

2023

Annual Report

PEACE AND EQUALITY CELL



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FOUNDER'S LETTER

Dear Friends,

Peace and Equality Cell has been working on access to justice for vulnerable disenfranchised populations for over 12 years. In this period, we have both solidified our core work on child sexual abuse and gender-based violence while venturing into new areas. We started working on the rights of persons with disabilities more pronouncedly in 2019 and expanded our work to Mehsana in 2019.

I want to thank the dedicated team of support persons and advocates in all 4 districts who take risks daily. Most of all, I want to thank the survivors and their families who have shown relentless courage to wage the battle for justice despite risking the loss of izzat (honor) that prevails in our communities. We vow to persevere in our fight for justice to make our society more secure, not only for the survivors whose dignity has been violated but for us all. Peace is impossible without justice and, as our constitution says, ***"each and every one of us is entitled to our life with dignity and we are all here to enjoy equality of citizenship regardless of our class, caste, gender, or age."***

None of us are safe and secure if the fear of our children falling prey to child sexual abuse and exploitation still pervades our minds. Thank you to all the members of rural and urban communities, our funders, and volunteers for your support. Last but by no means least, a heartfelt thank you to all members of the Board for their ideas and motivation.

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ABOUT PEACE AND EQUALITY CELL



STRIVING FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE FOUNDED ON THE PRINCIPLES OF OUR CONSTITUTION

Peace and Equality Cell (PEC) is an NGO set up under the Society and Trusts Act in October 2012. Our organization is motivated by its mission to reform areas of society that require urgent and significant attention. These include delivering justice and providing training for sexual abuse prevention, as well as raising awareness of the POCSO law. Prita Jha is the president of PEC and works alongside field resource persons, advocates, and grassroots experts.

For over a decade, PEC has worked on the issue of CSA (Child Sexual Abuse) by taking up cases of sexual violence against women and children. Though CSA has remained at the very core of PEC's work, it has largely and continually focused on raising awareness of domestic violence and supporting cases of gender-based violence as well. During the last few years, PEC's focus has expanded to include work on preventing violence against persons with disabilities, creating awareness around people's rights and provisions under the new legislation, and carrying out advocacy with government stakeholders as required.

The COVID-19 pandemic created new issues in society and consequently the need to expand our work to newer areas. PEC worked with daily wagers and migrant workers and linked them with government schemes to raise awareness of their constitutional rights to live a life with basic food security and dignity. PEC managed to distribute 4180 kits over 7 districts of Gujarat, of which 764 kits were given under the government's Annapurna Scheme. PEC distributed 400 more kits in 5 districts of Bihar and assisted migrant workers in applying for the Jeevanjyot Scheme, Antyodaya Card, RTE registration, Widow pension, NFSA entitlements, and others during this time.

We have established our field presence in four districts of Gujarat, primarily Ahmedabad, Anand, Mehsana, and Sabarkantha, and have further initiated our CSA prevention work in the state of Bihar in collaboration with Samvet during the year 2021 and are happy that child rights work has taken root.

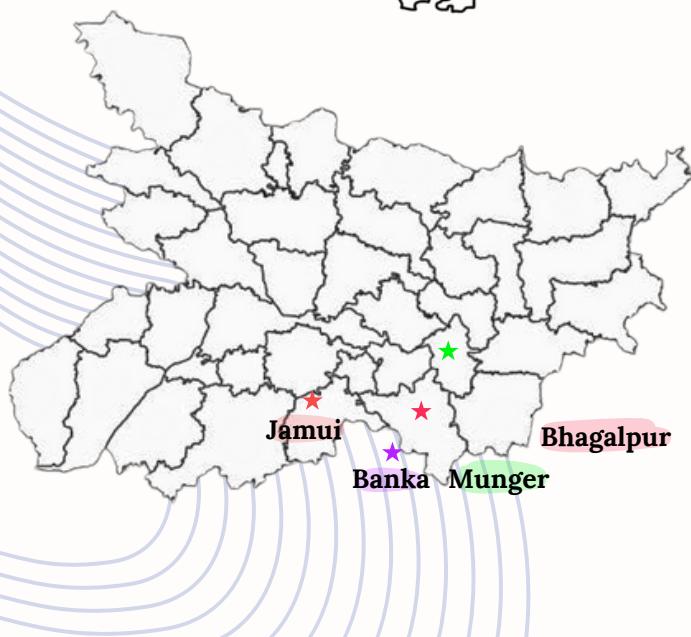
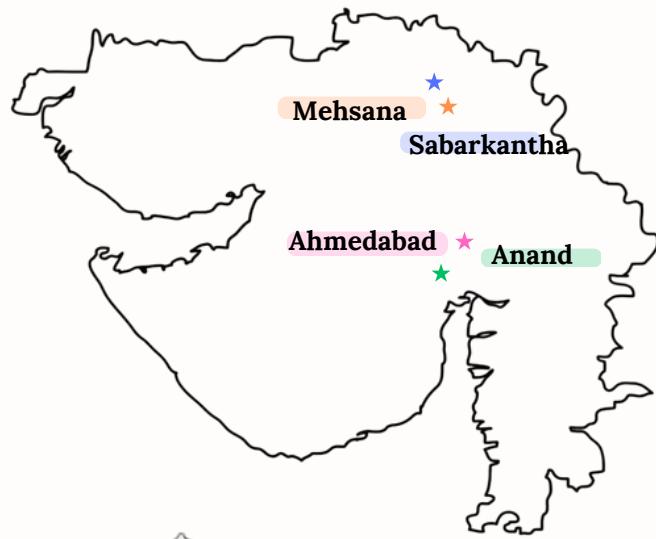
We believe workshops are an integral approach to forwarding our mission at PEC. We conduct workshops with children, parents, and teachers in rural and urban communities. This is an effective and important method, as people are made aware of CSA and how to access justice in the event of a case occurring within their own families or communities. Up to the end of 2022, PEC reached over one lakh children, apart from parents, teachers, and Anganwadi workers, through its awareness programs.

One of the biggest achievements of PEC has been to help create a new set of rules for shelters in Gujarat because of a PIL filed in 2014 on the poor condition of shelters. Our doors are always open to the frontline warriors handling emergency helplines and dealing with extremely stressful and distressing ground situations. PEC also conducts training programs on mental health and shelter rules for shelter managers.

It further works in Gujarat by advocating with government functionaries to ensure the implementation of the POCSO Act.

So far, PEC has offered legal support to CSA victims in 320 cases. As we look ahead, the organization aspires to expand its Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse work in the other states of India, all the while continuing to take up complex cases of access to justice work. It strongly believes in the equality and rights of persons of different genders, their understanding, and acceptance, leading to a more inclusive and supportive environment for LGBTQIA+ individuals.

WHERE WE WORK



2023 ACHIEVEMENTS



Court Results

PEC works to ensure that survivors of abuse receive the necessary help and resources so they can live safe, meaningful lives.

This year, the Gujarat High Court slammed back at a POCSO court in Anand for not awarding full compensation to a survivor of an acid attack incident. The survivor's father appealed the decision with support from PEC - Gujarat High Court increased the compensation amount from Rs. 1 lakh to Rs. 4.5 lakh.

The High Court commented:

“...the compensation is a right of the victim and an obligation of the state due to the lack of the ability of the state to protect, then that lack of protection is equal to all sorts of crimes.”

The High Court's response was a tremendous and notable achievement for PEC because it shows how our efforts and advocacy have managed to create an influence at a constitutional level. Recognizing the faults in our system and mending them is one of our primary missions, and we hope to continue achieving this at even higher levels.



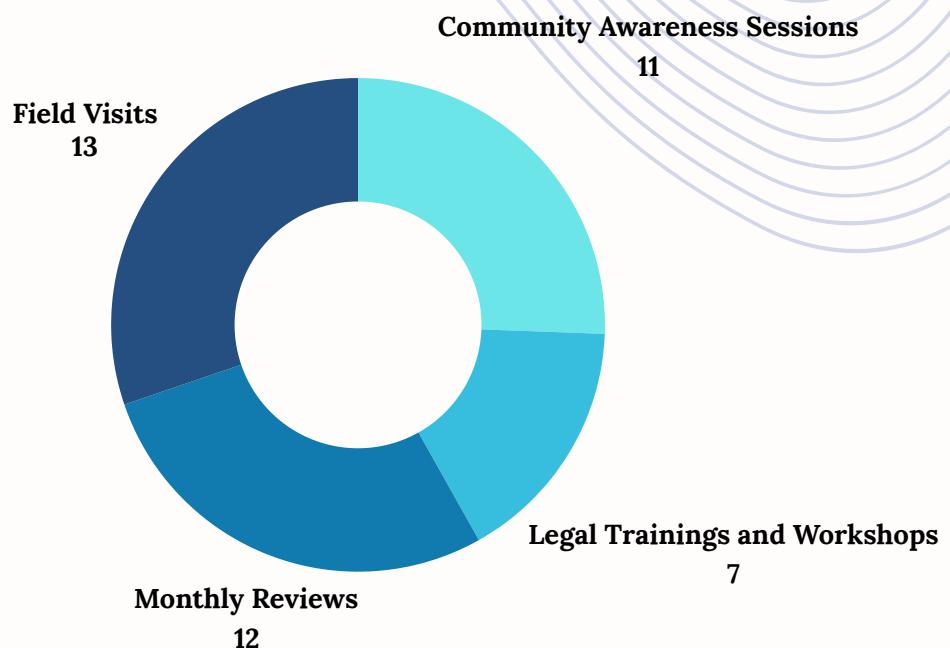
MODES OF CHANGE-MAKING

PEC adopts various modes of change-making to achieve its goals of spreading awareness and implementing the POCSO and PoSH acts.

We realize that bringing about change in society is a long-term and complex process that can only be achieved using a multifaceted approach.

How we influence

- Meetings
- Awareness sessions
- Legal trainings
- CSA awareness
- Legal intervention
- Advocacy with stakeholders
- Creating legal resource materials







MEETINGS



Project Meeting on the Rights of Disabled Persons – May 11, 2023

The first was a quarterly review meeting for a disability project conducted on May 11 where the team discussed the project on the Rights of Disabled Persons. This was the first time the Disability program team had gathered.

Prita Jha spoke about how the organization stepped into the work of Disability and familiarized new team members with PEC's main work areas. PEC also discussed the activities and outputs of the project to clarify everyone's role in it. The Rights of Disabled Persons project currently runs in Mehsana, Anand, and Ahmedabad.

Monthly Review Meeting for June – June 13, 2023

On June 13, a team review meeting was organized to discuss our progress on the cases and incidents we received the month before. The meeting was held on June 6th and 10th.

Our field person shared the official documentation on the cases we received after which the progress on each case was thoroughly discussed with Prita Jha. This meeting allowed the team to reflect on its performance, evaluate its progress, and identify areas of improvement.

Additionally, Prita Jha and intern Diya D...i conducted a brief PoSH training session for review purposes followed by a lengthy discussion on the procedure of court proceedings between the legal resource persons and field resource persons.

Community Meeting in Anand (POCSO Awareness) - June 24, 2023

On June 24, 2023, field resource persons Ranjanben and Dispsingh Bhai held a community meeting at Piplo Village's primary school, bringing together committee members from Piplo and Mohammadpura villages to raise awareness about the POCSO Act. Ranjanben led a session on key provisions of the law, while Dipsingh Bhai highlighted PEC's efforts in providing legal support from grassroots to court. The meeting empowered the community to protect their children and advocate for justice in cases of sexual offenses.

Monthly Review Meeting for July - July 15, 2023

On July 8th and 9th, field support persons and advocates from Sabarkantha, Anand, Mehsana, and Ahmedabad gathered at our Ahmedabad office for monthly review. The meetings started with case updates from each district, leading to in-depth discussions on field realities, including adolescent sexuality. The session was followed by an insightful training on the LGBTQIA+ community by Katha Bhatt, where attendees shared their experiences, broadening perspectives on the topic.

Monthly Review Meeting for August - August 19, 2023

On August 5th and 12th, PEC's field teams from Anand, Ahmedabad, Mehsana, and Sabarkantha met at the Panjrapole Office for their July monthly review. They discussed updates, challenges, and achievements in ongoing cases, as well as new incidents being addressed at the field level. The team also hosted a training session on the Transgender Community and the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, led by Ribhav Thakkar, a transgender law student. This impactful interaction with a community representative inspired the team to extend support and advocacy for the Transgender Community.

The visit also entailed a case of a survivor who was kidnapped from her neighborhood and had been brought back to the police station two days later. She refused to share the events with the court, the police, her family, and our field persons. After conversing with her for about an hour and a half and gaining her trust, she informed our team about the events that had occurred over the two days. PEC's team assured her that the information shared with it would remain confidential and that the proceedings would take place discreetly.

PEC's next visit was to another survivor of POCSO who had been impregnated by and gotten infected with HIV from the accused. The court ordered an abortion as a result. The team tried to convince the family to file for interim compensation considering the poor economic situation of the house.

Field Visit to Sabarkantha - June 20, 2023

On June 14, State Coordinator Usmanbhai, Founder Prita Jha, intern Diya D^a , and documentation specialist Katha visited Sabarkantha. They met with survivors of both recent and ongoing POCSO cases, which are being managed by field support person Shabana Ben. The visit focused on cases from the previous month as well as older cases where legal procedures were in progress.

During the field trip, the team visited Poshina village to meet the family of a survivor who had been harassed by the accused, pushing her to commit suicide to protect her 'izzat' (honor) in society. The case highlights the significant role of honor in many Indian societies, often tied to societal expectations and reputations. Traditional views of honor focus on individuals' behavior, especially women, with an emphasis on purity, modesty, and adherence to cultural or religious norms. The responsibility for such incidents lies solely with the perpetrators who engage in harassment and assault.

Raising awareness and sensitizing communities about the issues surrounding suicide and the impact of societal expectations is an essential step toward fostering understanding and support.

Field Visit to Anand - August 2, 2023

On July 5, 2023, PEC's office and field team visited Anklaav village in Anand district to meet with four CSA survivors. The visit aimed to understand the challenges they face and explore how PEC can support their recovery and justice. Each case was unique, and the team assessed the specific needs and challenges of the survivors and their families. Below are the details of each case:

CASE #1: We met a survivor who had dropped out of school after being sexually assaulted by a neighbor. Despite filing a complaint, the accused continued to stalk and threaten the survivor and her family. The team offered support to the family and established plans to assist the survivor in continuing her education.

CASE #2: This case involved a 13-year-old girl who met the accused through social media and was sexually assaulted under pretence of being a caring friend. Our legal resource person helped the family navigate the legal system.

CASE #3: In this case, a 14-year-old was kidnapped and assaulted by the accused. The family faced challenges registering an FIR at the police station due to the accused's influence over the officials. The team supported the survivor and their family by providing educational resources and practical support.

CASE #4: The survivor was involved in a romantic relationship with the accused, leading to an allegedly consensual sexual relationship. As this was a non-coercive relationship where both parties were in different stages of adolescent/young adults the legal team will not fight this case but advise and guidance may be offered by the support person .



FIELD VISITS



Field Visit to Anand - May 3, 2023

On April 26, 2023, PEC's director, Prita Jha, and state coordinator Usmanbhai visited Anand to meet CSA survivors, including those whose cases PEC is handling in court. During the first visit, they met a POCSO victim who struggled to speak about her abuse. The team assisted her in accessing government schemes and interim compensation, while also offering emotional support to her family. On the second visit, they met an intellectually disabled survivor from a low-income family, lacking necessary identification documents. PEC helped the family obtain the required documents and enroll in government schemes for disabled persons.

Field Visit to Mehsana - May 29, 2023

Founder Prita Jha and State Field Coordinator Usmanbhai visited the village of Saanthal to meet POCSO survivor X (name changed to protect identity) who was harassed and later brutally murdered by her maternal cousin's brother. We met with the entire family who showed immense strength during the court proceedings. The mother assured us that she did not wish to compromise in the fight for justice even though it was an inter-family feud. The Sarpanch and Deputy Sarpanch of the village also supported the victim.



TRAININGS



LGBTQIA+ Community Training - September 14, 2023

PEC recognizes the LGBTQIA+ community as an equal part of society and is committed to ensuring they have access to justice, especially those vulnerable to discrimination due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. To support this, we launched the 'LGBTQIAWARE' donation drive to promote equality and understanding. On September 14, 2023, we held a training session for our team to better understand the LGBTQIA+ community and later focused on the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act, 2019, and the discrimination faced by transgender individuals. Equality remains a core part of our mission, and we continue to raise awareness for LGBTQIA+ rights.

PoSH Training Session - August 29, 2023

The Prevention of Sexual Harassment at Workplace (PoSH) Act, established by the Indian government in 2013, aims to protect women from workplace harassment and ensure a safe work environment. Since its inception, PEC has held numerous training sessions to educate university students about women's rights. PEC's Founder, Prita Jha, firmly believes in the role of the younger generation in advocacy, bringing fresh perspectives to improve the system.

This year, PEC held five Community PoSH sessions in colleges in Anand and Mehsana. The sessions covered the law on sexual harassment- focusing on consent and rejection also as these issues are very important for young adults to understand and are not discussed in our families, schools and communities.

POCSO Training Session - December 6, 2023

PEC has worked extensively with survivors of POCSO to ensure that any injustice inflicted on them has been recognized, and dealt with and that they are equipped with all the necessary resources to have complete access to their rights, safety, and justice. This year, on December 6th, PEC conducted a POCSO training with active Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) across Gujarat.



CELEBRATIONS



World Social Justice Day 2023

This year we celebrated Social Justice Day in all the four districts of Gujarat we have field presence in: Anand, Ahmedabad, Mehsana, and Sabarkantha. Through our celebrations, PEC aims to raise awareness of CSA and POCSO and create a platform where local communities can engage with these issues. Every year, PEC organizes various events and activities such as community meetings, workshops, rallies, and panel discussions to educate people about social justice, its importance, and how they can create a difference locally by promoting social change in their own communities.



IN THE MEDIA

The way forward



PEC, in collaboration with other organisations, conducts training on POCSO.

Plans for the future include expanding to other states, says Prita. "We have started work in Bihar and will soon do so in Jharkhand soon. Uttar Pradesh and Haryana are also on our radar as far as work on addressing CSA is concerned. We plan to support local activists to bring about awareness and change in these states."

Lawyer Helps Child Sexual Abuse Victims Win Compensation Up to Rs 1 Crore

Engineer turned lawyer Prita is founder-president of the NGO Peace and Equality Cell (PEC), which works to prevent CSA by creating awareness and providing victims access to justice.

By Aruna Raghuram
March 30, 2023



“Lawyer Helps Child Sexual Abuse Victims Win Compensation Up To Rs. 1 Crore”

On: “The Better India” | By: Arun Raghuram | March 30, 2023
[Link](#)

“We ask children, ‘Who is the boss of your body? Many say, ‘God’. We tell them, ‘You are.’”

- Prita Jha

A big victory for Prita and PEC was a trafficking case involving a minor. The girl had lost both parents. When the trial court acquitted the accused, PEC moved the Gujarat High Court. The High Court awarded Rs 5 lakh as compensation to the minor.

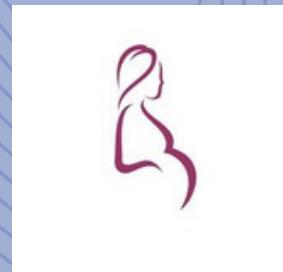
“justice is a long-term transformational process. It is not about vindictiveness or demanding the death penalty.

Creating a just society is the goal. Punitive actions are not always the answer. A change in mindset is what's required”

- Prita Jha



BROADENING OUR IMPACT



LGBTQIA+
COMMUNITY

PERSONS WITH
DISABILITIES

MASCULINITY

“IZZAT”

Beyond POCSO, POSH, and CSA

PEC has historically worked on three pressing and interconnected issues in Indian society: POCSO, PoSH, and CSA. Within those domains, it plans to extend its impact by also including those areas of society that often go unnoticed or whose importance is unrealized. These include: protecting and providing a voice to the LGBTQIA+ community, promoting social and economic rights to persons with disability, preventing gender-based violence by addressing issues around masculinity, and decrypting the complex role of “izzat” in cases of sexual abuse cases against women.

While we have already started working on all four areas, be it through training sessions, conferences, or publishing material, there is more we aspire to achieve in the coming years to create a noticeable change in society. We also feel the need to put these very issues at the forefront of our work as it would help us reach and inspire those in society who are most affected or disadvantaged.

LGBTQIA+ COMMUNITY WORK

PEC is committed to advocating for the rights and justice of the LGBTQIA+ community. We are eager to expand our efforts to support individuals wronged due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. India lacks sufficient institutions that protect the rights of the LGBTQIA+ community or provide safe spaces for those facing injustice. PEC aims to change this by fostering an inclusive, empathetic, and accepting society for all.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities (RPwD) Act, passed in India in 2016, ensures equality and dignity for disabled individuals. However, many are still unaware of their rights and entitlements, and the Act's implementation has faced challenges, limiting access to healthcare, education, livelihood, and social security. PEC is addressing this by running a project in Anand, Ahmedabad, and Mehsana districts, conducting household surveys to identify disabled individuals and help them access government schemes and entitlements.

MASCULINITY

Patriarchy is deeply ingrained in Indian society, often manifesting through toxic masculinity, which harms women and girls by giving men unchecked power in relationships and justifying harmful behavior. PEC has worked with men and boys in both urban Ahmedabad and rural Gujarat (Anand, Mehsana, Sabarkantha) to challenge these harmful norms. The organization aims to expand this work to redefine masculinity, prevent gender-based violence, and shift patriarchal mindsets in the coming years.

“IZZAT”

“Izzat” (honor) plays a significant role in domestic abuse cases. Families often worry that revealing or addressing the abuse will damage their izzat, which can prevent victims from speaking out or seeking help. The importance placed on izzat often outweighs the victim's safety and rights. PEC aims to challenge this mindset and ensure victims of domestic abuse can access the rights and resources they deserve.