

At Avadi kiln, 31 kids among 146 bonded workers freed

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CHENNAI : Tiruvallur revenue department officials on Wednesday rescued 146 migrant workers, including 31 children, from a brick kiln in Avadi. The officials raided RNI Brick Kiln in Pandeshwaram panchayat on a tip and found the workers, all from Chhattisgarh and Odisha, living in subhuman conditions. The owner of the kiln forced them to toil in inhuman conditions.

"The workers said a supervisor, a native of Odisha, often physically assaulted them," said revenue district officer Divya S. The supervisor and his employer, the owner of the kiln, are absconding.

A middleman brought most of the workers to Tiruvallur from impoverished districts in both the states, an official said. They had to work for long hours for minimal wages and the owner and supervisor restricted their movement. Each worker received just Rs 20 for every 1,000 bricks made or carried.

The officials filed a complaint with the Muttam Pudhupettai police in Avadi and made arrangements to send the workers home by Dhanbad Express on Thursday.

Tiruvallur is among nine districts in the state with high prevalence of bonded labour. Officials freed 318 workers from Odisha, including 88 children, from a brick kiln in the district in 2016.

Officials rescued 1,020 individuals bonded labour across the state in 2016-2017, up from 964 three years earlier, state records show.

Most of them were in food processing or mat-making units, brick kilns, rice mills and agricultural and tree-cutting units.