

NATIONAL COMMISSION OF PROTECTION OF CHILD RIGHTS  
NEW DELHI

Minutes of the First Meeting of the Working Group for "Children's participation in TV serials and advertisements", held on 17<sup>th</sup> September, 2008 at 11am in NCPCR conference Room

The meeting was called by Smt Sandhya Bajaj (Member) for deliberations on Children's participation in TV serials and advertisements.

Members present: Mrs Abha Sehgal, Mrs Monalisa Palit, Mr Niret Alva, Mr Sumit Nagpal , Ms Shweta Jain and Ms Vani Tripathi.

From NCPCR: Smt. Sandhya Bajaj, Shri V C Tewari, Shri R K Singh and Ms Lipika Gourh

The meeting started with welcome and introduction given by Member Secretary Shri V C Tewari.

Smt Bajaj put forth the issue of Shinjini case which was an eye opener on harsh reality of children's participation and parental aspirations. Giving the plea that the children are getting mileage out of the shows and making name for themselves is just not enough. Sandhya Bajaj layed the need and the importance to regulate the rampant violation of child rights in TV serials and advertisements. She asked members to share their views.

The deliberations by the members are summarized below:

Mr. Niret Alva-MD Miditech India, Gurgaon

Mr Alva started the discussion with his views on Indian Idol (a reality show) – his own production. He said becoz of some shows manufacturing reality shows and showing scripted drama in the name of reality has blackened all reality shows. Children need to be mentally prepared and counseling should be given After the child is evicted he/she should be sensitively handled and given proper counseling.

TV is only giving an opportunity and more than winning or losing it's the exposure and learning for the child that's important. More than the child the parents pressurize and react immaturely. They don't accept the loss fairly and tend to blame the child for a less than perfect performance. It's important to lay down the no of hours children can shoot. Tensions are created and the child is asked to perform accordingly. Young children are susceptible to harm and they are pampered once they become famous. Parents are ready to go out of the way to make their child appear on TV. Many parents hide medical facts of the child and this leads to aggravation of the disease. Mr Alva shared incident which happened during the auditioning of Indian Idol. Parents also need to be counseled on the impact such undue pressures have on the child.

Ms Vani Tripathi-actress

Ms Vani shared the story of a girl who worked in many popular advertisements and became demanding and high handed. The girl behaved well when she would be accompanied by her attendant and driver but in her mother's presence her behavior would drastically change and she would be rude and demanding towards the production staff. Other child stars exhibit haughtiness & superiority. There is an urgency to curb the parents aspiration which makes them use their child as a commodity not realizing how much hurt they are causing to the child. Parental responsibility must be defined. Theatre gives a much better opportunity for children to showcase their talent since there is less exploitation. There is also a need to segregate good programming and bad programming.

Mrs Abha Sehgal-Principal-Sanskriti School, New Delhi

Mrs Sehgal put forth that while it's true that TV does provide an opportunity to the otherwise unknown talents from small towns but it's too early for young children. We need to nurture talent and & not rush into things. Young children need to be safeguard against too much glory or too much disappointment so that it doesn't impact the future. There should more of group activities to avoid individual glory Careful consideration must be adhered while selecting the child in terms of analyzing the temperament and behavior of the child. She enlightened that in schools a child who behaves differently from others is not accepted by other children and this child then faces rejection. Schools which have a child who has become popular must also insure that not too much prominence is showered

on the child. A healthy and neutral approach needs to be practiced. She shared that in Sanskriti school children below 12 yrs are not given proficiency prizes and hence the payment or cash rewards are objectionable. By showing scripted reality we are entertaining at the cost of the child.

Mrs Monalisa Palit –Child psychologist, VIMHANS, New Delhi

Ms Palit suggested that there should be interview of parents just like they happen for school admissions in order to assess the parental aspirations. This can also be used to counsel the parents about the impact of participation on the child. The child should also be given the right to decide whether to participate or not. By allowing children as young as 3 yrs and below 16 yrs to participate we are forcing them to grow faster and thereby causing early onset of puberty. The innocence of the child is lost somewhere in the glare and glamour. A child's cognitive development is not apt for taking judgments or decisions involved in the intricacies of competition. The reality shows should be much more than just song and dance routine. A counselor should be mandatory during shoots to provide emotional support. The long term interests of the child must be focused upon and benefits be extended to the child and not the parents.

Mr Sumit Nagpal: TV journalist, New Delhi

Parents need to be informed about the pro's and cons of participation in TV reality shows. The payment to the children should be through fixed deposit or scholarships. The TV media needs to maintain anonymity of children in sensitive cases like child abuse.

Smt. Sandhya Bajaj: Member (NCPCR)

Smt Bajaj put forth that there should be proper guidelines on working conditions, working hours, atmosphere on the sets & on outdoor shoots, facilities extended to the child, which requires to be followed by the broadcasters and TV production houses. There is a need to have proper schedules for rehearsals and breaks for the child participants. She supported the cause that there should an age limit for children's participation which can be minimum 12 yrs and over 16 yrs in competitive programs. She also pointed that action be taken against broadcasters/show producers if a child is subjected to mental harassment

through unusually harsh comments. She pointed out that this is not to suggest that such shows be banned but regulations are necessary and broadcasters should be sensitive towards child rights. Smt Bajaj said that the Guidelines are a way of help safeguard the welfare of children during the different stages of their participation in programmes and will incorporate recommendations to prevent distress or anxiety to the child. These guidelines will be prepared after consulting media representatives, child experts, and after taking viewpoints from children who have participated on reality shows and then be submitted to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting for the needful.

Shri V C Tewari: Member Secretary (NCPDR)

Shri Tewari said that there need to be a regulation on content of programming. We also need to understand the structure & roles of Broadcasters, TV production houses and the actors. The representation from Ministry of I&B would be useful as they can throw light on policies and regulations.

Ms. Lipika Gourh-Consultant

Ms Lipika facilitated the group to deliberate upon the various issues and elicit their thoughts and suggestions for the same. The issues of education of child, child and parental counseling, working hours and conditions, programming content, consent issues, educational issues, mode of payment through educational bonds, programs featuring victims of child abuse, the need for child stars to be involved in the formulation of guidelines, were brought up for discussion.

It was decided by the working group members that since the legal representatives didn't attend even after confirmations, there can be a separate meeting for them and also include members who are willing to attend and contribute. Ms Rakhi Sethi, advocate will be included in the group. Also a visit to Studios in Mumbai and meeting with Broadcasters should be organized in October.

The media like Aaj Tak, CNN-IBN took interviews of Member (SB), Ms Vani, Mrs Abha Sehgal and Mrs Monalisa. The media widely covered the event.

Shri R. K Singh thanked the members for sharing their views and giving valuable suggestions. Lunch was then served to the members.

