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Only Trained Professionals Can Conduct POCSO Awareness in Karnataka Schools

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The Karnataka State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (KSCPCR) has issued a directive restricting the delivery of awareness programs on the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act in schools to trained legal professionals or certified child protection experts. The move follows multiple reports that untrained presenters, during school sessions, disclosed sensitive details about victims and incidents, potentially causing distress and fear among students.

Under the new rules, only individuals with formal training and certification from either the Special Juvenile Police Units (SJPU) or officially recognized child protection non-governmental organizations (NGOs) will be authorized to conduct such programs. Certification ensures that trainers are competent in handling the subject matter in a manner that is accurate, age-appropriate, and psychologically safe for students.

KSCPCR officials stated that the decision was prompted by concerns from parents, educators, and child welfare groups, who observed that some unqualified trainers used explicit examples or revealed identifying information about survivors. Such disclosures, the commission noted, not only violate privacy but also risk retraumatizing or unsettling young listeners.

Chairperson Dr. K. Nagalakshmi Bai emphasized that POCSO awareness is essential for empowering children to recognize, resist, and report abuse, but that the delivery must be handled with care. Children should be educated about their rights and protections under the law in a manner that builds confidence, not fear. Qualified trainers understand how to balance legal accuracy with sensitivity to children's emotional well-being, she said.

The POCSO Act, enacted in 2012, sets out comprehensive measures to protect minors from sexual offences, including detailed procedures for reporting, investigation, and trial. Awareness campaigns are a key part of its implementation, helping children, parents, and teachers identify signs of abuse and understand legal recourse. However, poorly designed or inappropriately delivered sessions can have the opposite effect, leaving children confused, anxious, or unwilling to speak up.

As per the KSCPCR's directive, schools will now have to verify a trainer's credentials before scheduling awareness sessions. Training content must comply with guidelines from the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) and the Ministry of Women and Child Development, ensuring legal accuracy and adherence to child-friendly communication standards.

Child rights organizations have welcomed the decision, noting that it addresses long-standing concerns about unregulated awareness initiatives. Several NGOs have expressed readiness to work with the commission to provide proper training and certification for aspiring educators in this field.

The KSCPCR has also indicated that it will monitor compliance, with potential penalties for institutions or organizations that disregard the directive. The commission may conduct random checks of school sessions to ensure that presentations meet the prescribed standards.

By formalizing these requirements, Karnataka aims to safeguard the integrity of POCSO education, protect children from distressing experiences, and set a precedent for other states to adopt similar measures in strengthening child safety education.