

## 9-YR-OLD AMONG 67 GIRLS RESCUED

By Yogesh Sadhwani, Pune Mirror | Jan 11, 2017, 02:30 AM IST



1 Shiny Padiyara talking to the 9-year-old  
2 A team led by Kumar from Rescue Foundation  
3 The victims rounded up after the raid

### Pune shelter leads massive raid on Nandurbar brothels

*Following tip-off on racket and lack of action by officials, volunteers from Rescue Foundation staked the spot for five days, before moving in with local cops*

In one of the biggest raids in the country in over two decades, around 67 girls, most of them minors, were rescued from brothels in Nandurbar district, around 400 km from Pune. The operation was planned and led by Pune-based volunteers, who work extensively in the area of rescuing minors from the flesh trade.

During the operation at Shahada on Tuesday, volunteers were shocked to discover a nine-year-old among the girls rescued, saying they hadn't seen anyone this young in the flesh trade since 2008.

It all started when volunteers from the Rescue Foundation's shelter at Sasanewadi got a tip-off from a highly-placed government official at Nandurbar about minors being forced into prostitution and authorities concerned looking the other way. Rather than walking in blind and simply carrying out a raid, volunteers decided to stake it out. The team reached Shahada on January 5 and started verifying the tip-

off.

"Our team made several trips to the red light area to find out about minors and living conditions. Over the days, we were able to find out that most of the girls had been forced into the flesh trade. Most of them have been trafficked from Rajasthan and Haryana," said Shiny Padiyara, superintendent of Rescue Foundation's Pune shelter.

The seven-member team often posed as customers and even spoke to the girls. Once they were certain about the problem, they got in touch with the local police station at Shahada. "However, the local police did not have enough manpower to carry out the raid. Hence, we approached superintendent of police Rajendra Dahale, who provided us with a larger team," added Padiyara.

On Tuesday morning, the posse of around 40 policemen and social workers surrounded the red light area. All the access roads were blocked and teams started moving in, combing every house. As word spread that a raid was in progress, several girls crossed a nullah and escaped. However, the teams were able to get 83 people, which included three brothel owners. "We couldn't find any girls in some of the houses. However, on closer examination we saw huge photographs on the wall. Behind these frames, we found niches inside which girls had been pushed," added Padiyara.

Elaborating on the plight of the nine-year-old girl they found, Triveni Acharya, president of the Rescue Foundation, said, "The last time we came across someone this young in the flesh trade was in 2008 in Mumbai. Normally, such young ones are not trafficked even though they are easy prey because traffickers know that someone that young will grab a lot of attention and that they would get booked under the stringent Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act." The nine-year-old initially told the raiding party that she was a cook and not part of the trade. The cops had even let her go at first. However, later, it was found that she was an orphan and had been sold by a bar dancer to the brothel owner three months ago. "The girl had spoken to me during the raid and her conversation had been recorded. Some of the other girls also told us that she was indeed trafficked. In the confusion that ensued, cops had let go of her thinking she was a cook. However, later, they found her," Padiyara said.

Acharya explained that in her experience of 23 years, this is among the biggest raids involving minors. In 2007, 57 minors had been rescued from Budhwar Peth, Pune. In 2008, around 50 girls were rescued from GB Road in New Delhi.

When contacted, Rajendra Dahale, superintendent of police, Nandurbar, said, "The girls will be produced before a magistrate after which they will be sent to a shelter. The raid has brought to light some serious issues and we will initiate action soon."

At the time of going to press, 67 girls had been identified as victims and sent to a local shelter for 21 days on the orders of a Judicial Magistrate First Class. The age verification process will begin in days to come.

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— Rajendra Dahale, superintendent of police, Nandurbar

## GALLERIES