

Child labour goes up despite laws

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PUNE: The number of cases of child labour increased by nearly 240% in one year, according to the annual report released by Dnyanadevi Pune Childline this week. There were 122 cases in 2015-16, while 415 were reported in 2016-17.

"This, and (the) organized nature of child beggary has been repeatedly brought to the notice of authorities concerned, but no action seems evident," the organization stated in a press release.

"We have dealt with a lot of cases wherein children are brought here from outside the state to be employed as permanent domestic help or as labour in restaurants," Anuradha Sahasrabudhe, honorary director of

Childline, a 24-hour city-based helpline for children in distress.

Meanwhile, the number of cases of sexual abuse or physical/emotional abuse of children actually went down in 2016-17. There were 96 reported cases of sexual abuse, and 180 cases of physical/emotional abuse in 2015-16. This past year, the number of reported cases were 63 and 131 respectively.

"While the number of cases might have gone down, the perversity of the nature of cases has actually increased," Sahasrabudhe said.

More than half — at least — of the 63 cases of sexual abuse against children involved incest. The perpetrators in such cases were the fathers and grandfathers. An alarming portion of the remaining cases reported involved persons who were known to

the child they abused. In one recently reported case, a vegetable vendor who was known to the child committed the crime.

In such cases, it takes a lot of counselling for the mothers to file complaints, Childline points out.

The report adds that there is an increase in the cases of bullying in schools, and also in cases of parents seeking help for serious misbehaviour and delinquency.

Growing addiction to the Internet and pornography have also emerged as a worry in the past year, as has been revealed by Balsena representatives and school prefects. With easy access to Internet on mobile phones and thus, to pornography, older children have been found to pressure younger children into homosexual experimentation. "Trying out different things they see online is like a game for them," Sahasrabudhe said. "This problem has been particularly observed in institutes with residential facilities, like hostels for boys and girls," she added.

Childline will conduct special sessions in schools to tackle this problem, especially as they are in denial of the problem.

"Pimpri Chinchwad Municipal Corporation is making two days a month school bag-free for children, ensuring the fostering of creativity. Zilla Parishad education authorities have also promised to ensure the right to play," the helpline further stated.

However, bottlenecks in filing complaints with the police and getting suitable, friendly and sensitive aftercare for rescued children continue to be challenges. "While it is mandatory to report every case to the police, and we do so too, sometimes, the police too find it challenging if the victim's statement is not available," Sahasrabudhe said.