

Child Victims Make Up 40 Percent of India's Prostitutes

(So Why Is This Workout Guru Smiling?)

IN HER MOTHER'S ETHNIC HOMETLAND, HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND EXPLOITATION OF FEMALES IS RAMPANT. NOW, L.A.'S RAMONA BRAGANZA HAS CREATED A PROGRAM THAT WILL GRADUATE 15 AT-RISK GIRLS, ORPHANS AND DAUGHTERS OF PROSTITUTES AS CERTIFIED FITNESS TRAINERS NEXT YEAR — A CAREER THAT COULD SAVE THEIR LIVES

By Rebecca Ford • Photographed by Austin Hargrave

E

EVERY SUNDAY, 45 GIRLS LIVING AT THE Naunihal Special Home for Girls in Mumbai, India, gather in their living room for a cannot-miss tradition: watching a new Bollywood movie.

The girls, who range in age from 8 to 20 years old, love everything about Bollywood, movies and television. So meeting celebrity personal trainer Ramona Braganza was a big deal — about as big as it gets.

"You should have seen their eyes sparkling," says Priti Patkar, the founder of a nearly 30-year-old anti-trafficking organization called Prerana, which runs the shelter and two others like it in secret locations throughout the heart of Mumbai. "They were all fantasizing that maybe someday they could train a Bollywood actor."

Before Braganza, 53 — whose star clients include Jessica Alba, Kate Beckinsale, Halle Berry, Scarlett Johansson and Zoe Saldana, a supporter of the trainer's initiative — this notion would have stayed in the realm of fantasy. After all, the girls, all in some way victims of human trafficking, live in one of Prerana's homes, which rescue young women from the red-light district of Mumbai — the most populated city in a country where women face threats both physical (35 percent between ages 15-49 have experienced violence) to economic (India is ranked 84 out of 113 countries

for women's economic opportunities). Many are the daughters of prostitutes and are at risk of falling into the same cycle as their mothers, as 40 percent of the more than 3 million sex workers in the country are children, according to India's Central Bureau of Investigation. Others were rescued from human trafficking for labor, which a U.S. Department of State 2014 study found affects an estimated 20 million to 65 million citizens of India. Many of the girls living in the facility, which is funded in part by international philanthropists Janet Genoud and Francine Kandaouoff, are orphans because HIV claimed the lives of their mothers. "Their daughters get an opportunity to live a life of dignity," says Patkar, who received a master's in social work at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences in Mumbai and then immediately founded Prerana. "We are attempting to bring an end to the intergenerational trafficking into the sex trade, a vicious cycle" — which the girls can escape through gainful employment, making them less vulnerable to predatory traffickers. (Until then, the girls' identities are protected.)



From left: Braganza with client and 321Empower supporter Saldana, who says: "I've been really amazed how the girls have taken to the program. I admire Ramona for her determination." Below left: The red-light district of Mumbai.



Moore

The Upshot of #NoSuchThing

A case study of how Hollywood voices can effect change

ON SEPT. 24, Julianne Moore and other industry supporters (Mia Farrow, Ashton Kutcher, P. Diddy) asked Twitter followers to sign a Change.org petition calling on media outlets (particularly the Associated Press) to stop using the term “child prostitute” and for law enforcement to end the detention of children for prostitution. More than 140,000 signatures were collected and on Oct. 21,

L.A. County Sheriff Jim McDonnell announced that his department would no longer arrest children for prostitution. “Our goal is not to arrest victims, instead utilizing victim rescue, trauma-informed services and arresting and prosecuting traffickers,” Captain Merrill Ladenheim of L.A. County’s Human Trafficking Bureau tells *THR*. Now if only AP would get with the program. — JANE CARLSON

The Ontario, Canada-raised Braganza, whose mother originally is from Mumbai, met these young women while on a tour of Prerana’s homes. About a year ago, the former competitive gymnast and Raiders cheerleader traveled to India for the second time, looking to expand globally after having her book *Feel Fit, Look Fantastic in 3-2-1* published in 2014. She also was searching for “a connection to my background in India — I knew that I was missing something.”

Braganza decided to teach the girls in the Naunihal home a routine from her signature 3-2-1 Training method, which she first employed on movie sets, where time and equipment are limited. She described them as “very smiley, very happy,” but soon discovered that they didn’t know how to work out and indeed didn’t have shoes that they could exercise in. Braganza bought athletic shoes for the girls (since then, Victoria’s Secret and Fabletics have donated workout gear).

Upon learning that the fitness and wellness industry in India is a rapidly growing sector, with the total retail market expected to reach \$1.18 billion by 2017, the workout guru sparked to an idea: “[India] has jumped into fitness in a big way, but not from the ground up. Their facilities are at an elite level, but the trainers need help.” There’s especially a need for female trainers, which led to her brainstorm to train these women for a lifelong career as physical trainers. “I saw a need. I saw a group of young girls and I thought, ‘Why couldn’t they be the trainers?’”

Patkar says a particular group of about 15 girls between the ages of 16 and 20 took a strong interest in the routine — the first class to enroll in Braganza’s newly founded 321Empower program. “Nothing is more convincing than just meeting Ramona and seeing how well she has built her physique through that exercise,” says Patkar. Adds supporter Saldana: “I think it’s



1 Mumbai-based personal trainer and 321Empower associate Enfield helps the girls study their fitness lessons. **2** “When we started, they couldn’t do one push-up,” says Braganza (center), teaching the girls how to high kick. **3** Says Patkar (left, with Braganza): “The girls say they feel more agile and less lethargic since the program. One girl told me, ‘I was having these aches, but since I’ve started training, I’m not complaining about them anymore. I feel that my body’s much lighter.’”



inspiring and beautiful — I’ve been really amazed to hear how the girls have taken to this program and want to learn.”

In September, the women at the shelter started working through a certification program, funded by the Vista, Calif.-based National Association for Fitness Certification. Each

“India is changing and women are changing in India. This might be the start of a really positive movement.” BRAGANZA

months-long program typically costs about \$400 per person. “I thought it was a wonderful project,” says William Singer, executive director of NAFC Non-Profit & Institutional Affairs. “We wanted to give these young girls something that empowers them and helps them to move forward in life.”

Braganza hired a local trainer, Nisha Enfield, to run the program when she’s in Los Angeles. “We want to give little girls a career that can bring about mental, physical and emotional

change,” says Enfield, who visits the girls every Saturday for two hours of training.

Since September, the girls start every weekday with a morning workout before doing their chores. Braganza also Skypes to check in on their progress. “When they get on a call, they start showing me their guns,” says Braganza with a laugh: “When we started, they couldn’t even do one push-up. Now they can do five. They couldn’t run the flight of stairs. Now they can run the flight of stairs.” While the shelter offers a wide variety of activities (including singing classes, magic instruction, English lessons and employment skills), Patkar says that never in her 30 years has fitness training been offered as a livelihood opportunity.

The next step for Braganza, who returns to Mumbai in February, when her first class graduates, is to raise funds through Indiegogo to build a small gym at the shelter, where the girls can start a business by training local women. Someday she hopes to expand the program to other parts of India and maybe beyond. “I didn’t have children, so this has become my calling, my legacy,” says Braganza. “It’s really shown me that nothing is impossible.” **THR**