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'Age of consent should be reduced to 16'

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Madras High Court (File Photo | D Sampath Kumar/EPS)

By Express News Service

CHENNAI: The age of consent for sexual relationship or marriage should be reduced from 18 to 16, said Justice S Vimala. She was referring to a query raised by Justice Parthiban in the Madras HC recently if it was time to reduce the age of consent to 16 and to his call for consultations from all stake-holders on the issue.

Speaking at the release of a research study titled, 'Why girls run away to marry', on Friday, Justice Vimala said adolescent realities had not been taken into consideration and they were being punished based on ground realities. She added that the study supported the case for POCSO reforms. "POCSO needs to be modified in the context of adolescents," she said, pointing out the mandatory reporting clause as harmful section.

Referring to a case in which a minor girl was forced by her parents to part with her child and her husband was sent to prison under POCSO Act, she spoke of the heartbreaking ways in which adolescents were being punished by the law.

"If the law is doing injustice, is it not for us to ask for change," she said. The study, written by Madhu Mehra and Amrita Nandy, brings out the complex interplay of the age of sexual content, early marriage and structural inequalities in the lives of adolescents and youth from the marginalised populations in India. Madhu Mehra said law reforms were made, based on ideals and not on reality. "Law hardly protects the most marginalised but only prosecutes them," said

Mehra. Girls can't be considered as adults if they assume adult responsibilities at a young age, she remarked. Journalist Vaishna Roy said, "The idea of marriage as a 'solution' should end.

It gives a girl no mental, spiritual or physical empowerment," she said. About 100 people ranging from journalists to child's rights activists and NGOs' members participated in the event organised by TULIR. The age of consent for sexual relationship or marriage should be reduced from 18 to 16, said Justice S Vimala. She was referring to a query raised by Justice Parthiban in the Madras HC recently, if it was time to reduce the age of consent to 16 and to his call for consultations from all stake-holders on the issue.

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