

Health Department launches drive across State for leprosy awareness

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CHENNAI

Aiming to eliminate leprosy by 2025, the Tamil Nadu Health Department has launched a month-long initiative to raise public awareness of the cardinal signs of the disease. It plans to reach out to schools, colleges, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) workers, self-help group (SHG) members, voluntary organisations, and government offices.

According to official data, the State recorded nearly 3,000 new leprosy cases last year. Currently, 2,531 persons are being treated for leprosy. "We are moving towards the elimination of leprosy. The goal is to reduce new cases by 70% and bring down child cases and deformities by 90% by 2027," said S. Amutha, Additional Director of Medical Services, Leprosy (in-charge).

Battling leprosy

The disease can be cured completely with multidrug therapy. In 2019, the T.N. Health Department rolled out post-exposure prophylaxis single dose Rifampicin for contacts of patients

Keep watch for

- Discolouration of skin with definite loss of sensation
- Thickening of peripheral nerves
- Skin smear positivity
- Shininess of skin
- Thickening of ear

lobes and nodules over the body

- Tingling sensation in the hands and feet
- Weakness of the small muscles of the hands (inability to hold objects) and feet
- Inability to close the eyelids

3,000
new reported cases in State last year

2,531
persons are currently under treatment in the State



"We have the potential to eliminate leprosy from Tamil Nadu by 2025. Elimination does not mean total eradication. It is a level where the disease ceases to be a public health problem. In particular, there should not be any new deformity cases or occurrence of new childhood cases. Rehabilitation of persons who recover from leprosy and have deformities will continue," said T. S. Selvavinayagam, Director of Public Health and

Preventive Medicine.

Public support is crucial to bring down the cases, Dr. Amutha said, adding that people should know the cardinal signs and symptoms of leprosy - discolouration of skin with definite loss of sensation, thickening of peripheral nerves and skin smear positivity. "There are other symptoms as well for which they should seek medical help. This includes shininess of skin; thickening of ear lobes and

nodules over the body; tingling sensation in the hands and feet and weakness of the small muscles of limbs; and the inability to close the eyelids. People should come forward and approach the nearest health facility to get checked. Early diagnosis and management will prevent deformity," she said.

She said the department launched post-exposure prophylaxis single dose Rifampicin drug in 2019.

16% of women in Chennai face sexual harassment in public spaces: study

The study, conducted by the Gender and Policy Lab of the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC), took into account the verbal, physical and visual harassment faced by women in public places in Chennai city over the last three months

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

A study conducted by the Gender and Policy Lab of the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) has revealed that about 16% of women were sexually harassed (verbal, physical, visual) in public places over the last three months in Chennai city.

Significantly more women at transit points (22%) reported sexual harassment than women at public places (12%) and women at households (14%), according to the study on Women's perception of safety in public places and public transport in the city.

Major respondents

Graduate women and women in the age group of 18-35 were the major respondents who said that they were sexually harassed. Shockingly, more than 70% of the transgender persons reported some form of sexual harassment at public

places in the last three months.

Harassment was reported at multiple locations, mainly on the bus (42%), while boarding the bus (20%), at the bus stop (15%), while alighting the bus (13%). As much as 62%

women mentioned that no one intervened.

More than 40% men in the survey reported that they had witnessed sexual harassment of women. Of them, 18% reportedly did not intervene even when the victim was known to

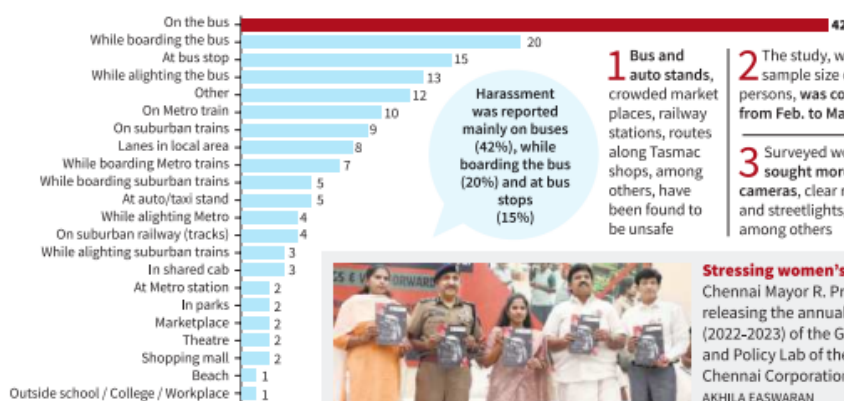
them, while 14% said the victims were strangers to them. Around one-fourth of the men who did not intervene mentioned the hassle of dealing with the authority (29%) and fear of getting attacked (25%) as the main reasons.

About 20% said they did not intervene because the incident took place because of the women's clothes or behaviour.

The study, with a sample size of 3,000 persons, was conducted from February to May 2023.

Ground report

A study conducted by the Gender and Policy Lab of the Greater Chennai Corporation has thrown light on various instances of sexual harassment of women



The figures represent the percentage of women who responded during the survey

Over the top

The decision to expel Mahua Moitra
smacks of political vendetta

The alacrity with which the Lok Sabha Ethics Committee went about recommending the expulsion of Trinamool Congress Member of Parliament (MP) Mahua Moitra from the lower House is certainly not a sign of any fidelity to ethics, or fairness. The recommendation is a brazenly partisan attempt to silence a critic of the government. It is also a warning shot meant to intimidate MPs from doing their job of holding the executive accountable. Neither the process nor the conclusions of the committee are grounded in any decipherable principle. The committee, with the help of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology found that the MP's credentials were used online from Dubai 47 times to access the Parliament portal. Parliamentary questions were submitted from abroad. As Opposition members in the committee have pointed out, the drafting and the submission of questions are routinely done by aides of MPs. And MPs raise questions in Parliament based on representations from various constituents. To assume without solid evidence that any question is in exchange of material favours and then to expel an elected MP, is an assault on parliamentary democracy itself. The committee is calling upon the government to investigate the allegation of '*quid pro quo*' raised by one of its members against Ms. Moitra, after holding her guilty, turning the principle of natural justice on its head.

If MPs are barred from sharing their login credentials with others, the rule must equally apply to one and all. Now that the committee has taken this extreme step of calling for the expulsion of an elected member from the House, thereby depriving the voters of her constituency representation, it should also investigate how other MPs prepare and submit parliamentary questions. The selective investigation of one MP, based on insinuations and conjectures, clearly comes out as what it is – intimidation. It is also in stark contrast with the tardy response of the Lok Sabha Committee of Privileges to a serious complaint against Bharatiya Janata Party MP Ramesh Bidhuri who used derogatory communal slurs against a fellow member in the Lok Sabha. That a member can abuse and threaten another member on the floor of the House is a matter of serious concern. That said, Ms. Moitra's act of allowing a person who is not employed by her to execute official work on her behalf betrays a lack of discretion and judgement. This should act as a lesson for all those who seek to hold the government accountable: to keep themselves beyond reproach.

Unending ordeal

Law enforcement officials and colleges
must do more to prevent ragging

Multiple pieces of legislation and regulations prohibiting ragging on campuses have failed to end the dehumanising ordeals junior students are subjected to by their sadistic seniors. Nearly three months after a 17-year-old boy died due to ragging in West Bengal's Jadavpur University, a second-year undergraduate student of the PSG College of Technology in Tamil Nadu has been left brutalised, physically and mentally, for refusing to yield to monetary extortion by his seniors. Both States were among the earliest to enact legislation banning ragging. That students undergo such traumatic experiences despite civil society being rudely awakened by spine-chilling cases of brutalisation and even the murder of victims of ragging, exposes the gaps in the system that allow a vicious cycle where victims one year become perpetrators the next. From bullying and harassing freshers to ensure subservience to seniors, acts of ragging have taken perverse and cruel forms, including through sexual abuse, intended to dehumanise victims. An act of indiscipline has evolved into one that involves elements of criminality. While unlike earlier, ragging is no longer a given on campuses, it is evident that victims are not just the freshers and the harassment extends beyond the initial months of a new academic year, as seen above.

The Supreme Court-appointed R.K. Raghavan Committee had captured the causes, and suggested actionable remedies, in its 2007 report, 'The Menace of Ragging in Educational Institutions and Measures to Curb It'. The panel rightly categorised ragging as a form of "psychopathic behaviour and a reflection of deviant personalities". In 1999, a University Grants Commission (UGC) Committee had recommended a "Prohibition, Prevention and Punishment" approach to curb ragging. Yet, as the Raghavan Committee pointed out, many State laws only seek to prohibit, and not prevent, ragging. In its words, "while prevention must lead to prohibition, the reverse need not be true." Despite 'The UGC Regulations on Curbing the Menace of Ragging in Higher Educational Institutions 2009', except for formalities such as conducting freshers' parties, mandating undertakings from students and parents against indulging in ragging, and putting up 'no-ragging' notices, the stakeholders have done little to prevent it. Institutions must create an encouraging atmosphere where teachers and hostel wardens, and not parents living in a distant place, are the first point of contact for victims. There must be greater accountability by educational institutions to prevent ragging. As the Raghavan panel recommended, regulatory authorities must ensure a ragging-free campus. This has a direct bearing on the maintenance of academic standards in individual institutions. Governments too must be earnest in implementing regulations, failing which campuses would not be safe for students.

Sept. IIP growth falls to 5.8%

Industrial output growth slid to a three-month low in September from a 14-month high of 10.3% in August; nine out of 23 segments saw drops in output in September as against seven in August

Vikas Dhoot
NEW DELHI

India's industrial output growth slid to a three-month low of 5.8% in September from a 14-month high of 10.3% in August, with manufacturing growth halving to 4.5% from the 9.3% recorded in the previous month.

Consumption demand appeared weak with consumer durables' production rising just 1% while non-durables' production grew 2.7% in September, despite a beneficial base effect from last year when both segments tanked by 5.5% and 5.7%, respectively.

Disappointing growth

An unfavourable base, excess rainfall and a shift in the festival calendar caused a fall in industrial output in September



■ Consumption demand appeared to be weak in September with the production of consumer durables rising just 1%

■ The furniture and apparel segments were the worst hit, declining by a sharp 20.2% and 17.9%, respectively

■ Most economists expected September's Index of Industrial Production or IIP to reflect much sharper growth

Electricity and mining growth also moderated to 9.9% and 11.5%, respectively. Spliced on the basis of usage, primary goods grew the fastest at 8%, cooling from 12.4% in August, followed by infrastructure

and construction goods that were up 7.5% and capital goods, which rose 7.4%. Intermediate goods output grew 5.8%. While only seven of 23 manufacturing sectors had clocked a contraction in August, nine

segments saw drops in output in September, led by furniture (-20.2%). The apparel segment contracted 17.9%, worse than the 17.1% decline clocked in August.

Overall industrial output is up 6% in the first half of this year, with mining up 8.7%, electricity 6.1% and manufacturing 5.7%. Most economists expected September's Index of Industrial Production, or, IIP to reflect sharper growth.

ICRA's chief economist Aditi Nayar, who had estimated an 8% uptick, said the numbers were influenced by an unfavourable base, a shift in the festive calendar and excess rainfall in September.