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## Karnataka Restricts POCSO Awareness to Certified Trainers

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The Karnataka State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (KSCPCR) has mandated that only certified professionals with legal or child-protection expertise will be permitted to conduct awareness sessions on the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act in schools. The move comes after recent incidents where untrained presenters shared inappropriate or overly graphic content, causing distress among students.

According to the KSCPCR's directive, trainers must hold recognized qualifications and be certified either by the Special Juvenile Police Units (SJPU) or by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that have been officially recognized for child protection work. This certification process ensures that trainers are well-versed in both the legal framework and the sensitive approach required when addressing matters of child safety.

The decision was prompted by multiple reports from schools across Karnataka where unqualified individuals conducting POCSO awareness programs inadvertently disclosed explicit details of abuse cases. Such disclosures, the commission noted, could potentially traumatize children instead of equipping them with preventive knowledge.

KSCPCR Chairperson Dr. K. Nagalakshmi Bai emphasized that awareness programs must be delivered in a child-friendly manner that informs without causing fear or distress. "Children should feel empowered, not alarmed. The trainers must communicate in a manner that is age-appropriate, legally accurate, and sensitive to the psychological well-being of students," she said.

Under the new rules, schools hosting POCSO sessions will need to verify the credentials of the trainers in advance. Training content must also align with the guidelines issued by the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) and the Ministry of Women and Child Development.

The POCSO Act, enacted in 2012, provides a robust legal framework to protect children from sexual offences. It lays out specific procedures for reporting, investigating, and prosecuting offences while safeguarding the interests of child survivors. Awareness programs are a critical part of its implementation, helping children understand their rights, recognize inappropriate behavior, and seek help when necessary.

However, child rights experts have long cautioned that poorly conducted sessions can have unintended consequences, such as inducing fear, shame, or confusion among children. This is particularly true when sessions are led by individuals lacking the necessary training in pedagogy and trauma-informed communication.

By limiting awareness responsibilities to certified trainers, the Karnataka commission aims to standardize the quality of POCSO education across the state. Officials believe this step will not only protect students from potentially harmful content but also enhance the effectiveness of such programs in preventing abuse.

The directive has been welcomed by several child welfare organizations, which have advocated for stronger safeguards in school-based awareness initiatives. At the same time, the commission has encouraged NGOs and legal professionals to seek certification if they wish to continue contributing to POCSO education.

The KSCPCR plans to monitor compliance with the new rule and may conduct random audits of awareness sessions in schools. Non-compliance could lead to warnings, fines, or restrictions on the organizations involved.