# PRAJWALA HAPPENINGS

**Knowledge → Reflection → Action**

Volume 9 | Monthly Newsletter | September 2026

## This Month at Prajwala

### 3 Convictions Secured

**9 Traffickers Sentenced to Life Imprisonment**

Nine accused were sentenced to life imprisonment for trafficking Bangladeshi women into India and forcing them into prostitution.

**A significant conviction against an organised cross-border trafficking network.**

**4 Persons Sentenced to 6 Months**

Four persons were convicted and sentenced to six months' imprisonment for running a brothel from a residential premises.

**Holding those facilitating sexual exploitation accountable.**

**1 Accused Sentenced to 10 Years**

A child was trapped and sexually abused after the accused attempted to negotiate her sale. He was convicted and sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment.

**Justice secured for a child survivor.**

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| 27 | Victims assisted in removal from places of exploitation |
| 36 | At-risk women supported through employment/self-employment |
| 5 | Survivors placed through employment/ self-employment initiatives |
| 8 | Survivors safely reintegrated with their families (1 child included) |
| ₹1.80 Lakh | Immediate Relief accessed by 9 survivors |
| ₹0.20 Lakh | Interim Compensation accessed by 1 survivor |
| 88 | Sex buyers counselled and pledged to not buy sex again |

## A QUESTION WORTH ASKING

### *Is It Really Just a Friendship?*

***When does an online friendship become something more?***

***When does a connection become grooming?***

***Can a conversation built on trust become a pathway to manipulation, sextortion or exploitation?***

***And when fear and shame silence someone, who will they turn to?***

Read More on Page 3

**"A CONNECTION THAT BEGAN THROUGH INSTAGRAM CHANGED THE COURSE OF A 13-YEAR YOUNG GIRL'S LIFE. WHAT STARTED AS AN ONLINE FRIENDSHIP GRADUALLY BECAME A PATHWAY TO EXPLOITATION, LEAVING AAFIYA STRUGGLING WITH TRAUMA, SELF-HARM AND SUBSTANCE DEPENDENCE. TODAY, HER JOURNEY IS MOVING IN A DIFFERENT DIRECTION – TOWARDS HEALING, EDUCATION, SKILLS AND NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR HER FUTURE."**

Read her Story inside on Page 4



External Evaluator Mr. Salil Kader interacting with Project Director, DRDA, Medchal, as part of the external evaluation



Our founder sharing her insights at the State-Level Consultation on the Juvenile Justice Act implementation organised by the Odisha High Court




Dr. Sunitha Krishnan honoured among the PERFECT21 – Voices of Impact Honours 2026



Five-day home management training for the shelter team



Anganwadi Workers training in Golugonda Mandal, Anakapalli District, Andhra Pradesh



Employability Training for transgender persons



Health check-up Camp organised for Staff members



Founder engaging with students at the National Law University and Judicial Academy, Guwahati, on human trafficking and its legal dimensions



CPR training session to learn essential emergency response skills



Celebrating Teachers' Day at our Learning Centres



A meaningful Teachers' Day moment as children from our Learning Centres greeted our Founder

# IS IT REALLY JUST A FRIENDSHIP?

A message. A like. A follow. A friendship.
At what point does an online connection become something more dangerous?

A message arrives. A conversation begins. Someone listens, remembers small details, offers encouragement and gradually becomes someone we look forward to hearing from.

Nothing seems dangerous.

**That is what can make online grooming so difficult to recognise.**

Grooming may begin by building trust and an emotional connection. The person may gradually learn about another's interests, relationships and vulnerabilities, using that knowledge to gain greater influence. In the case of children, this can become a pathway to sexual exploitation.

But the larger issue is not limited to children.

A lonely child may be drawn to someone who seems to listen. An adult going through an emotionally difficult period may find comfort in someone who appears unusually understanding. Someone seeking companionship, or opportunity may also become vulnerable to manipulation.

**The problem is not the desire to connect.**

**The problem begins when someone deliberately uses that need for connection to gain control.**

Once trust is established, requests may gradually change—asking for secrecy, personal information, intimate photographs or money. What began as affection or friendship can become pressure and manipulation.

This is where sextortion can enter the picture: intimate images, videos or conversations may be used to threaten or blackmail someone into complying with further demands. The person making the threat does not necessarily have to be a stranger; they may be someone the person already knows and trusts.

And fear often brings silence.

**Fear of being blamed.**
**Fear of being judged.**
**Fear that the images will be shared.**
**Fear that asking for help will make things worse.**

But being deceived does not make a person responsible for the exploitation that follows.

Prevention, therefore, cannot simply mean telling people not to talk to strangers online. By the time trust has been built, the person may no longer feel like a stranger.

We need to recognise when connection begins turning into control—when secrecy, pressure, threats or repeated boundary-crossing enter a relationship.

We also need something beyond digital awareness: safe relationships offline. Children need adults they can approach without fear of punishment. Adults too need spaces where they can speak about online abuse without shame.

Technology will continue to change. The methods of exploitation will change with it. But our need for connection will remain.

The answer is not to stop people from connecting. It is to help them recognise when connection is being turned into control—and to ensure that no one has to face that control alone.

**SOMETIMES, GROOMING DOES NOT BEGIN WITH A THREAT. IT BEGINS WITH ATTENTION.**

# When an Online Friendship Changed Everything

Like many young people, Aafiya found a space to express herself on social media. As a young teenager, Instagram had become a space where she shared videos, connected with others and imagined a future where she could be seen and recognised. She had created around 1,800 videos, like many young people who find a sense of identity and belonging through social media.

It was through Instagram that a young man first reached out to her. What began as an online friendship slowly developed into an emotional connection.

He praised her and offered to help her become a successful influencer. He gave her attention, made her feel understood and gradually became someone she trusted. What Aafiya could not see at the time was how that connection was being used to influence and manipulate her.

The online relationship eventually moved offline beyond the screen. What appeared to be friendship became a pathway into commercial sexual exploitation.

Aafiya was 13 years old when she was first drawn into this cycle. What followed exposed her to repeated abuse and exploitation, leaving her struggling with trauma, self-harm and substance dependence.

When Aafiya came to Prajwala, she needed more than immediate safety. She needed a space where she could begin to recover from experiences that had affected her physically, emotionally and psychologically.

At Prajwala, she received trauma-informed counselling, psychosocial support and specialised psychological and psychiatric care. She continues to receive psychiatric support as part of her recovery.

She returned to education and is being supported through open schooling. She is on the verge of completing her training in our Economic Rehabilitation Program and is now ready to become an apprentice.

Recovery has not been a straight path. It has required patience, safety, professional care and opportunities to rediscover her abilities.

Today, Aafiya is slowly looking towards possibilities beyond what happened to her. Her journey is still continuing—but so is her opportunity to learn, heal and build a future on her own terms.

Grooming does not always begin with an obvious threat. Sometimes, it begins with a message, a compliment, a friendship or the promise of being seen. Recognising these early signs – and creating spaces where young people can speak without fear or blame – can make the difference between vulnerability and protection.

## If You Would Like to Support Us

Aafiya's journey reminds us that recovery takes time, safety, care and opportunities to rebuild. At Prajwala, survivors receive sustained support through safe shelter, counselling, psychological and psychiatric care, education, skill development and livelihood opportunities.
Your support can help survivors like Aafiya continue their journey towards healing, independence and a future beyond exploitation.

To support, Donate at https://prajwalaindia.com/donate