



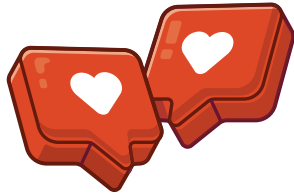
Protsahan[™]
India Foundation

Hriday Dialogues 2023

**Bridging Grassroots Wisdom
with Policy Discourse on Child
Protection in India**

15th December 2023
India Habitat Centre - New Delhi





Hriday Dialogues 2023

Bridging Grassroots Wisdom with
Policy Discourse on Child Protection
in India



Protsahan
India Foundation



Philosophy and Purpose: The Essence of Hriday Dialogues

Protsahan has been working at the grassroots since 2010. In these 14 years, we have endeavored to facilitate the holistic development of migrant adolescent girls and vulnerable children, who have endured gender-based violence and abuse throughout their lives. So much so that many of them have lost the idea of living with dignity or being deserving of any respect and love.

In the course of our work over a period of time, we understood that if we want these girls to have a shot at healing and self-reliance, the interventions need to be holistic. We started looking for examples and best practices that focused on depth of scale work focussing on the needs of the child and her community (and not those of quarterly or annual funding reports) but couldn't find many. Development initiatives often operate within siloed frameworks, addressing issues like protection, health, education, disability, gender, and participation separately. However, the reality of children's lives defies such compartmentalization. This realization prompted us to pose critical questions at the onset of our work, ultimately culminating in the inception of the "H.E.A.R.T Model".

The H.E.A.R.T approach stands for, 'H - Health', 'E-Education', 'A - Art', 'R - Rights', and 'T - Technology'. Protsahan's H.E.A.R.T model is a holistic, flexible first-of-its-kind gender transformative approach to seamlessly blend the physical, mental, material, and emotional well-being of survivors of gender-based violence and abuse.

This approach has enabled us to help vulnerable girls holistically.

In reflecting on over a decade of implementing the H.E.A.R.T model, we recognize the limitations of our reach, particularly in reaching every marginalized child. Therefore, we have chosen to extend our influence globally through meaningful dialogue. **That's where the idea of Hriday Dialogues comes to the fore, straight from our H.E.A.R.T to yours.**





Hriday Dialogues aims to become a collective platform for fostering collaborative action towards child rights in India. These dialogues aim to enhance the nation's child protection ecosystem and foster holistic approaches through constructive collaboration. After consultation with various sector leaders and internal deliberations, the structure of Hriday Dialogues was formed comprising:

1. **Panel Discussions**
2. **Experiential Masterclass**

The panel discussions with multi-stakeholder groups brought in deliberations on varied aspects of child protection instead of just one. The panels were intertwined with an experiential masterclass for CSR and non-profits for creating trauma-informed education spaces. The idea behind the broad set of panels and the masterclass was to acclimatize the participants towards holistic work with children.

1. **LEGAL PANEL:** Policy and Possibilities: Reflections on POCSO
2. **PSYCHOSOCIAL PANEL:** The Body Keeps the Score: Understanding Critical Psychosocial Narratives
3. **EXPERIENTIAL MASTERCLASS:** Understanding the Neurobiology of Childhood Trauma
4. **MEDIA & FUNDER PANEL:** Collaborative Pathways: Media and Funders Shaping Child Protection Narrative



Setting the Stage for Child Protection Discourse where Grassroots Wisdom is Listened to by Funders, Media, and Policymakers

Protsahan at its core is a social work practice that enables systems to work efficiently for its children's welfare and social protection, not just a team of lawyers and psychologists working with vulnerable children plugging gaps at the last mile. The essence of our work is holistic intervention and depth of scale.

There is a lot of grassroots wisdom to be shared with systems actors like media, law students, psychologists, school teachers, and key decision makers to circulate good ideas, key messages, resources, alternative approaches, and models that help us co-learn as a community. It's a space where the best of the best working with children - converge, exchange ideas, and catalyze transformative change in child protection by talking about not just their successes but also failures of what didn't work.

In all these years we have also realized that working hyperlocally in 87 urban slums connecting the most vulnerable children with critical government schemes and linkages will not change the system. It will essentially be shoveling water with a pitchfork. System actors need to get together and talk!

Hriday Dialogues 2023, has set out to bridge the gap between the grassroots and policy tables. Hriday Dialogues is a platform where diverse system actors can build connections and advance understanding of child-related issues.

This philosophy is the bedrock on which Hriday Dialogues is formed.





Decoding 10-years of POCSO: Report Launch & Insights

As India's landmark Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 entered its 10th year in 2022, it was an appropriate time for the country to take stock and see how the law's implementation has fared over the decade. POCSO aims at making the lives of children free from all forms of sexual atrocities. [‘POCSO 2012: 10-year analysis of NCRB Data on Sexual Crimes against Children \(2012 - 2022\)’](#) was launched at the first edition of the Hridaya Dialogues.

Protsahan's Report takes stock of penetrative sexual assault, non-penetrative sexual assault and sexual harassment cases against children in India separately. From how many cases are reported to how many cases are finally convicted under each head, this report analyzes the data reported by National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) in its 'Crimes in India' Report over the last 10 years, specific to sexual crimes against children in the country.

"Even among child protection specialists there is no common understanding of child protection, that's why conversations are important"

- Enakshi Ganguly, Co-Founder,
HAQ: Centre for Child Rights





Insights from Keynote Address by Ms. Enakshi Ganguly - Co-founder, HAQ: Centre for Child Rights

Ms. Enakshi Ganguly | Bio: Enakshi Ganguly is a development researcher, human rights activist and author working on issues of women, children, and other marginalised groups for four decades. She has worked with many organisations including being Deputy Director of Multiple Action Research Group for 10 years. She co-founded HAQ: Centre for Child Rights in 1998 and was its Co-Director till August 2018 and is currently Advisor of HAQ.

The keynote started with a stress on the importance of data. In the social sector, many a time, situations may appear to be hopeless, with no resolution in sight. This is when analyzing data becomes important. Data can help us identify areas and gaps where we may make interventions to salvage a situation.

But we do need to proceed with caution while analyzing data. Representation and analysis of data should be such that it encourages the stakeholders to make positive interventions and not discourage them from abstaining from the collection





of it. Data should be analyzed through the lens of, 'how things can be improved, rather than, 'who is at fault for these numbers'.

If we look back at the past 20 years, there has been a tremendous advancement in the child protection ecosystem. More and more people are making a career in this field which was not the case earlier. The level of practice, deliberation, and advocacy that we have today was not the scenario in the early 2000s.

Though there have been improvements, a lot is left to be desired. One aspect that Enakshi urged every practitioner to be mindful of is, what one sets out to achieve and what one actually achieves may be inherently different. *"During the late 1990s we set out to achieve a preventive law for child protection, but what we ended up achieving was the ICPS scheme, which essentially is a service delivery scheme under the Juvenile Justice Act. At the onset, our aim and objective was to protect children where they were, but what ICPS did was create another layer of authority without much accountability."*

Enakshi urged the practitioners in the field to be mindful of the understanding of "बाल सुरक्षा या बच्चों की सुरक्षा" (child protection v/s protecting our children). *"The two may sound similar but are starkly different in approach."*

The 'child protection' approach is mainly the legal system set in place that protects children from crimes and sets up a justice delivery system. But the ethos of 'protecting our children' is to not mindlessly create an atmosphere in any human interaction that may lead to crime against children in the first place.

"Lastly, every era has a narrative, due to which we may get blindsided by other issues. In the 1980's it was child labour, today it is child sexual abuse. So much so that child protection has become synonymous with protecting children from child sexual abuse. We need to be mindful, not to enter into these narrow domains of narratives, so that every issue that requires attention and intervention, gets it."



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PANEL 1 Policy and Possibilities: Reflections on POCSO



Ms. Liyi Marli Noshi
Child Rights Lawyer

Bio: Practicing Advocate in Courts of New Delhi, she has been working on the issues of human rights, women and child rights for the past 16 years.

Ms. Sneha Singh
Child Rights Lawyer

Bio: She has been practicing in the field of criminal litigation for a decade advocating cause-based litigation and human rights violation



Ms. Nimisha Shrivastava
Executive Director

Bio: Executive Director of Counsel to Secure Justice, an Indian non-profit working on access to justice for child sexual abuse survivors and building restorative justice models for children and communities.



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Ms. Soumya Mishra
Feminist Practitioner

Bio: Young neuroqueer development sector professional primarily interested in leveraging digital mediums to amplify marginalised voices, bridge existing gaps promote inclusivity and accessibility.



Moderator:

Ms. Sonal Kapoor, Founder
Director, Protsahan India Foundation

The first panel began with deciphering the meaning of justice. Justice for a child who has fallen off the margins of social security. Following were the inputs made by the esteemed panel members:



We see justice from an adult's perspective. For a child, it may be very different. For an innocent child, the feeling of safety, warmth, and confidence through various stakeholders of the criminal justice system may be the most critical requirement. Of course, the final justice delivery is most important. But justice begins with the beginning of a child feeling safe.

Liyi Marli Noshi, Child Rights Lawyer



Children always seek to be heard and actively participate in discussions concerning their justice, both within the criminal justice system and in their everyday lives. Just the act of listening to a child holds significant importance in the justice ecosystem.

Sneha Singh, Child Rights Lawyer





Justice often is the protection of self-esteem. Especially when children come from marginalized communities or are disabled. Self-esteem becomes the first casualty of the process. Preserving a child's self-esteem will go a long way while seeking justice for them.

Soumya Mishra, Feminist Practitioner



A point to think upon was raised during the discussion on Justice, regarding the sense of justice for a child in conflict with law (CCL).



What is the sense of justice for a CCL, who inadvertently ended up committing a crime while trying to protect their mother? What is the interplay between noble intention, bad deed, and justice for the victim and CCL as well? These are the grey areas that require our attention while thinking of justice not only for the victim but also for CCLs.

Nimisha, Executive Director, Counsel to Secure Justice



The panel moved forward towards a thorough discussion over the 'best interest of the child'. The conversation initiated with the tug of war going on in the policy circles i.e. mandatory reporting vis a vis best interest of the child.



Mandatory reporting in POCSO is put in place to make sure that a child gets justice for the wrong committed against them, but at the same time, there are several pitfalls associated with it. For example, if a remote area has one school, and a POCSO case is reported from there, the school may face social exclusion because of the sensitive nature of the incident. Apart from the issues the school administration will face, the remaining students will also be adversely affected. The school in this case is the only school for them as well, and hence continuing their education may become a challenge.

Sneha Singh, Child Rights Lawyer





It was noted that we need to take a step back while thinking about mandatory reporting and the best interest of the child.



Mandatory reporting should not be blindly considered in the best interest of the child. It needs to be the other way around. Best interest should be paramount and should be thought of before deciding if mandatory reporting applies.

Sneha Singh, Child Rights Lawyer



From mandatory reporting the discussion moved on to the best interest of the child who happens to be disabled.



We need to also understand the lack of best interest practices in the scenario of disabled children. Currently, there is a heightened insensitivity towards disabled children. This insensitivity is across the ranks from the bottom to the top. Stakeholders in the criminal justice system need to empathize more with the disabled children, which is sorely lacking right now. The training of professionals and systems of the criminal justice system should be such that it makes room for empathetic behavior.

Liyi Marli Noshi, Child Rights Lawyer



How non-profits play a crucial role in securing the best interest of the child was also discussed. Limitations of non-profits and the requirement of holistic care were discussed.



There are various forms of interventions that a non-profit does to secure the best interest of the child. But what many of us have noticed is that putting a timeline of 2 months, 3 months, 6 months, etc. on an intervention or a 'project' may not be enough to secure the best interest of the child, hence the intervention needs to be holistic. Since most non-profits are constrained by resources, many a time, such long-term interventions are not possible. Nonprofits need to be supported in innovative ways to ensure the best interest of children is preserved even at the last mile. CSRs should be patient and more invested.

Nimisha, Executive Director, Counsel to Secure Justice





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At the closing of the best interest discussion, the problem of intimidating government avenues was also raised.



It is difficult to secure the best interest in intimidating avenues. For a child, going to a police station may be daunting. Multiple confrontations with the system leads to re-traumatisation of the child victim.

Soumya Mishra, Feminist Practitioner



The discussion post best interest, moved on to the issues of compensation, pendency, and conviction.



High pendency and low conviction are also affected by the mindset of functionaries. There is a general notion that most POCSO cases are 'fake cases'. This mindset adversely affects the process and outcome of the case.

Sneha Singh, Child Rights Lawyer



The number of FIRs is higher but the number of final reports (chargesheets) reaching the courts is low. The reason is that the family is not fighting fit for the case during the investigation and needs financial assistance. This is where interim compensation can play a major role in keeping the case on track and securing justice in the end.

Sneha Singh, Child Rights Lawyer



When it comes to conviction in POCSO cases, the victim's testimony is of sacred importance. If the prosecution only has a valid victim's testimony by its side, securing justice would not be that difficult.

Normally no other evidence is required.

Liyi Marli Noshi, Child Rights Lawyer



Child Protection Eco





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PANEL 2

The Body Keeps the Score: Understanding Critical Psychosocial & Mental Wellbeing Narratives in Child Protection



Ms. Jyothi Ravichandran

Programme Specialist for MHPSS, UNICEF India

Bio: In her role at UNICEF, she supports advancement of a multisectoral MHPSS agenda, especially in child protection, education and health.

Ms. Avantika Jain

Venture & Fellowship, Ashoka Innovators for the Public

Bio: Her current role includes Ashoka Fellow research and evaluation under the Venture and Fellowship arm.



Ms. Angana Prasad

Head: Gender & Social Inclusion, Project KHEL

Bio: A gamification expert, she designs interactive activity-based curricula to simplify messages for children and adolescents



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Ms. Shweta Sharma

Key Resource Person for the NIPUN Bharat Mission, Jharkhand

Bio: She has been working as an elementary school teacher with Government of Jharkhand for the last 18 years. On the lines of the popular slogan Ma, Mati, Manush, she believes that mother and mother tongue, Mobile (learning resources) and mobilization of alumni and community are the keys to the achievement of learning outcomes, especially at the foundational stage.



Moderator:

Ms. Harshita Kaushal

Consulting Psychologist, Protsahan India Foundation

The panel began its discourse by attempting to understand what **safety** means for a child.



Safety begins with protecting the physical body. There can be no assurance of cognitive safety unless the body is preserved. What we need to note is that safety is in a series, it begins with physical, then cognitive, moving to emotional, and lastly social. What systemic changes are required for preserving safety at all four levels, requires inputs and deliberations from various stakeholders

Jyothi Ravichandran, Mental Health Specialist, UNICEF India





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From the point of safety the panel moved toward what characterizes an unsafe adult.



An unsafe adult is not only a person who actively seeks to harm a child but also a person who ignores the signs that the body of a child is trying to make.

Avantika Jain, Venture & Fellowship, Ashoka Innovators for the Public



[BEST PRACTICE] In the United Kingdom, the government keeps a watch on animal abusers. A study published in 'Aggression and Violent Behaviour Journal' noted that animal abusers are potential child abusers as well. This preemptive measure can ensure the prevention of various child abuse cases, wherever applied.

Avantika Jain, Venture & Fellowship, Ashoka Innovators for the Public



Next, the panel moved to discuss the need and benefit of building a curriculum for children coming from marginalised communities.



Trauma-informed curriculum for children should involve play-based therapy. The open playground fields represent an open mind. Hard work and fairness during play give children the rush of pursuit and meaning. There is no straight jacket formula to ascertain which activity may work for which kid, so room for social innovation is a must for trauma-informed curriculum design.

Angana Prasad, Head: Gender & Social Inclusion, Project KHEL



One overall improvement that we have witnessed over the years is that teachers have become much more empathetic towards children.

Avantika Jain, Venture & Fellowship, Ashoka Innovators for the Public



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Moving forward, the NIPUN Bharat Program was discussed with a psychosocial lens.



NIPUN Bharat program aims to create an enabling environment to ensure the universal acquisition of foundational literacy and numeracy so that every child achieves the desired learning competencies in reading, writing, and numeracy. One of the expected outcomes of the program is the holistic development of the child. It is to be done by focusing on different domains of development like physical and motor development, socio-economic development, literacy and numeracy development, cognitive development, life skills etc which are interrelated and interdependent.

**Shweta Sharma, Key Resource Person for the
NIPUN Bharat Mission, Jharkhand**



For the benefit of the participants, the panelist also deliberated upon how to identify a child who is dealing with the feeling of unsafety.



The body tends to know that it is in an unsafe presence. The brain may not record it all the time as a means of coping mechanism. But if we give attention to our bodily integrity, we will more likely know when we are in an unsafe presence.

Avantika Jain, Venture & Fellowship, Ashoka Innovators for the Public



Blaming the child without any context creates an unsafe environment for them. A higher amount of empathy is required to understand why a child is behaving a certain way.

Angana Prasad, Head: Gender & Social Inclusion, Project KHEL



[BEST PRACTICE] To help a child feel safe and respected, use their name. Addressing a child by their name sends a message to them that they are respected and will be treated as an equal.

Angana Prasad, Head: Gender & Social Inclusion, Project KHEL



India's
Ecosystem







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PANEL 3 Collaborative Pathways: Media and Funders Shaping Child Protection Narrative



Ms. Arpan Rai
Journalist, The Independent

Bio: As a journalist she covers human rights issues and political affairs in Asia, especially the gender apartheid affecting millions of women and children in Afghanistan since the fall of Kabul.

Ms. Shefali Chaturvedi
, Broadcast and Emergency Response Expert

Bio: She has worked extensively in Social Behaviour Change Communications and C4D across Asia, working with communities, audiences and creatives to make the world better.



Ms. Archana Relan
Azim Premji Foundation

Bio: She has over 18 years of hands-on experience in program management, donor relations, multi-stakeholder administration, government liaison, capacity building and training and evaluation.



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Ms. Jaswant Kaur

Director, Fundraising & Growth Strategy,
Protsahan India Foundation

Bio: A Company Secretary by profession and a writer by heart, she switched to the development sector after a decade in the corporate world.



Moderator:

Ms. Nicole Rangel

Founder, Leher

In this panel, participants witnessed a simultaneous discussion on the decisions of media and funding agencies. How these decisions lead to narrative building in the sector was analyzed.

The discussion began with how the media and the press shape public opinion.



Media is the medium through which an individual looks at the world. It shapes our opinion on various topics and plays a crucial role in how much importance we give to a certain issue. The persisting challenge here is that every important issue does not get adequate coverage.

Nicole Rangel, Founder, Leher



This was discussed at great lengths, as to why important news do not get adequate coverage and what could be its viable solution.





The discussion focussed on why important news do not get their fair share of air time on news networks and what can be done about it.



News agencies to stay afloat financially, cover the news which gets the most traction with the public. Mostly the news that falls within the scope of 'light entertainment' gets maximum traction. Hence news agencies need to highlight those and give their attention there. Most of the time, important news has a shelf life of 1-3 days, unless it completely captures the attention of society, eg. Nirbhaya Case.

Arpan Rai, Journalist, The Independent



In a somber reality check, it was highlighted that there is a lack of empathy among the public as well.



A problem that we as a society have been facing in the past few years is 'lack of Empathy'. News reports which used to shake us to our core, no longer do so. This behavioural shift in society, the increased level of apathy, is also a reason why attention to important news is lacking.

Arpan Rai, Journalist, The Independent



One probable, yet out-of-the-box solution is, public intervention in the news ecosystem. Big news agencies have less risk appetite. Whereas, with social media, people themselves can report important instances and newsworthy pieces from the grassroots. A disruption of this nature may lead to a change in what is expected from the media sector as a whole. Eg. an organisation can channel new age independent media to create short-form content.

Arpan Rai, Journalist, The Independent



Following this, the discussion turned towards the relevance of simple language.





The social sector is specialist with issues like human rights and child rights, whereas media is generalist in nature. The social sector needs to provide information to the media in the simplest language possible. This way neither the media houses nor the public at large will lose attention and may give the report the much-needed traction.

Shefali Chaturvedi, Broadcast and Emergency Response Expert



Social sector professionals do not follow a common language. Every non-profit is looking at a particular topic differently. There needs to be a usage of common terminology, so that repetition could happen adding to the seriousness of the topic.

Shefali Chaturvedi, Broadcast and Emergency Response Expert



From here the discussion moved on to the role of funders in the narrative building of the social sector.

The discussion was initiated by pointing out the less funding for children's protection programs when compared to children's health and education programs. But it was also highlighted as to how holistic programs are getting more support in recent days.



Funding agencies generally focus on education and health when it comes to child rights funding. Child protection gets the least proportion of funds. This may be attributed to a lack of understanding of child protection space. In the past 10 years, especially since the introduction of POCSO, the proportion of funding between health, education, and child protection has remained the same.

Jaswant Kaur, Director, Fundraising & Growth Strategy, Protsahan India Foundation





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Recently in the child protection space, there has been increased support for depth of scale programs. This has provided organizations with an opportunity to create holistic and enabling programs for children who face gender-based violence and abuse.

Jaswant Kaur, Director, Fundraising & Growth Strategy, Protsahan India Foundation



At the conclusion of the session it was highlighted how big organizations build a narrative and how it impacts smaller organizations.



“One challenge affecting narrative building is the source. Big organizations, knowingly or unknowingly set the narratives for the sector and decide which issues are important. Small to medium-sized organizations follow suit and develop their programs around those issues. These are the programs that get most of the funding.

Archana Relan, Azim Premji Foundation





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Strengthening India's
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EMERGENCY RESPONSE EXPERT



Experiential Masterclass for CSRs and Non-Profits Creating Trauma-Informed Education Spaces



Ideation

In academic circles, a child's trauma and how it impacts their brain is often discussed. But it mostly remains within those circles. Child rights practitioners who work day in and day out with children have a limited understanding of the intricacies of how childhood trauma affects the brain. A clear understanding of trauma-led change also makes them better equipped to identify a problem and give a better solution for it. With this thought Protsahan conducted an experiential masterclass that offered a tangible representation of the impact of trauma on a child's brain.



Aim

The exercise aimed to show the pivotal role educators and caregivers play in a child's recovery and overall well-being. Along with a better understanding of trauma, how to heal such trauma was also discussed with the participants.



Method

Case studies were discussed to understand the following:

1. How do grief and bereavement affect the hippocampus and amygdala
2. How shame affects the prefrontal cortex, amygdala, and insula
3. How child sexual abuse leads to anger and shame while affecting the hippocampus, amygdala, and prefrontal cortex
4. How paternal trauma affects the DNA of the child itself.



The experiential exercise helped the participants to understand the varied forms of trauma in a very tactile way. The participants were asked to pinpoint the certain part of the brain affected by the trauma and put a sticker on it. This way they were actively thinking about the affected brain part vis a vis the trauma being discussed through the case study.

The case study aimed to identify the negative effect of trauma, and which part of the brain is adversely affected due to it.

Hence this was followed by the decoding neuroplasticity, which explores the healing potential of a traumatized brain. Inputs were given as to how neuroplasticity can be utilized to deal with trauma.

“I don’t think a simpler and scientific method of explaining, what actually happens when somebody is inflicted with abuse and trauma can be conceived,” said Harleen Walia, Child and Youth Participation Advocate.

The following tools to heal a traumatized child were discussed:

1. Therapeutic relationships
2. Structured Routine and Predictability
3. Mindfulness and Emotional Regulation Techniques
4. Therapeutic Interventions
5. Encouraging Learning and Exploration
6. Physical Health and Nutrition
7. Creating a Safe Environment
8. Empowerment and Self-Esteem

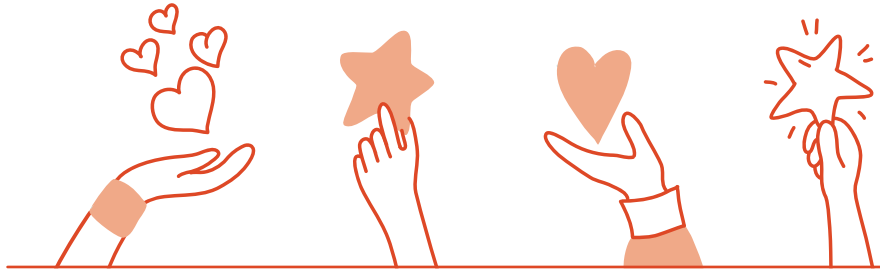
The masterclass can be watched online on this YouTube Link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EQceaLpCH9M>

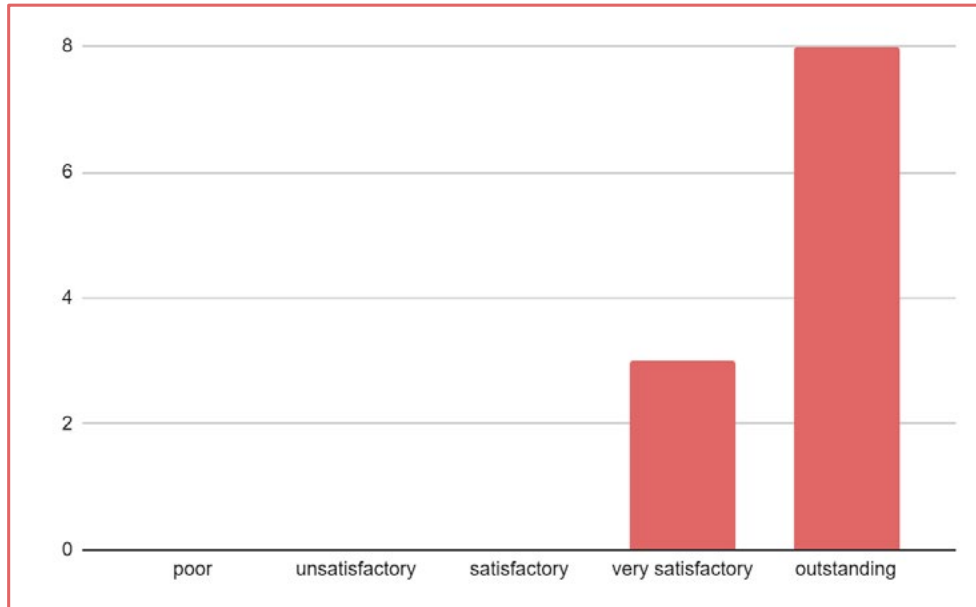




FEEDBACK FROM THE PARTICIPANTS

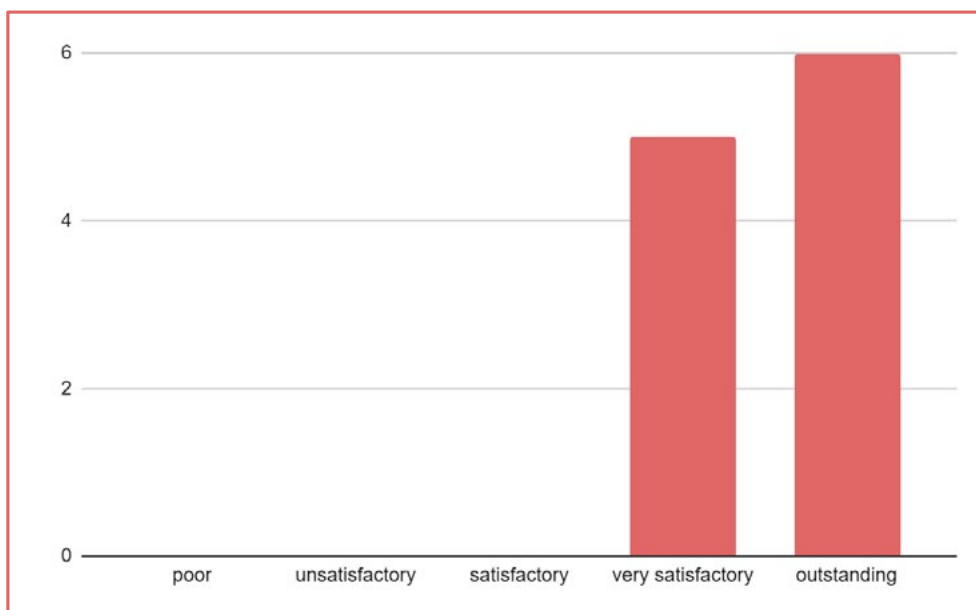


Overall Experience at Hriday Dialogues 2023



72% of the participants rated their overall experience at the Hriday Dialogue 2023 as outstanding

Overall Experience at Hriday Dialogues 2023



Every participant at the Hriday Dialogue 2023, took away insights that they could apply to their work with children in vulnerable setting

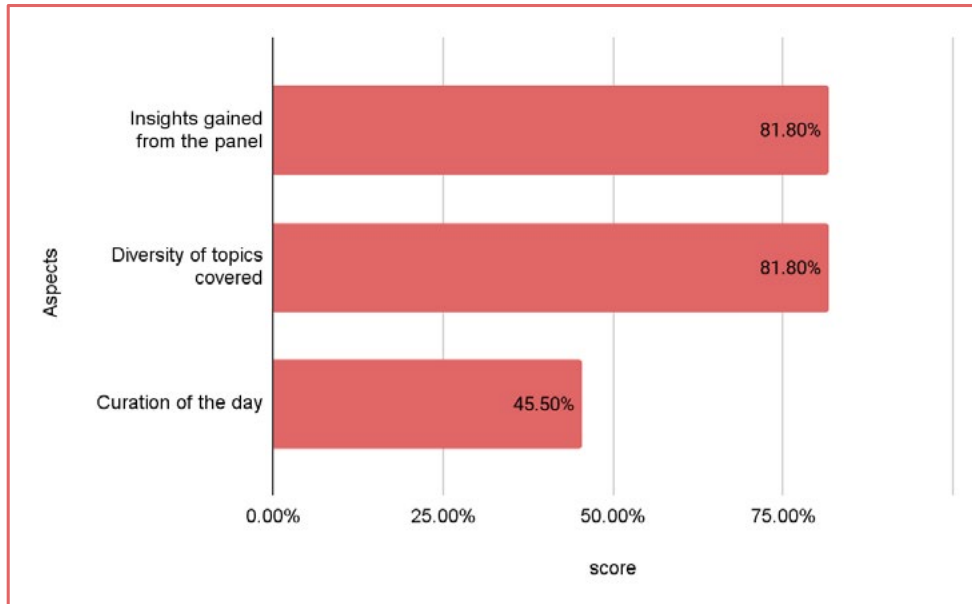


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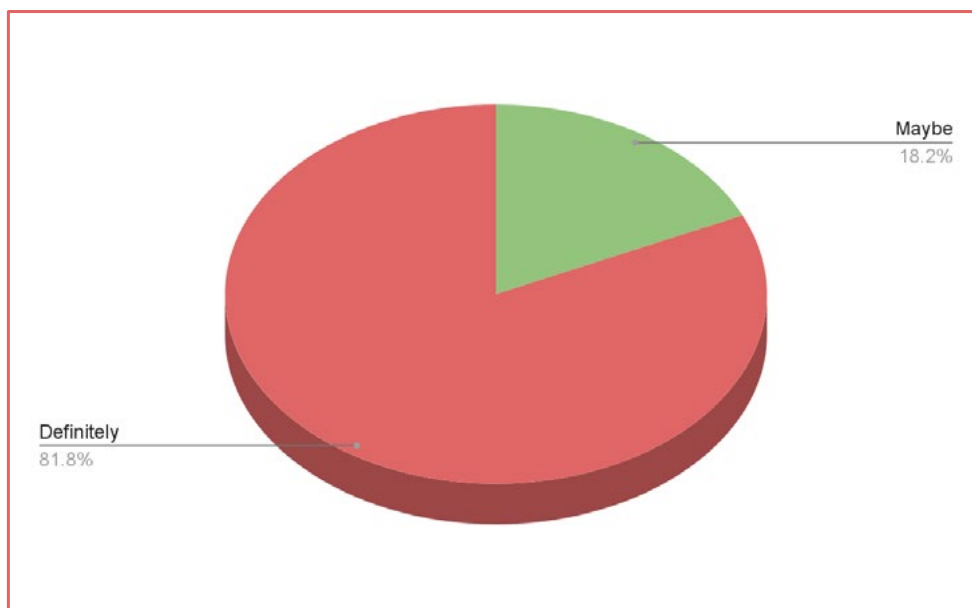


Appreciation of various aspects of Hriday Dialogues 2023



More than 80% of the participants at the Hriday Dialogues 2023 appreciated the insights from the panel discussions and the breadth of topics covers

Interest of Participants in Attending Future Editions of Hriday Dialogue 2023



As a matter of immense encouragement, more than 80% of the participants have shown a definite interest in attending the future editions of Hriday Dialogue





As the inaugural edition of Hridaya Dialogues draws to a close, it marks not just the end of a conference, but the beginning of a journey. Participants unanimously agreed that it represented more than mere discourse—it embodied a collective mission to reshape the narrative surrounding child protection.

Through the fusion of grassroots insights and policy discourse, Hridaya Dialogues paves the way for a new era characterized by collaboration, empowerment, and profound change in the realm of child welfare.

*Approximately 130 individuals attended this first edition of Hriday Dialogues.



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