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## PAGE ONE

### Survey shows why sex education is a must

*Sexually abused girls, girls reporting sexual advances, state is in top 3*

**Swatee Kher**

**Mumbai, April 10:** Releasing the findings of the first ever nation-wide child abuse study on Monday, Union Minister for Women and Child Development Renuka Chowdhury stressed that the dismal level of awareness about sexual abuse among children necessitated "mandatory sex education" in schools — a subject recently banned by the Maharashtra government and supported by politicians cutting across party lines.

This is what the survey found in Maharashtra:

\* From the children surveyed in state, 49.43 % of boys reported sexual abuse as compared to 50.57 % among girls. National figures are 52.94 % (boys) and 47.06 % (girls)

\* In the national sample, Maharashtra reports higher incidence of sexual abuse among girls (11.27 %) as compared to boys (8.33 %) and is third after Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh

\* It is among the top three states which report the highest incidence among girls who face sexual advances during travel (72.63% of those surveyed).

\* The incidence of corporal punishment reported from the municipal/zilla parishad schools was highest in Maharashtra at 47.6% followed by Gujarat at 41.5%.

\* 37.5 % (5-12 years); 25 % (13-14 years) and 37.5 % (15-18 years ) of the children have reported sexual assault

\* Of the children living in family environment and not going to school, state reported 61.73% physical abuse within family

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\* Maharashtra is one of the two states which reported physical abuse among children in over four situations (family, work, school and institutions), the other being Assam.

\* The report states that sexual abuse starts at age 5, gains momentum 10 years onward, peaking at 12 to 15 years and then starts to decline; this means that children in early teens are most vulnerable.

“We have seen that the problem is secular in nature but it exists everywhere. The details change, such as in slums the children are easily available, whereas in flats the space is available. People do not talk about it though they may seek help,” says Vidya Apte, founding member of the Forum Against Child Sexual Exploitation.

“It is absolutely wrong to categorically ban sex education. These instances of abuse are not reported. There is no environment where the children can speak freely about sexual instances. There needs to be healthy communication,” says Apte.

“Boys do not come out in the open and report instances of sexual abuse. Even our studies on sexual abuse of girls in Mumbai have shown that most of the offenders were known to the victim, be it the neighbours, family friends and cousins,” said Trupti Panchal, in charge of the special cell for women and child at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences.