childbirth is still the leading cause of death for girls aged 15-19 globally. It is also a precursor to many issues to girls' development.

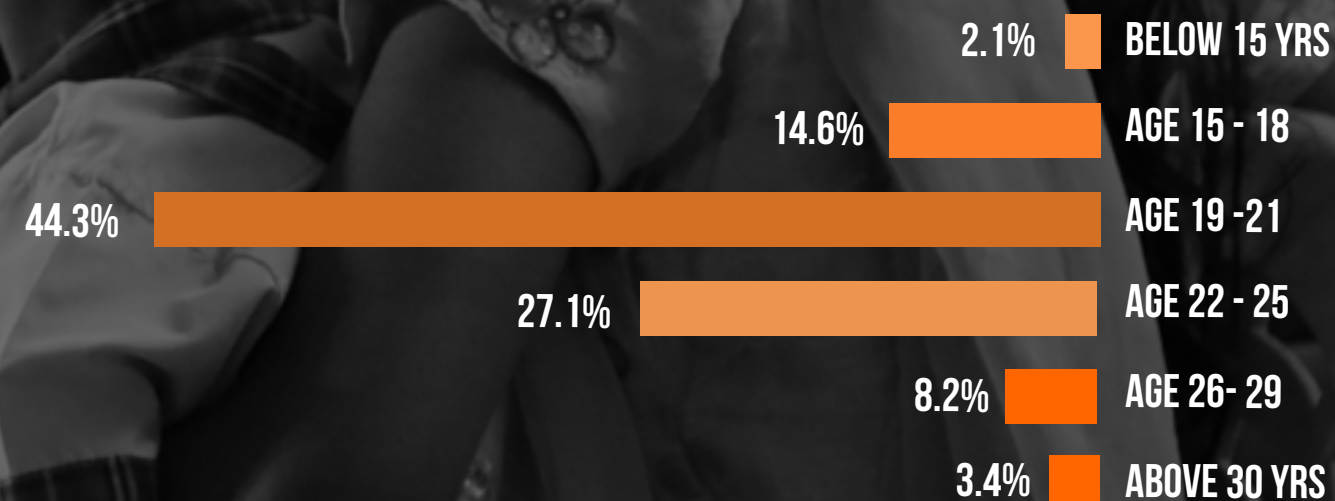
## SURVIVOR AGE BREAKDOWN



## SURVIVOR AGE AT MARRIAGE



## SURVIVOR AGE AT FIRST CHILD



**THIS** year, we will be widening our data sample by collecting age data on all of our clients. We will also be conducting analysis to determine the relationship between early marriage and childbirth and abuse.

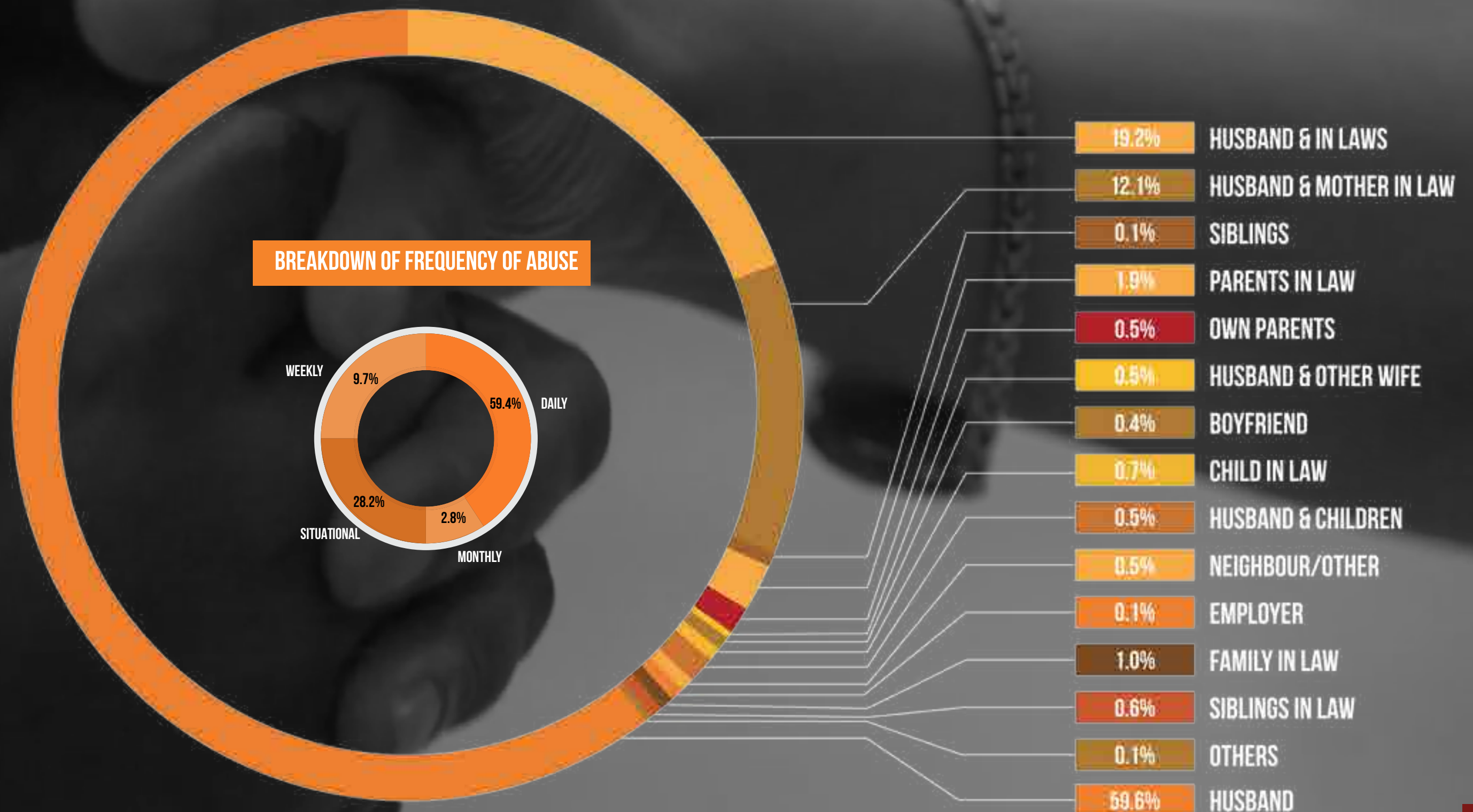
We will be asking, how does early marriage and childbirth relate to:

- Frequency and severity of abuse
- Relationship of victim and abuser
- Type of abuse experienced
- Time taken to speak up and to get help



# ABUSE PROFILE

**THE** percentage breakdown identifying the perpetrator of abuse has changed substantially between 2016 and 2017, with the percentage of cases where the husband is the single abuser decreasing. Husbands who act abusively against their wives are often goaded on by other family members. Domestic Violence is not just an issue of warped masculinity, as many assume. It is the side effect of a culture that undervalues women and seeks to oppress through humiliation, power and control. Empowering the victim is critical, but far from a holistic solution. Putting family and healthy relationships at the center of solutions helps include all members of the community in the transformation. Empowering couples to establish their own identity and boundaries apart from their families has proven to be an essential strategy, allowing them to build shared respect, trust, dependency, and hope on a clean slate.

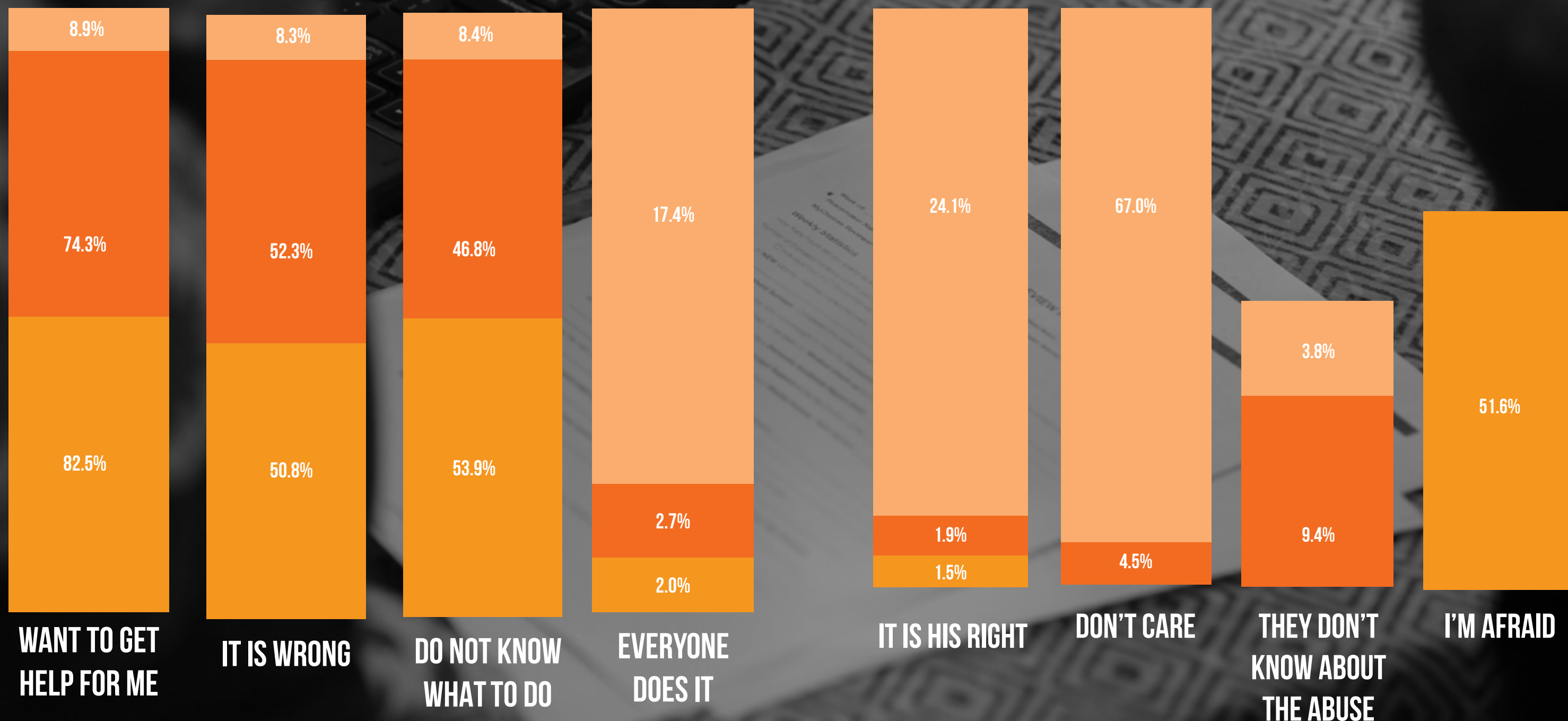




# \*VIEWS ON ABUSE



\*INFORMED BY THE PERCEPTION OF THE SURVIVOR







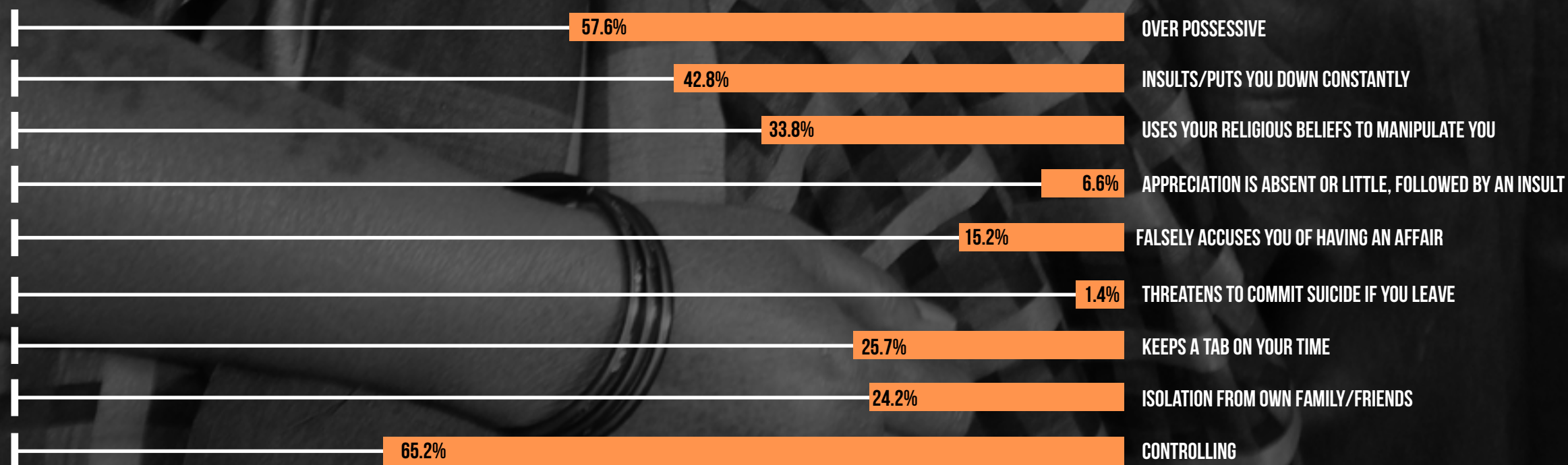
# 22.8%\* OF TOTAL CASES INVOLVE SEXUAL ABUSE



\*Percentage of sexual abuse reported in our cases is much lower than the reality experienced. Our Counselors report that sexual abuse is prevalent in around 80% of all cases. Sexual abuse remains a taboo that our clients and even our own PeaceMakers are reluctant to discuss openly and is therefore under-reported even when it may have been a part of PeaceMaker counseling.



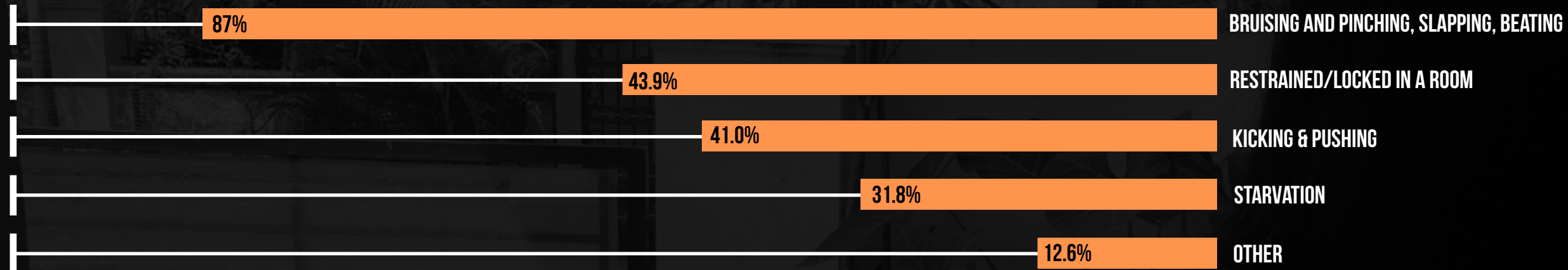
# 79.4% OF TOTAL CASES INVOLVE EMOTIONAL ABUSE



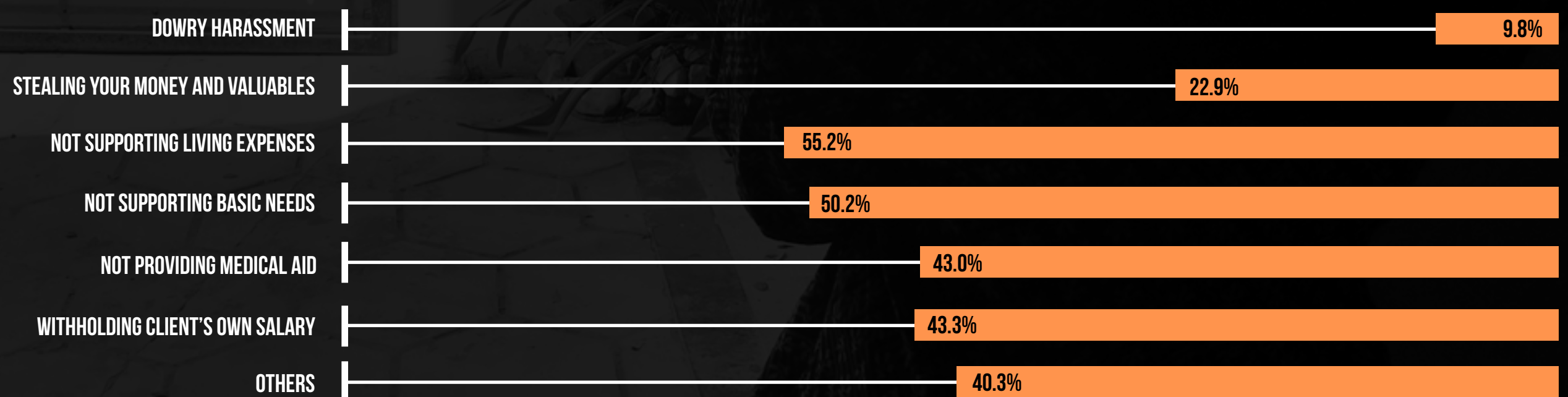




# 64.3% OF TOTAL CASES INVOLVE PHYSICAL ABUSE



# 67.1% OF TOTAL CASES INVOLVE ECONOMIC ABUSE





# OUR STORIES

## YAMINA'S STORY OF SHAKTI

**SUNDAY** is my fun day in the week. As I walk to pick up my best friend Beena, I take a deep breath and enjoy the time alone. Beena lives just a few houses away from mine, and I enjoy my walks with her every week. On our way to the Shakti Center, Beena always asks me if I'm carrying my Pink Book. I would never leave home on Sunday without it. It is the book that I use to write all my dreams and plans for the future. During the week, I keep it in a safe place to hide it from my brothers and sisters. Every Sunday, I take it out and write more in it.

Beena and I go to the Shakti Center every Sunday. The turquoise coloured walls have become a symbol of safety and warmth to me. It's my second home and a place that I get to be the real me. At first I was timid, and didn't want to say anything during the sessions. Over time, I have learned that this is a place that I can share anything that is happening to me or bothering me.

I never wanted to come to the Shakti Center. When Mrs. Hajera knocked on the door of my house a few months ago and told my mother about the program, I didn't want to go. Sunday is my only free day, and I didn't want to give up any time on my one day of rest. My father is a rickshaw-puller, so my mother works to help support our family. She is a saree embellisher and works with beautiful fabrics. Two years ago, when I was in 6th grade, they pulled me out of school to work with my mother. I always enjoyed the fabrics, but I get exhausted. That's why I didn't want to spend my Sunday at the Shakti Center.

When Mrs. Hajera told my mother that I would be with other girls and learn about safety, rights, and education, my mother gave me no choice. The only reason I thought it might be nice to go is because my friend Beena was also going.

Now, I wait all week to go to the Shakti Center. Each week we discuss the stories of other girls. We use our red books to write down our thoughts about how other girls could have used their rights and made better choices. We also write about our own painful stories, and how we wish they had been different. Most of the girls in my Shakti Circle are younger than me, but I can see the pain in their eyes when they write in their red books. I know our Shakti Leader sees it too. We use our pink books to write down our own dreams. We are taught to become the woman we dream of being, and not to let anyone else tell us what we are worth. As long as we believe that we are precious, strong and proud, then no one can tell or treat us differently. We have named our Shakti Circle the "Precious Stones". We want to be strong on the inside, but beautiful on the outside and able to bring a sparkle of light to our community. This is what Precious Stones means to us - to be strong, confident and good.

Mrs. Hajera always takes time to ask me about my life. She asks about my sister who has been ill, and she helps me plan to make sure the dreams in my pink book come true. That's how she found out that I want to finish school and start a tailoring business. She has been able to convince my parents to let me go back to school. We worked it out so that I can go to school, work with my mother, and attend Shakti in the week. It has been really difficult to catch up in my school after missing two years! I keep working hard because in my pink book I have written down my dream of finishing school, and starting my own tailoring business. My school also teaches tailoring, so I'm working towards my dream day by day.

I can't wait for graduation, because I have some big plans. Some of them I have shared with my friends at Shakti, and some of them only my pink book knows!

**Yamina's story as told in her Shakti Circle, and written by Supriya, Shakti Program Manager**  
\*Name and identifying details changed to protect the identity of a minor aged client.



# OUR STORIES

## BILQUIS BEGUM'S STORY

**BILQUIS**, 38, has undergone severe abuse for the full 20 years of her marriage. She was married at the age of 18, and very next day she was introduced to marital rape. She eventually resigned herself to the belief that it was the fate of every married woman to obey the demands of her husband at any time. If she refused or resisted her husband for any reason, even if the reason was that her children were in the room, she was beaten horribly.

Bilquis was embarrassed by the bruises that would show on her face and body when she went out in public, but that was the least of her worries.

The sexual abuse was the most degrading for Bilquis, but she would have put up with it if the violence at home did not affect her children so badly. Bilquis was treated like a maid at home, looking after her in-laws and her alcoholic husband. Yet her husband and in-laws refused to provide her or her children with basic needs like food. Bilquis ate once every 2-3 days. Her children got used to sharing 1 bowl of rice that their landlord would smuggle to Bilquis' eldest daughter a few times per week. If Bilquis ever got a hold of enough money to buy a packet of milk, she would keep the milk with the neighbors and go to their house to have a sip. Her aunt would come home every 2-3 days to take her out of the house and get her a meal.

Bilquis' family and neighbors cared about her, but did not have the resources to help her live on her own. They did what they could to help her get food for her and her children every couple of days. Her in-laws were also complicit in the abuse she faced. They encouraged her husband's doubts about her character and encouraged him to beat her upon suspicion that she was having an affair with her cousin.

Bilquis finally took the bold step to come out from the abusive relationship. She spoke out about the abuse after approaching an Operation PeaceMaker counselor. The sexual abuse was

particularly difficult for her to share. She had never spoken to anyone about any of the abuse before. After counseling, she realized that she has a right over her own body and violence is not justified. After several counseling sessions, she gained her confidence and made a conscious decision not to suffer any longer.

Now, as a single mother, she is taking small steps towards growing in her role as a provider. She got so used to her husband being the "string master", and she being his puppet. Now, she is taking back the reigns of her life. She is trying to increase her income by growing a business.

Her dream of living peacefully with her three children has finally come true. She is very firm that she will give a good education to her two daughters and son. Her elder daughter is 17 now, and everybody in the community is trying to force her to get married. However, Bilquis is very clear that she will educate her daughter first, and only get her married when she is ready. Bilquis wants her daughter to decide for herself when to get married.

Bilquis plans to educate her son not to violate anybody and to respect all women, and to educate her daughters to never be silent victims of abuse.

Bilquis felt that to raise her children with the knowledge they need to grow up compassionate and educated, she needed training herself. She joined the PeaceMaker program, to become equipped to affect change in her community and ensure her children grow up knowing their rights. Bilquis still works as both PeaceMaker and pappad-maker (bread maker) and is saving to start a tailoring business.

**As told to Counselor Tajwar Lodhi on 17/Feb/2017**



# OUR STORIES

## SAROJINI'S STORY

**I**f Sarojini looks familiar, or you feel like you have heard her story before, it is because you most likely have come across her story before. However, you have never really met Sarojini before.

Sarojini is the real name of Sandhya, whose story was featured in a 2016 fundraising campaign, and in our 2016 Impact Report. Why reveal her real name, and why feature her story again? Of course, there are many client stories we could choose from. Since our last Impact Report, Operation PeaceMaker has helped resolve an additional 2,000 cases of abuse. Yet, Sarojini's story stands out. It is symbolic of just how much our work has grown, and just how powerful the hope that we carry for our clients is.

Sarojini ended 16 years of abuse through a middle-of-the-night escape with her two little daughters in tow. The abuse she experienced was so severe, her escape so dramatic, and her triumph in setting up a new life so inspiring, that her story reads like a script from a dramatic movie. However, it is the progress that Sarojini has made since 2016 that has made us highlight it once again in this year's Impact Report.

Sarojini's indomitable spirit, and irrepressible joy for life is something we are inspired by every day we get to see her. To think that this time two years ago she was still living under constant fear for her and her daughter's lives is nearly impossible.

In 2016 we announced the beginning of Saath-Saath, our very first self-help group initiative. Sarojini was one of our very first group members. Now, Sarojini leads several Saath-Saath groups, and is a guide for many other women while they navigate the pain, processing, self-discovery and healing at various stages of their recovery journey.

Sarojini is now also helping to lead Basthi Meetings, the community-based workshops providing prevention and awareness education to local women. She is a powerful speaker, who shares from her experience, and motivates women to be strong enough to stand up for themselves. She speaks with the confidence of a survivor. She tells women that they have a choice, and that they must make the safety and peace of their own lives their first priority. Critically, Sarojini tells women that it's okay to get help, and that there are PeaceMakers waiting to hear their stories and support them.

Sarojini does all of this volunteer work with Operation PeaceMaker in her spare time.

She is hard working and entrepreneurial. Her first job after starting her new life was as a tea-seller. She then got a job as a cook, which afforded better pay and hours that allowed her to be with her daughters in the afternoon when they came home from school. Before Sarojini escaped her abusive home, she single-handedly ran a scrap shop. She managed everything from logistics and supplies to finances. It is her goal to save enough money to start her own shop again.

Sarojini has two goals to fulfil through starting her own shop. First, she believes that setting up a local shop will help her build a community of friends and neighbours. She wants her daughters to grow up with strong roots in a community where they have many well-wishers. Secondly, Sarojini knows she can earn a lot more running her own shop. Both her daughters plan to be doctors, and Sarojini knows she needs to save a lot of money to get them through university.

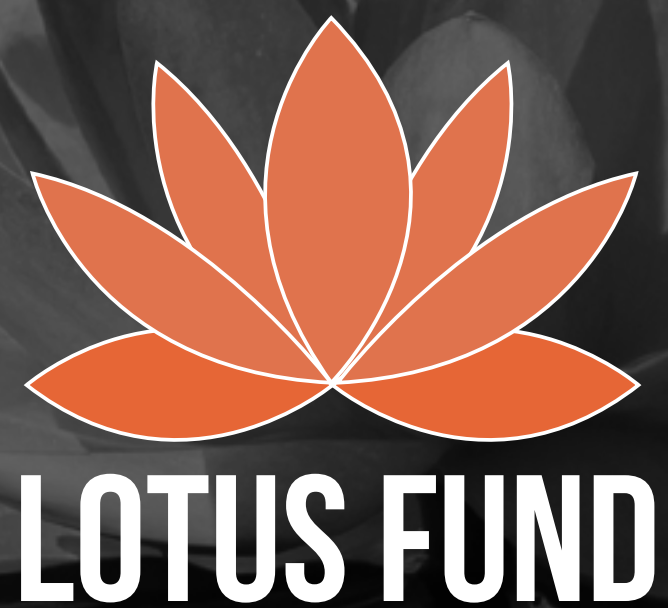
Sarojini is the perfect example of what women are capable of, once they are supported with the choice to live a life free from abuse and violence. However, she would not be where she is today without the help of the Operation PeaceMaker team, and some very generous donors.

Sarojini was the first ever client that we provided crisis funding to. We didn't do it because it was a strategic objective of ours. In the past, our team worked internally to pool in and provide occasional crisis support. In this one instance, we decided to give the opportunity to donors to be generous. The result is that Pavani and Pallavi got a long term donor committed to funding their school fees while Sarojini works to build up some savings. It was the first time that we formally offered financial support to a client, and the result was deeply impactful for both Sarojini as well as the donors.

Since our initial one-off crowdfunding campaign, we have had other clients with serious, mid-crisis needs. The victim support system in India is almost non-existent. It is even difficult to find a safe home for victims, let alone financial support.

Inspired by Sarojini's success, and in response to a persistent and tremendous need, Operation PeaceMaker has decided to build a combined crisis and start-up fund. We have named it the Lotus Fund.





## A NEW BEGINNING...

**I**n India, there is a crisis in the victim support system. Essentially, there is no guaranteed support for survivors of domestic violence, even if they come forward with the courage to file a case. So-called Safe Homes are rare, and often perpetuate abuse against survivors. There is no system for reliable support for women and children in crisis. For some of our most critical cases, this means that the choice is often between staying with an abuser to ensure they can provide for their children, or taking the risk to escape abuse knowing that they may not be able to make ends meet.

The Lotus Fund is an internal fund aimed to provide crisis and start-up support to women like Sarojini who are faced with zero alternatives.

Sarojini's journey has had a special impact on our work, and we wanted to honor her through the name of the fund that would be dedicated to helping more women like her. Her name happens to mean "lotus flower".

The lotus flower is a symbol of great resilience in spite of adversity, of the ability to let go and become detached from trouble, and of purity and beauty. It is a symbol of rebirth.

The Lotus Fund will be a niche focus of our fundraising, providing donors with the opportunity to connect their donations with the lives of families in desperate need of a little extra support to get started.

The Lotus Fund will strictly fund emergency needs within the first year of recovering from abuse including:

- Tuition fees for children of survivors
- Essential school-related costs (like textbooks and uniforms) for children of survivors
- Short term, emergency needs like food or emergency medical attention for survivors and their children
- First month rent for independent accommodation for survivor
- Basic kitchen utensils for survivor who is moving from a safe home to her own home
- Partial support for vocation initiation, like a sewing machine or set of work cloths

Our mission is to provide every woman facing abuse with choices to end it. The Lotus Fund will help us offer critical, holistic support to many clients who feel they have no way out of abuse because of the limited options for support.



# BEYOND TRIPLE TALAAQ:

## WHAT MATTERS TO MUSLIM WOMEN

AN ARTICLE BY DR. FARZANA, OPERATION PEACEMAKER PROGRAM DIRECTOR

\*For the purpose of this article, the term “talaq” is used in place of the word divorce.

**MARRIAGE** can, perhaps, be the most beautiful relationship of all, if it is based on love and mutual respect. For some, it can be their most significant inspiration in making life worth living.

Yet, as we all know, sometimes a marriage does not work out the way it should. In some marriages, there is no mutual love, no mutual respect. Sometimes, there isn't even mutual adjustment and compromise. Such a marriage becomes an oppression, a curse. To keep such unwilling partners bound together would be cruel to them and would also be a detriment to their community. For such cases, Islam provides talaq (divorce).

Unfortunately, without codified law defining the process for talaq, instantaneous triple talaq has become common in India. It has also become the topic of a national debate, stirring up heated discord among citizens, clerics, law-makers and more.

For us, an NGO whose mission is to support women and their right to peace, safety, and justice, the debate is informed by the real lives and stories of Muslim women. The impact that this debate has on Indian law has enormous implications for the lives of our clients, and therefore our work.

For women like Rehana, an Operation PeaceMaker client who was married to a man 12 years older than her who eventually abandoned her without any child support, it is the mystery surrounding divorce that is more demeaning than the actual act. For seven years, Ruhana lived with her parents, wondering if her husband would ever come back home, or help her support their daughter. Only with the support

of an Operation PeaceMaker Counselor did Rehana discover that her husband had issued Talaq through the local Kazi 6 months prior. She could have gone years without knowing that her husband divorced her, and this was permissible in accordance with their local Kazi, who is responsible for administering marriage and divorce procedures.

### What is Triple Talaq?

Triple Talaq, as discussed in this article, is the act of stating the word “talaq” three times to initiate the end of a marriage with immediate effect. The word is stated verbally, in writing, and even digitally. It is entirely different than Talaq-e-Hassan, which is the method of talaq permitted in the Quran, which involves making the statement of talaq three times over at least three months.

### Is it legal?

The legality of triple talaq is what had been hotly debated in Indian courts in 2017 to now. Finally, in August 2017 the Indian Supreme Court blocked triple talaq, affirming that the practice was a violation of women's rights. However, it stopped short of permanently banning the practice. As I write this article, the issue is being presented to Parliament to be permanently banned, and to add to criminalize it.

### Is it Islamic?

Whether or not triple talaq is Islamic is the real point of the debate! Indian law allows Muslims, Christians, and Parsis to operate through their own family laws. Muslim family law is not codified, which means it is largely left up to the interpretation of local clerics. However, Triple talaq as it is practiced now is not Quranic, meaning there are no verses in the Quran that support the practice. Instant talaq is not even mentioned in the Quran. Where it exists in modern society is a complete departure from Quranic teachings. There are only two options for talaq in the

Quran, each of them requiring the husband to wait at least three months before the talaq is finalized. Triple talaq is actually the process of declaring the intention for divorce three times over a period of three months. Quranic talaq also requires that the relatives of both the husband and wife try to help the couple resolve their issues before the husband initiates a talaq. If reconciliation fails, the husband declares talaq, and the waiting period completes, the talaq becomes complete and the husband has to pay his ex-wife a sum of money. Ideally, he should also provide his ex-wife with an additional amount to help her maintenance to end their marriage with respect and dignity. Nothing about this process is instantaneous, informal or undignified.

### Why is it such a big debate?

The debate on triple talaq in India is highly nuanced. First, you have those who believe that there should be no law dictating religious practices for Muslims. Second, you have those who mistakenly believe that banning triple talaq is an effort to protect women from divorce in general. Both these groups fail to understand the intention of the law. The law intends to preserve the right to divorce, clarify its lawful process, and ultimately protect women from discriminatory practices that are unconstitutional and unIslamic.

The constitutional bench of the Indian Supreme Court has already declared triple talaq unconstitutional. Now, the debate is whether or not to criminalize the act of triple talaq with the punishment of 3 years of imprisonment.

I believe that while banning triple talaq was a win for women's rights and ultimately for Muslim families, that criminalizing the act would be highly problematic. If we are guided by the real stories and experiences of Muslim women in India, we can immediately see the issues that arise with criminalization.

Criminalization is a hasty measure that aims to punish the offending man, but does not actually protect the affected woman. It can lead to several negative outcomes for the woman, including increasingly severe abuse or desertion. For example, under the terms of criminalization, if a man attempts triple talaq, it will lead to immediate imprisonment and a sentence of 3 years. While he is in jail, he is not obligated to pay maintenance to his family. So the wife and family are left without support. When the husband is released from his sentence, what's stopping him from punishing his wife through abuse or marrying another woman?

Alternatively, triple talaq can be a way out for men avoiding their responsibility of paying maintenance. Some men may find it easier to utter triple talaq, and serve jail time than to take responsibility for their families. This may sound bizarre, but we have experienced many cases where men show a shocking level of commitment to do anything to avoid accepting responsibility for their families. For men like Rehana's husband, talaq was an impersonal process that could be conveniently arranged through a religious official who took his side.

### How can the law protect Muslim women?

There are too many women like Rehana, who suffer

**CRIMINALIZATION IS A HASTY MEASURE THAT AIMS TO PUNISH THE OFFENDING MAN, BUT DOES NOT ACTUALLY PROTECT THE AFFECTED WOMAN.**



unnecessarily demeaning and confusing processes simply because it is left to a local cleric to decide what is appropriate or fair.

The way to address the problem with triple talaq is to define the proper legal process for talaq in general. Currently, there is no codified law outlining the due process of talaq among Muslims. Muslim Family Law leaves interpretation up to local clerics, and it is only in the instance that the case goes to court that legal processes are considered. Indian courts have repeatedly knocked down the right to instantaneous triple talaq, but this has no bearing on practices across the country because the legal process has yet to be codified.

The result of the August 2017 Supreme Court ruling blocking instantaneous triple talaq without any codified legal process, that we are seeing more cases like Fadilah's. Fadilah was abandoned after one month of marriage, when her husband moved to Dubai without informing her. She was pregnant when he left, and waited a year and a half without any hope that he would return. Her husband eventually sent his divorce notices in intervals through a lawyer to Fadilah. Since his delivery of talaq was not instantaneous, and delivered through a lawyer, it did not violate the Supreme Court ruling. There is no law prohibiting this type of divorce, or making it mandatory that the woman agrees to the divorce or be able to ask for arbitration.

Indian law should categorize instantaneous triple talaq as domestic abuse, and allow the same options for recourse that are provided to women the Protection from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 or Indian Penal Code (IPC) Section 498A, which are civil and criminal options respectively. These laws protect women from emotional abuse, and provide a mechanism to ensure that proper maintenance, residence, protection from violence, and custody of her children.

Further to these legal measures to punish offenders, the government should work to sensitize Kazis (local religious magistrate) who facilitate nikah (marriage) and talaq processes. If these Kazis are found guilty of assisting instantaneous triple talaq, their license should be revoked.

In order to provide meaningful protection to Muslim women from experiencing abuse through the practice of instantaneous triple talaq, the government must make two steps. First, codify the legal process for talaq, thereby eliminating the possibility of discriminatory and unIslamic interpretations of Muslim Family Law by local clerics and abuses of

interpretations by malevolent husbands. Second, provide legal recourse for women whose husbands try to use triple talaq, recognizing it as domestic abuse rather than categorizing it as a criminal offense. Criminalizing triple talaq is likely to further silence women, and hinder them reporting the issue out of worry that it will ruin any and all chance of reconciliation. Providing recourse through existing laws for domestic violence would help guarantee that the woman receives the protection and support she needs.

Beyond these two basic requirements for Indian law to support Muslim women, the government must recognize its responsibility to provide services to disenfranchised women and children. A woman facing a legal battle with her husband is often left without home or money to keep her life afloat. Victim services like safe homes, vocational training, employment, etc. are critical to ensuring that it is possible for women to secure their and their children's future through divorce or desertion.

For women like Rehana and Fadilah, a codified process for divorce will provide them with a dignified and fair divorce process, and could also help protect them from ill-intentioned marriages with abusive husbands in the first place.

Want to help affect change? Operation PeaceMaker will be initiating a change.org petition asking for the Government of India and the All India Muslim Personal Law Board to codify the legal process for talaq, and provide Muslim women and families adequate protection under the law.

**THE WAY TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM  
WITH TRIPLE TALAAQ IS TO DEFINE THE  
PROPER LEGAL PROCESS FOR  
TALAAQ IN GENERAL.**

## **THIS IMPACT REPORT IS DEDICATED TO**

**Mehek\*, who lost her life to the fear of never escaping abuse; to every woman and girl facing abuse and dreaming of peace; and to our PeaceMakers and Counselors, who refuse to give up.**

**Operation PeaceMaker is privileged to step into people's lives to help them replace violence with peace. We are privileged to witness the courage of women who have faced years of abuse, step up to stop it and provide a life to their children that is violence-free. Sometimes, however, the burden of years of violence and abuse does irreparable damage to a woman's spirit. Even though we do as much as we can to offer choices and support, sometimes the abuse is so severe, the perpetrator so manipulative, and the woman so defeated that we are faced with the horrible reality where a mother of five children sees no escape and no future, and takes her own life.**

**\*Mehek was married at 13, and had her first child at 14. She was never equipped with the maturity and skills to handle abuse. At 26, all she knew since childhood was abuse and control. It is for these girls, and women that Operation PeaceMaker exists to offer CHOICES.**

\*Client's name changed for the privacy of the 5 children she left behind, to whom Operation PeaceMaker is providing ongoing support to ensure they are raised in a violence-free home.



**OPERATION RED ALERT  
BELIEVES THAT THROUGH  
BUILDING AN ARMY OF  
GOOD FATHERS, INFORMED  
MOTHERS, AND EMPOWERED  
GIRLS AND BOYS, WE CAN  
CREATE SAFE, TRAFFICKING-  
FREE VILLAGES. WE BELIEVE  
THAT A COALITION EFFORT  
IS ESSENTIAL, AND THAT  
TOGETHER, WE CAN END  
LARGE-SCALE TRAFFICKING  
BY 2025.**



**EVIDENCE OF  
PREVENTION**



# GEO GRAPHY

**OPERATION RED ALERT** operates in 5 states that historically hold among the highest risk of human trafficking in the country. These are the states that NGOs and local anti human trafficking units confirm are some of the highest risk source areas for girls being trafficked into forced sexual slavery. Prevention in these states is crucial.

Maharashtra was added as the fifth and newest state in which Operation Red Alert is working towards prevention. We have moved into the state with the strategic partnership of Save the Children India who are assisting in not just implementation but also monitoring and evaluation. The mission of coalition-lead prevention is becoming a reality throughout India, and we are grateful to our partners for leading this movement with us.

**“THANK YOU FOR TRAINING OUR NGO AND GIVING US THE OPPORTUNITY TO DO THE SAFE VILLAGE PROGRAM IN THE STATE OF MAHARASHTRA. THERE ARE MANY TRAFFICKING PRONE VILLAGES THAT ARE IN NEED OF THIS PROGRAM!”**

**SANTOSH RAUT - ABHINAV BHARAT SAMAJ SEVA MANDAL**

TELANGANA

WEST BENGAL

KARNATAKA

MAHARASHTRA

ANDHRA PRADESH



# PILLAR #1

## GRASSROOTS EDUCATION

“A GREAT OPPORTUNITY HAS BEEN PROVIDED TO US THROUGH THE SAFE VILLAGE PROGRAM TO CREATE AWARENESS AMONG CHILDREN AND ELDERS ABOUT SEX TRAFFICKING. WE ARE VERY PROUD OF THIS PARTNERSHIP WITH OPERATION RED ALERT, AND WILL PUT IN ALL OUR EFFORT TO REACH THE GOAL OF ENDING SEX TRAFFICKING BY 2025.”

PRASAD UDDANDRAO - VIDYA FOUNDATION



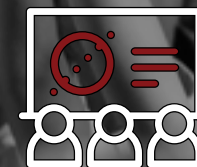
**68** ACTIVE IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS



**1,375** SAFE VILLAGES CREATED



**912,663** INDIVIDUALS FROM HIGH RISK AREAS EDUCATED



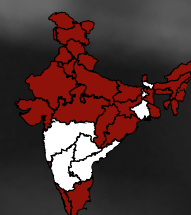
**100+** NGOS TRAINED ON PREVENTION, RESEARCH, PROGRAMS AND TOOLS



**1,441** HOURS SPENT TRAINING NGOS ON PREVENTION



**6** LANGUAGE SUPPORT OPTIONS THROUGH HELPLINE AND VILLAGE TOOLKIT

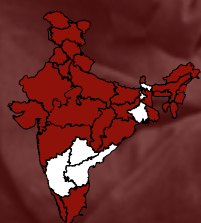


**5** STATES CURRENTLY IMPACTED THROUGH SAFE VILLAGE PROGRAM



# RAKSHAK PROGRAM

THE NEWLY LAUNCHED RAKSHAK PROGRAM HAS ALREADY BEEN ROLLED OUT THROUGH:



**4** STATES



**15** PARTNERS



**106** RAKSHAKS TRAINED

**EDUCATING** at-risk families and girls about trafficking has had an incredible impact already. Calls to the Red Alert Helpline are increasing, and we are receiving more stories of individual village members taking action to combat human trafficking themselves. The stories in this report give a snapshot of a changing reality that is just the “tip of the iceberg” of the impact of prevention education being delivered where it is needed most.

Yet, we know that in order to achieve the long-term goals of the Safe Village Program - to successfully change mindsets and create allies to the mission of keeping girls safe - multiple interventions are required.

For this reason, in 2017 Operation Red Alert launched a brand new initiative to provide long term support for girls in high-risk villages. This initiative is called the Rakshak Program. Rakshak literally means “protector” in Hindi. A Rakshak is a local man or woman, who lives and works in a village targeted by the Safe Village Program, and who has a personal passion for ensuring that their village stays safe. A Rakshak becomes an ally for girl’s safety, committed to being vigilant about risks that girls in the village face, and to reporting any suspicious incidents to the local Implementing Partner and/or Red Alert Helpline.

It is critical that a Rakshak is mature enough to overcome the biases triggered by harmful social norms and traditions, and to be the voice to speak out for girls when issues like child-marriage arise. Operation Red Alert actively equips each Rakshak with ongoing training and capacity-building that makes them not only a capable ally for girls’ safety, but also indispensable as a resource to adults in the village.

The Rakshak program has been piloted in 4 states, and with 20 Implementing Partners. We currently have 106 trained Rakshaks through whom we are piloting the program and tailoring it for country-wide roll out in late 2018.



# PILLAR #2

## HELPLINE

**THE** Red Alert Helpline remains the only dedicated helpline in India addressing Human Sex Trafficking. We are getting more calls than ever, and now have more partners to support the cases we receive through it. The helpline is supported in 6 languages, covering all the major languages of the states in which we operate.

The Red Alert helpline receives many calls of verification, thank you's, and non-trafficking case reports. Our team handles each call call its due importance, even if it is "just" a call to say thank you or to verify that someone would respond. We look at every call as an opportunity to instill trust among stakeholders in the work and the mission of Operation Red Alert. Our helpline responders know that a simple call for verification can easily lead to a case report down the road. Every call impacts perceptions of grassroots stakeholders on the programs and the local Implementing Partners.

We receive many non-trafficking cases, and are able to respond to them by activating the support of our local Implementing Partners and their network organisations. While non-trafficking cases can be perceived as outside of our mandate of operations, we do not treat them that way. Every case of domestic violence, child marriage and missing children (in particular) is followed through on until the best possible resolution. Domestic violence is a critical push factor, causing girls to be vulnerable to running away from or willingly leaving home with a stranger. Child marriage is one of the most common tactics that traffickers use to lure families into letting young girls go. Our Implementing and Strategic partners have worked together to resolve domestic violence, locate and rescue missing children, stop child marriages, counsel parents on keeping children in school, and so much more.

The Operation Red Alert Helpline represents a coalition of do-anything partners who are committed to the safety of girls, and the reduction of vulnerabilities of their families. Together, we are providing assistance to thousands who have no other options for recourse. What an honour it is to be working together to impact thousands of lives.



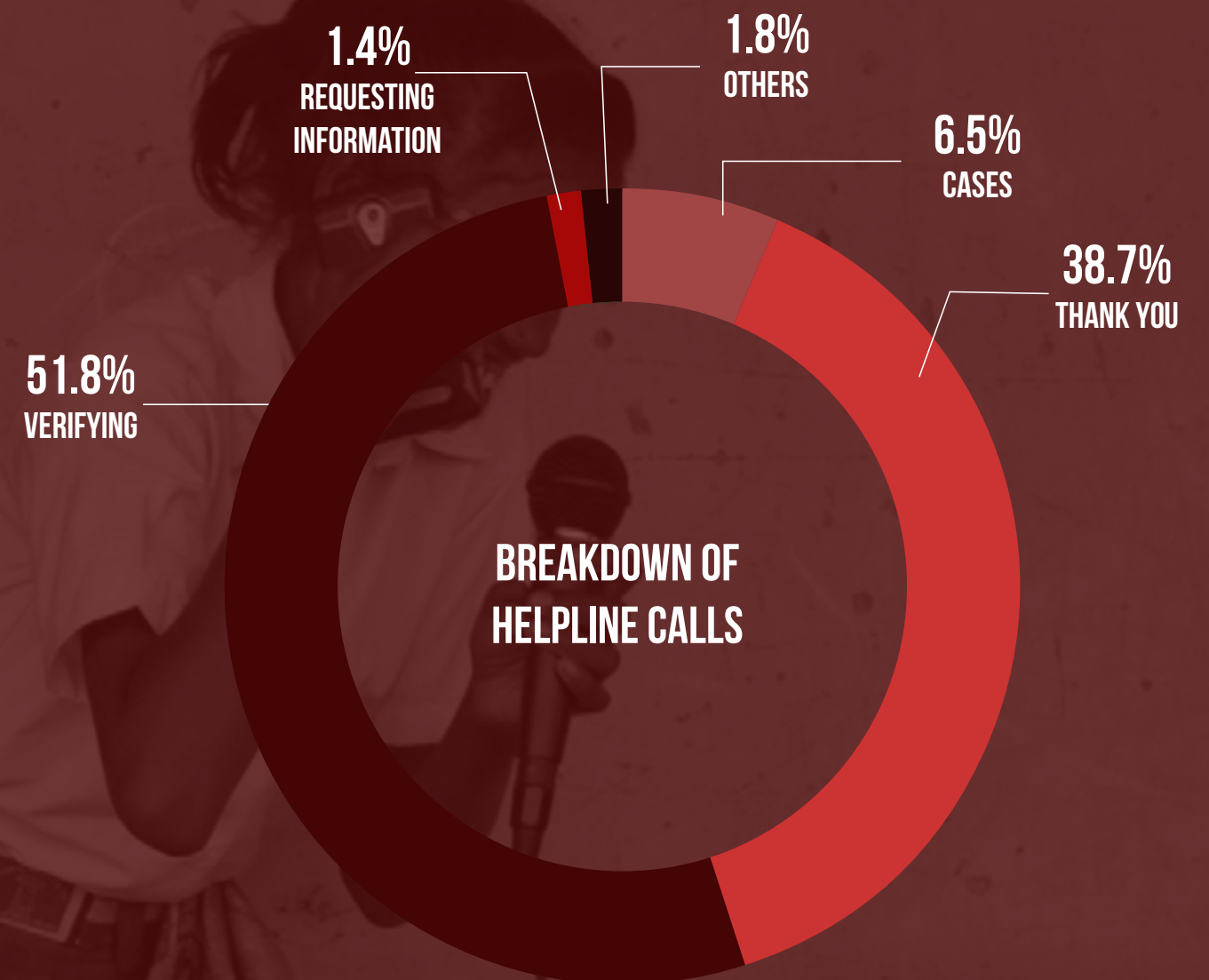
**16,759** HELPLINE CALLS



**3,865** UNIQUE CALLERS



**80** HELPLINE CASES





# PILLAR #3

## MASS MEDIA

### NOTES TO MY FATHER

**NOTES TO MY FATHER**, the world's 1st live action Virtual Reality documentary on sex trafficking was viewed for the first time in January 2017, at Sundance Film Festival. It went on to make its World Premiere at SXSW Film Festival, followed by a world tour at international film festivals, events, conferences, and more. It was shown at the SKOLL Forum in Oxford, and at Trust Conference in London, and it achieved an incredible response from each person who was immersed in the powerful story of Ramadevi and her father Kullyappa.

The film won the UN Women Film Festival Award for Best 360/VR Film.

The film has been viewed over 340,000 times on Facebook alone since being made public in September 2017. The story, which emphasizes the importance of good fathers and keeping girls in school has captured the hearts of individuals and media alike. If you haven't seen the film yet - watch it now on Facebook or YouTube, or any of the major VR platforms.



2 AWARDS



3 MAJOR VR PLATFORMS




343,692 SOCIAL VIEWS



### UNERASE POETRY

**BOLLYWOOD** actor and crowdfunding platform founder Kunal Kapoor wrote a spoken word poem on sex trafficking and used it as the campaign video for a fundraising for Operation Red Alert. The video was viewed nearly 454,000 times, and was unequivocally well received. Crucially, the video succeeded in confronting passive acceptance of commercial sexual exploitation by spurring empathy for the hidden pain of lost innocence, and severed family bonds. The campaign is an exciting example of how we are working to put India on Red Alert to end sex trafficking in our own backyard!

 459,834 VIEWS

₹ 68,775 INR MONEY RAISED

**ESOMAR**  
WORLD RESEARCH

**ESOMAR** Foundation & Partners - In 2016, the Red Alert Research Paper won the most prestigious global award for market research - the ESOMAR Excellence Award. In 2017, ESOMAR invited us back to their annual Congress to present on the impact of our research in a segment dedicated to learning about social-impact of their field. Ahead of the Congress, ESOMAR Foundation received a very generous donation from AOL's OATH program to run a banner ad. ESOMAR Foundation partnered with System1 to create the ad campaign, and chose our research paper to base the campaign on. Here's what John Kearon, CEO of System1 said about working on the campaign -

**"THEIR WORK REPRESENTED RESEARCH AT ITS BEST — AND WE DECIDED TO TRANSLATE ITS NUANCED AND COMPLEX FINDINGS INTO A CAMPAIGN THAT WOULD GRAB PEOPLE EMOTIONALLY AND RAISE BOTH AWARENESS AND MONEY."**



1,000+ VIEWED THE LIVE STREAM



1,200+ ATTENDEES



# TEDx

# Hyderabad

x = independently organized TED event

**FOUNDER**, Elca Grobler received a standing ovation from over 3,000 attendees at India's flagship TEDx event. The talk was painstakingly crafted to highlight solutions that both men and women can share in, and to challenge India to think about the power of an "Army of Good Fathers". The positivity that her TEDx talk received exceeded all expectations, with men in particular sharing their support. The video has so far received nearly 3,000 views on Facebook and YouTube! Eliminating violence and exploitation about women and girls is an "idea worth spreading" indeed!

 3,000 ATTENDEES

 2,815 ONLINE VIDEO VIEWS  
\*AS OF DECEMBER 2017

**भारत यात्रा**  
**BHARAT YATRA**  
सुरक्षित बचपन, सुरक्षित भारत | SAFE CHILDHOOD, SAFE INDIA

**NOBEL** laureate Kailash Satyarthi has called for a war on child sexual abuse. To kickstart the movement, he organized the Bharat Yatra, an 11,000km (6,385 mile) walk across 22 states of India with local events in each major city. The Yatra came through our home city of Hyderabad where the Operation Red Alert team helped organize and spoke at the city's rally. The Yatra sparked enormous conversation in India about the importance of children's safety and rights. Each step taken was dedicated to #MakeIndiaSafe.

 10,000,000 TOTAL PLEDGES

 35 DAYS

 **airtel**  
**HYDERABAD**  
**MARATHON**  
28TH AUGUST 2016

**ON** 19th-20th August, 2017 over 22,000 people ran in the Airtel Hyderabad Marathon. The Marathon selected 47 NGOs to partner with to turn the race into a run for a reason. My Choices Foundation received support from 41 new unique donors, and raised a total of Rs.40,983 to go towards the Safe Village Program. The support came in organically, without a separate campaign to drive traffic to the donations page, encouraging our team that our mission is as inspiring to others as it is to us.

₹ 40,983 TOTAL FUNDS RAISED

 10,000+ MARATHON SIZE





# COALITION BUILDING

At Operation Red Alert, our aim is to unify the voice of the anti-trafficking community. The only way to do this is to build a coalition of NGOs who are willing to work together with a shared mission and vision.

We will never be able to curb this evil alone. Activists, NGOs, academics, private sector, government and citizens have to come together as a strong coalition to fight the largest criminal network in the world - the traffickers of human beings

**WE STRONGLY BELIEVE THAT IT'S NOT ABOUT WHO GETS THE CREDIT, IT'S ABOUT HOW MANY LITTLE GIRLS WE CAN KEEP SAFE!**

## 72 IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

An implementing partner is a grassroots NGO that has received training from Operation Red Alert on the Safe Village Program, and is equipped with the resources to run it in their area of operations. Each Implementing Partner dedicates between 2 - 6 team members to the Safe Village Program, and conducts a minimum of 3 programs per month.

## 10+ STRATEGIC PARTNERS

A Strategic Partner is an NGO that is committed to the coalition effort, and is committed to providing support to cases of human trafficking reported through the Red Alert Helpline. We are proud to partner with heroes in the anti-trafficking field, and together, help lead the joint effort to combat human trafficking.

## QUANTIUM TECHNOLOGY PARTNER

We have partnered with Quantum, a big data analytics company, that has built a technology-based ecosystem to identify high-risk hotspots for trafficking.

Quantum helped us in prioritizing our intervention in vulnerable areas for a better impact. They have also built a mobile-based reporting tool to help simplify all our partner's and field worker's reporting needs.

## NETWORK FORUM

In 2017 Operation Red Alert launched its first Anti-Human Trafficking Network Forum event. This partnership-building gathering will be held semi-annually going forward. The first Network Forum took place in August in Kolkata. More than 80 NGOs from in and around West Bengal participated, and each one took a pledge to work together to end human trafficking and modern day slavery.

## THE FREEDOM COLLABORATIVE

The Freedom Collaborate is a joint initiative by Liberty Asia and Chab Dai, and does just what the name states. It is a platform that fosters collaboration for freedom fighters. Operation Red Alert is proud to have become a regional partner, helping Freedom Collaborative connect Indian NGOs with the platform and all the resources it offers. So far, we have helped 40 grassroots NGOs connect with Freedom Collaborative, and we look forward to assisting many more connect with the amazing resources that the platform makes available.





# PREVENTION STORIES

## GOUSIA AND HER GUARDIAN GIRL

**15** year old Gousia dreams of becoming a teacher so that she can “guide children” while they are growing up. Her father passed away a few years ago, and ever since that time Gousia’s mother, elder sister, and brother-in-law pressured her to get married.

When Gousia finished her 10th grade, her family forced her to end her education, and began arranging her marriage. She refused the idea saying “I will not get married, because I have to finish my education to be a teacher”. No one listened to her. They were more concerned with finding Gousia a husband who could take care of her.

Gousia’s friend Usha promised she would help her get out of the forced marriage. Usha had attended the Operation Red Alert Safe Village Program (SVP), and had learned about how to be a Guardian Girl. Guardian Girls look out for other girls, and make sure they stay in school. She knew what to do if a girl in her village was being forced to get married instead of go to school. Usha built up the courage to call the Red Alert Helpline. The call was directed to local Implementing Partner FMMSSS, who had been the partner to conduct the SVP in their village.

FMMSSS showed up in their village, intervened and stopped the marriage. They made sure that Gousia was admitted back into school, starting her new year in 11th grade (called college in India). They counseled Gousia’s family, and made them aware that marrying Gousia at the age of 15 would not only limit her options in life, but would also be breaking the law. Her family knows that if Gousia is forced to quit school to get married, that they will be reported to the police.

Gousia says “now my dreams of becoming a teacher will come true thanks to my friend Usha, who is my Guardian Girl!”.

### A NOTE ON EARLY MARRIAGE AND TRAFFICKING:

Marriage is one of the most common guises that traffickers use to trick their victims and victim’s families. It is common for a trafficker to invest substantial resources into faking a marriage in order to traffic a girl. Operation Red Alert treats every case of child and early marriage that is reported to our helpline like a potential trafficking case. Stopping a child marriage means more than preventing a girl from a marriage that puts her at risk of poor health, childbearing complications and higher susceptibility to domestic violence. It also eliminates the possibility of her being trafficked into a much worse fate.





# PREVENTION STORIES

## MEET SAIDUL

**SAIDUL** is a father of three daughters and two sons. They belong to a poor minority community in Kuldia village. Saidul and his wife work in the unskilled agriculture sector as a daily wage laborer. Both of them are illiterate, and unable to pursue better opportunities. They have a MGNREGA job card, but it only helps them with around 100 days of employment per year. Their resources are unpredictable, and they find it very difficult to support their family.

The Aila cyclone, which took place in 2009, damaged Saidul's village in ways they are still recovering from. Many families from his area arrange their daughter's marriage with people they do not know, who do not live in their village, hoping to secure their daughter's future and to make it easier to provide for the rest of the family.

When a neighbor woman came to Saidul and brought a marriage proposal for his 16-year-old daughter Rabia\* from a man in Delhi, Saidul thought it was a good opportunity for his girl. The neighbor said the man was a successful business person, who would look after Rabia well. "I thought that Rabia would be happy, and would get at least two meals per day" said Saidul.

Preparations were nearly underway for their marriage, despite the family never having met the man in person. Then, on 15th of June, 2017 Operation Red Alert Implementing Partner, HASUS, conducted a Safe Village Program in Saidul's village. Saidul learned about human trafficking, trafficker's modes of operation, and how thousands of adolescent girls go missing each year, including from their own district. They learned about the mental and physical consequences of child marriage on young girls and boys, and that it is illegal for a girl under 18 to be married. They also learned that traffickers purposefully target illiterate and economically poor families, knowing they are more susceptible to their tricks.

Saidul says that the SVP was his eye opener. Immediately after the program, he went home and spoke to his wife about what he learnt, and the possible consequences of getting Rabia married to the man in Delhi. Both of them agreed that the marriage must be stopped, so their daughter would stay safe.

When Saidul informed the neighbor woman who helped arrange the marriage that they did not want to go through with it, she pushed them to reconsider. For several days, she continued to visit their house and urge Saidul to make the decision for his daughter's happiness. Finally, Saidul told her that if she visited them again they would inform the local police station and call the Red Alert helpline. Only then did the woman stop harassing Saidul. Saidul and the local Implementing Partner who conducted the SVP suspected this woman could be a broker for a local trafficking ring, a fact that was later confirmed when they discovered she is associated with other girls going missing and never being heard from again. If Saidul had sent Rabia to be married, they almost certainly would never have heard from her again.

Now Saidul is a self motivated activist, like many others in this village who were a part of the SVP. He said, "I am a lucky person in this village, because I got the opportunity to attend the meeting, which helped me save my daughter's life and save her from human trafficking."

According to ORA Implementing Partner, HASUS, "At present hundreds of educated and motivated fathers are living in these villages, and are proactively working against child marriage. Through their active involvement, incidences of child marriage and missing children cases have been significantly reducing in these vulnerable villages."



# PREVENTION STORIES

## MITHALI AND HER BROTHER

**15**-year-old Mithali was returning from her usual computer class in southern West Bengal when a fellow student introduced himself to her. He was at least 7 years older, but he gave her a lot of attention. They quickly became friends, and eventually she was seeing him after class every day. One day, he offered her a sweet lassi (yoghurt drink), and the next thing she remembers was waking up in Delhi over a thousand kilometers away from home. Her “friend” had laced her drink with a sedative. She doesn’t know how she got there, but when she regained consciousness, she was locked up in a room in a place she had never seen before. She soon discovered that her boyfriend had sold her to a brothel.

A few days after she went missing, Operation Red Alert’s Implementing Partner, BBSS, conducted a Safe Village Program (SVP) in Mithali’s village. Upendra, Mithali’s brother, was at the program. Distressed about Mithali being missing, he took the opportunity to report her case to the BBSS team. Though Upendra and his family had reported Mithali’s missing to the police, they hadn’t received any help.

BBSS was able to mobilize the police to conduct an investigation. Eventually, they found her in Delhi. She was immediately rescued and moved to a safe home in Delhi, then sent home to West Bengal to be with her family. She was gone for about 3 months, but her family says that it felt like an eternity. There was no joy at home while she was missing.

Now, Mithali is back in school, and joy has returned to her family. She is in 11th grade, doing well, and dreaming of what she will achieve after her schooling. Her family, especially her big brother, are proud of their courageous girl who exudes happiness and confidence.

**\*\*A note on men and boys:** Operation Red Alert firmly believes that men and boys have at least 50% part in the solution to ending trafficking - in some cases, even more. Fathers make decisions for their daughter’s futures, brothers look out for the safety of their sisters, and men are often responsible for the governing of a village. Men and boys are much needed allies in the effort to put an end to sex trafficking. Together, we can create a respectful and safe society for women and girls.





# NOTES FROM THE FIELD

FROM VIVIAN ISSAC, PROGRAM DIRECTOR

## WHY WE (PERSONALLY) PERSIST

Many “colleagues” in the cause ask me about what indications we use to measure the success of our village-level interventions. The metrics of success that are most widely accepted are: the reduction of trafficking cases; the reduction of child abuse cases; and the increase in calls to the Red Alert Helpline reporting trafficking and missing children.

For me, however, it is the real experiences from the high-risk villages we have conducted the program in that form the core part of my definition of success. When I see the grateful faces of the school girls thanking me for the program, I know how much our efforts mean. No amount of data could tell the story of impact as effectively as the gratitude of these little girls. The only negative response to our program was when we are asked “why didn’t you come sooner”.

Facing the evil of sex trafficking can be discouraging. Despite all our efforts, we are often shocked at how far there is to go, how much there is to learn, and how difficult it is to affect change. What keeps me going and gives me hope is the time I spend with girls like 13-year-old Nilaya Patil. I met Nilaya at her school in Dadpur Village in Maharashtra. When I and the team first arrived at her school, the children looked skeptical because their teachers hadn’t prepared them for them for the session. Once we got started our program with fun activities, the children’s faces lit up with joy. Nilaya was particularly well engaged

and excited about the program. We ask the children to share the learnings from the session with their parents.

Later in the day, as we held meetings with groups of mothers and fathers, Nilaya and her friends followed us around, watching each program from a distance. During the multimedia presentation in the evening, Nilaya showed up early and then acted like a principal, making sure all the other kids were sitting down and staying quiet so that the program would be undisturbed. On the second day of the Save Village Program, we go back to the school to ask the children about their parent’s response to the program. Little Nilaya shared that her father had promised her that he would not marry her off early, but would send her for higher studies. She told me, “Thank you for coming. Now we know that we girls are very valuable, and that each of us has a responsibility to keep each other safe. I’m so happy you came all the way with comic books to teach us and our parents how to keep us safe.”

These are the moments, when we personally experience and connect with the impact of our work, that drive us to train more partners, reach more villages, conduct Safe Village Programs, train Rakshaks, and keep expanding the Red Alert Helpline. All our efforts are made in effort to keep these precious girls safe.

## WHY PREVENTION MATTERS IN 2017 & BEYOND

Staying on top of trends and remaining agile in our approach to end trafficking is essential if we are to combat the traffickers and put an end to their work. We must do more than keep up with their ever-evolving tactics. Operation Red Alert works with over 80 partners across India, with whom we are always learning. In the past year, a report was published by International Justice Mission (IJM). The significant finding of their report was that the number of minors being exploited in red light areas has drastically dropped. What is more important than this exceptional drop, however, is the reason why.

While it is more difficult than ever to find a minor girl in one of India’s red light district brothels, it does not mean that there are fewer of them being exploited. Human trafficking is such a lucrative business that the traffickers are able to earn more and more profit taking less and less risk. Across India, commercial sex exploitation is slowly moving underground, into the private domain. Brothels are being abandoned and

traffickers are moving their slaves to upscale lodges, homes in quiet residential areas, communities with high elderly population, and other areas known for safety. It used to be fairly common to spot a young girl working in a red light area. Their presence in specific areas made it much easier to investigate and organise raids to rescue them. Now, it is nearly impossible to locate these girls.

While rescue operations and the process for sustained freedom that follows will always be a critical part of providing justice to survivors, it is not an effective deterrent to the traffickers. We have to invest our efforts where children are vulnerable. We know that the battlefield for freedom is in the rural villages, urban slums, and urban adolescent hotspots where minor aged children are being trafficked in the open simply because their communities do not know how to protect them. Operation Red Alert is on a mission to create Safe Villages and Communities by putting them on Red Alert. Will you join us?



# DELICACY POEM

I have no brothers, sisters,  
cousins, neighbours, teachers.  
I am no daughter, sister.

I tie no friendship bands,  
yet I am wanted - by men.  
Was born naked but wrapped  
in clothes to deceive me.  
My pictures in the natal  
form on each laptop.  
Me moved from lap to lap,  
a dressed chicken,  
they go straight for my legs.  
Love chocolates, lollipops  
ice creams, but they come as  
a package deal.

My mom too graduated  
in complete silence from  
innocence to guilt.  
Her mom?  
I'll never know.

My story grows with  
each pat,  
my baby smell lost  
to the stench of adulthood.

Hear other children laugh,  
but I make the Kookaburra cry.  
Alzheimer's cannot erase the  
invasion of a thousand fingers,  
I cannot lift even one.

The world is divided  
into men and women.  
Men whose delicacy  
is baby women.

**“PULLING DROWNING PEOPLE  
OUT OF A RIVER IS COMPASSION.  
JUSTICE IS WALKING UPSTREAM  
TO SOLVE THE REASONS THEY ARE  
FALLING IN.”**

**- DAVID BATSTONE**





# THANK YOU

Thank you to our technology partner, Quantum, for their dedication and passion to our work and for building the systems that enable us to effectively measure the impact of our work - we are truly grateful!

To each donor - whether individual, CSR, or grant-maker - who partnered with us financially: Thank you for believing in My Choices Foundation and the work we do. You have helped impact thousands of lives through your generous support of our programs.

We give a special thank you to the Police for working alongside My Choices Foundation in our quest to empower women and girls, and keep them safe. India is seeing real change, and the police are playing a big part in creating this new reality.

We are deeply thankful for each and every person that have joined us in this journey!

## WE BELIEVE IN COALITION BUILDING.

If you passionate about ending violence, abuse and exploitation against women, then join the movement to end it! Whether it be through partnership, funding or volunteering, there is so much you can do.

[www.mychoicesfoundation.org](http://www.mychoicesfoundation.org)  
[info@mychoicesfoundation.org](mailto:info@mychoicesfoundation.org)



DESIGNED BY

*arpitha*  
Y.D.K.D.

FOR



**MY CHOICES**  
FOUNDATION



OPERATION  
**PEACEMAKER**



OPERATION  
**RED ALERT**

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