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AN INSIGHT INTO CHILD ABUSE
HIGHLIGHTS OF THE STUDY CONDUCTED BY BUTTERFLIES



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THE ISSUE

Abuse has been defined as a verbal or physical behavior by one person (perpetrator) towards another person (victim), which is considered in their culture to be significantly upsetting, demeaning, harmful, or traumatic. Abuse can be verbal, psychological, or physical. Child abuse refers to all kinds of physical or mental injury, negligent treatment or ill treatment of a child by a person.

The very vulnerability of childhood makes the child prey to multiple abuses- sexual, physical and emotional. Most heinous of all abuses is the child sexual abuse, which is three to more times more than the physical abuse.

Sex and sexuality are alien concepts to a child. Therefore sexual abuse takes on a dimension that could be frightening and confusing. A child is in the process of crystallizing in her mind relationships, bonds with adults and abuse gives that identity a different and often distorted dimension. The impact is even greater and more threatening as the most creative and formative years of their lives are being exploited because they cannot comprehend and express the trauma in the absence of appropriate language/vocabulary. The self-guilt, blame, and secrecy shrouded around sexual abuse coupled with threats from the perpetrator accentuate the problem. They are not able to retaliate, as they are unaware of the complexity of the whole activity. For these reasons, the culprit goes scot-free thus giving fillip to more would be abusers. What worsens the scenario in India is the absence of any specific law directed towards child sexual abuse. It is covered under different laws concerning children directly or indirectly. So far mainly child prostitution is the identified form of child sexual abuse, thus ignoring abuses perpetrated by own family members, neighbors, known persons.

Child sexual abuse in India has always been considered an individual problem restricted to a handful group of pedophiles but in fact, it is social pathology, poverty, ignorance, improper education, inadequate legal system and weakening of social values and norms that have contributed to the gravity of the problem.

The act though sexual in nature is also about the abuse of power and the betrayal of trust. It cuts across all, class, castes, race, gender, regions, and religions. The myth that mainly girls are subjected to sexual abuse is also not true in that this evil victimizes boys also. Sodomy has attained alarming proportions in all societies.

THE STUDY:

Since 1989 the Butterflies Crisis Center has documented the handling of cases of abused children who were either rescued or who sought services and continue to follow-up ongoing cases registered.

A study was conducted mid this year (2002) to understand the prevalence of child abuse, form, extent, causes and effect of abuse. Furthermore, to examine and reflect upon the support services available to these children, responses of varied allied system and the

nature of interventions required. The study provides a starting point for professionals in the field of Child protection to re-examine and develop comprehensive strategies to work together with collateral agencies in facilitating better rehabilitative interventions for children in difficult circumstances, especially the ones who are sexually abused.

The study entails 80% primary and 20% secondary data. Case study method was used to gather data {names of abused children have been changed in case studies}. It analyses the case records combined with experiences with the allied systems. It tells us more about the child abuse defined in practice and responded to over a time period. It describes the linkages between different variables such as the extent of abuse, the background of the perpetrators, physical and mental health, abuse characteristics, case management, legal provisions and so on.

The study covered 100 children involved in episodes of alleged physical and /or sexual abuse assessed and reported at the centre from the year 2000 onwards. The data constitutes 70 boys and 30 girls in the age group ranging from 5 to 18 years. The sample of girls is comparatively smaller than that of boys as less number of abuse cases of girls were reported to the centre.

WHO ARE THE ABUSED CHILDREN

According to the reports and case files of crisis center over a period of two years approximately 100 children and adolescents were found to have been abused and/ or neglected. Of these, 68% of the children were physically abused. This entails children living and working on the streets, children working within the confines of road side restaurants, workshops or as domestic helps wherein they have limited and in some cases no scope to access services outside and those children who stay with their parents /relatives and either go to school or stay at home. 82.3 % of the physically abused involved boys and 17.6 % involved girls. Whereas 32% children {56.3% girls and 43.7% boys} were subjected to varied degrees of sexual abuse.

Girls are more vulnerable than boys because of their gender. In addition to physical violence meted out to them, they have to face the heinous crime of all-sexual violence. The data indicates that 32 % of the children were sexually abused. Amongst which 56.3 % of sexual abuse involved girls and 43.7 % involved boys. This also included street children, children working in closed establishments and children living with their families.

Children both girls and boys who live on the streets are relatively more susceptible to violence and abuse as they lack the protection of the shelter. They are exposed to abuse by:

	Male	Female	Total
Contact Point	41	8	49
Childline	29	22	51
Total	70	30	100

- ◆ The older street boys who bully them, beat them and forcibly take away their earnings or belongings.
- ◆ Employers who make children work under unhygienic working conditions besides thrashing them for not doing the work properly.
- ◆ Police who arrest them mostly at nights to clear the streets of homeless and drug addicts.

* Contact Point is an area where there are large numbers of street children and Butterflies works in these very same areas.

- ◆ Public who verbally and physically abuse them as they perceive them as delinquents.

Children who get extensively abused both physically and sexually are those working within the confines of the closed establishments. Their visibility is low as their employer forcibly restricts their movements. Financial exploitation, deplorable working conditions, strenuous working hours further accentuates their abuse. Further in case they are found unsatisfactory workers or turn rebellious they are thrown out by their employers without considering where the child will go. In some cases the child especially if he is older finds himself another work and in case of younger children they either take to begging or wander around till they come in contact with the police and the case gets reported. The girls who most often are employed as domestic servants are at a high risk of being sexually abused. Their low visibility, inability to access help or unfamiliarity with the city makes them more vulnerable and they are forced to bear the abuse. In some cases, children manage to run away or if they are fortunate, a sympathetic person who notices their deplorable condition while visiting a restaurant or the neighbour's might come to their rescue. Such cases are usually reported through the helpline by anonymous callers.

BOYS AND GIRLS

Among the abuse cases reported, 70 % were boys and 30 % were girls. Most of the boys who find themselves in abusive situations find it easier to leave and resort to streets, which is not the solution that girls usually resort to. The percentage of calls reported through the helpline by girls was 73.3 % while by boys it was 41.4 %, indicating that a considerable number of girls vulnerable to abuse were referred by concerned adults through the helpline service. Often the girls found it difficult to disclose or confide about the abuse directly due to lack of accessibility to such services and most importantly due to social conditioning.

AGE DISTRIBUTION

The data reflects that a majority of the children who reported abuse fall in the age group of 12 to 14. Younger children were found to be more vulnerable than older ones due to their lower level of awareness and physical strength. Younger children are often unable to verbalise abuse particularly sexual abuse. The older children required reassurance for their disclosure. As they grow they find it easier to reveal their abusive histories. The longer duration they spend on the streets or out of their homes the more abuse they are likely to experience. Another point that was noted among these adolescent children was their resilience and their coping capacities, which they develop to survive on the streets. They become conditioned to the negative experiences of the street. In some cases they no longer remain passive recipient of abuse and retaliate or leave the abusive situation. Children, particularly the boys above 11 years are usually sent to the capital city to work as labourers by the families. Such children who are driven away by their employers or get lost after spending a shorter duration in Delhi often find themselves helpless and hardly equipped enough to be able to protect themselves from any form of abuse including sexual abuse.

Age distribution -

8 year old was blind and on his wife's living. His 3 an easy target intense

Age	Contact Pt		Childline	
	Male	Femal e	Male	Femal e
3 to 6	1	0	0	3
6 to 8	2	3	7	4
9 to 11	6	1	9	2
12 to 14	28	2	11	12
15 to 17	5	1	0	3
Total	42	7	27	24

Gender wise

Babita's father had to depend earning for a children became for venting his frustration and

helplessness. While the mother used to go out for work the father used to control his two younger children by chaining them before beating them with whatever he could get his hands on. Babita, the eldest of the three children was repeatedly sexually abused by her father...both genital and oral sex. It was after three weeks of undergoing therapy that Babita was able to reveal the sexual abuse. Since she found it difficult to name sexual organs she drew them out on a sheet of paper. The presence of another sexually abused girl of similar age and who was vocal enabled her to muster the courage to disclose her traumatic experience. Concerning their custody the mother refused to relinquish her rights over the children despite her adverse financial and familial circumstances. On the suggestion of the organization the mother agreed to place the children at Butterflies crisis centre for a temporary period till she could make alternative arrangements of stay. The mother used to visit the children regularly during their 7 months stay. When the mother's financial condition improved, she got separated from her husband and she took custody of her children.

OCCUPATION

The data illustrates 53 % of children migrated to Delhi in search of work some of whom are also trafficked. They work in restaurants in middle class homes as domestic helps, porters and so on.

The sample entails 60 working children. Amongst which 22 worked as rag pickers in the busy streets of the capital. 6 children who were working in eating joints either incurred bruises and swelling due to working under neglected and harsh working conditions or got beaten by their employers for not being able to cope with their stressful hours. The rest worked as shoeshine, shop attendant, transport helper or a mechanic. Each of them has been subjected to varied degrees of abuse during their course of employment. In ability to speak out and lack of support further aggravates their vulnerability to abuse.

Ragpickers	22
Domestic Help	14
Begging	6
Embroidery	6
Eating Joints	6
Others	6
Total	60

Butterflies has been involved in rescue, repatriation and rehabilitation of trafficked children in cooperation with partner agencies. However, the absence of short term family sponsorship schemes or rehabilitative measures after rescue or withdrawal of children

further perpetuates the problem. It is thus imperative for GOs and NGOs working for children to develop a consensus on establishing the linkages, cooperation and mutual inter agency collaboration for the protection and rehabilitation of those children who are trafficked.

RISK FACTORS LEADING TO ABUSE

A number of risk factors were identified among children who were abused which were found to be associated with physical and emotional abuse. These include:

Sl. No.	High Risk Factors	Percentage (%)
1	Poverty	89
2	Addiction to Drugs	6
3	Mental Illness/Physical Disability	8
4	Separation of Parents	8
5	Death of Parents	23
6	Remarriage	25
7	Criminal History	4
8	Harsh Disciplining	25

Parental

- ✓ Poor economic status
- ✓ Parental History of abuse
- ✓ Drug or alcohol misuse
- ✓ Separation of parents
- ✓ Remarriage of parents
- ✓ Lack of support
- ✓ Mental illness / disability
- ✓ Lack of attachment or unresponsive to child's needs
- ✓ Domestic violence
- ✓ Inappropriate expectation
- ✓ Inadequate parental skills (inconsistent disciplining, low family activities, low parental reinforcement, poor communication)
- ✓ Social isolation
- ✓ Difficult to manage behavioral problems in children.

✓ **Child**

- ✓ Has a physical or mental disability
- ✓ Poor bonding
- ✓ Poor health

Poverty and lack of livelihood options {particularly in rural areas} are some of the major reason why children are sent to work in cities, rural girls are especially vulnerable. Traffickers most often lure children with various enticements rather than abducting them by force. While none of the above are 100% diagnostic of abuse in itself, each would be a cause of concern that would need to be explored with the family and with other agencies.

Lack of involvement with the child and history of drug or alcohol addiction in both parents increases the abuse potential as seen in 6% of the cases. Higher incest rates were

found among young girls due to their vulnerability, dependence on the family member, less mobility. Single parents and stepparents too abused them. Girls whose mother's were absent, sick or incapacitated ran a particularly high risk. Similarly having a stepfather increased a girl's chances of being sexually abused, not just by the stepfather, but by other people outside the family. Parental disputes also make the child prone to physical and sexual abuse.

Unemployment, financial problems, single parent, addiction, etc are stressful events, which accentuates the likelihood of abuse. In addition, it was noted that a person with low or no social supports or social contacts was more likely to be violent in the home. The association between financial problems and the lack of coping mechanisms among parents was found to be an important factor in violence. Most of the street children who encounter abusive situations in their everyday struggles learn to use violence both expressively (language) and instrumentally (physically) as a means of coping with the pileup of stressful events. The risk of abuse and violence increases when the functioning of children and parents is limited and constrained by developmental problems. (e.g. Children who have low intelligence, bedwetting, physical handicap and mental, social or emotional handicaps) and when parents are under considerable stress or have personality problems (immature/impulsive). One faces a problem when a child is repatriated to his family in a remote village where there are few agencies in the community to support the troubled family or do follow-ups to find out how the child is coping.

'Bhola, a 13 year old Nepali boy, lost his parents at a tender age. To earn better wages he decided to go to India like many others. He was a new entrant to New Delhi railway station. But soon his dreams turned into a nightmare. In 3 months he was bullied, slashed with blade and was forced to have sex with older children and men had sex with him {anal and oral} as they found him docile and 'chikna' {smooth}. He came to the crisis center to receive medical help for throat infection. While he stayed at the crisis centre, during his case work session with the social worker, he revealed his experiences of being physically and sexual abused. He was in desperate need of psychological therapy'.

'Junaid was born deaf and dumb. His mother had migrated from U.P and used to live and sell garments on the pavements of Jama Masjid. He was barely 4 years old when he was sexually exploited by men on numerous occasions. Junaid was referred to the crisis center for getting enrolled in a residential school as his mother had expired and his alcoholic stepfather hardly cared for him. He had a lot of behavioral problems. He would expose his penis to children or brush them against his body. He would have sex with other boys, masturbate. He now goes for speech therapy and counselling. He stays in a residential school and is supervised closely'.

NATURE OF ABUSE

68 % of children (12 girls and 56 boys) reported physical abuse as the main reason for leaving home and for refusing to go back to their family or guardian.

32 % of children (18 girls and 14 boys) were subjected to varied degrees of sexual abuse (genital, /anal or oral sex) at different times in their life.

There is now growing awareness that sexual abuse is far more common than previously thought and that it affects much younger children than was considered to be the case.

Abuse	Male	Female	Total
Physical	56	12	68
Sexual	14	18	51
Total	70	30	100

RELATION TO THE PERPETRATOR

Relation to the perpetrator	Nature of Abuse	
	Physical	Sexual
Father	22	5
Mother	10	0
Parents	10	0
Stepfather	3	2
Stepmother	11	0
Brother/Sister-in-law	5	1
Uncle/Aunt	4	3
Employer	17	6
Police	5	0
Older children	3	7
Antisocial elements		15

Perpetrators were **parents** in **63 %** of substantiated cases. One explanation for this could be that in stressful situations wherein they either have limited or no support services the primary caretaker –father or mother–tend to displace their growing frustrations and helplessness over the children. In cases where both are present the father tends to be more aggressive and controlling more so due to the patriarchal nature of our society. The results also indicated that biological mother or stepmothers are slightly more likely than fathers to abuse their children. This could be due to the fact that the mothers spend more time with their children than fathers do, so they have more opportunity to be violent and abusive in as they tend to be ones who have a greater responsibility for child rearing with minimal support systems. In cases where the mother is absent the father or stepfather is more likely to be abusive. It was also observed that girls are more likely to be victimized if they have at some time been separated from their mothers (e.g. If they ever lived away from their mother or their mother is ill or disabled) or if their relations with their mothers are strained.

Sonam was chronically and severely sexually abused by father, her 3 brothers and other men. She fled from home on a number of occasions. Her mother who was mentally disturbed had left home leaving the

siblings with the father despite being aware of the abuse. She would run away from home to avoid being abused but once on streets she would encounter different men and women who in turn would lure her into sexual exploitation. Through a call from a local police station to Childline, South Zone the girl was rescued and her custody was not given to the father. With her help, her younger sister who was also being subject to similar maltreatment was also rescued. Sonam became highly sexualized, used to masturbate daily, had frequent anger outbursts, psychosomatic pains, and nightmares. During one of the sessions she said, "I have got so habituated to sexual intercourse that I can't resist from inserting my finger into the vagina every night." The ongoing therapy was abruptly stopped when Butterflies lost their appeal (case) at Delhi High Court for custody of Sonam and her sister. She was remanded to Government Custodial Home. The two girls continued to be extremely traumatized and guilt ridden. She would displace her hatred and anger to men and was extremely confused with her abusive situations. For two years, the legal proceedings continued and finally the accused were acquitted as the girls kept changing their statements. The father will in all probability get the custody of the children in case he applies for it as stated by the Juvenile Welfare Board who refuse to consider her father's history of abuse.

Childline South zone, Butterflies, 5th February 2002

Majority of the abusers are family members, known persons, as compared to the strangers in the first case. These abusers are known to the child, which gives them an access without arousing much suspicion. Deception and false promises are widely used by the abusers to gain the child's trust and cooperation. The level of self-blame is higher because of the greater taboo and secrecy attached to sexual abuse. The common trend was that more severe the abuse greater was the self blame and thus lesser disclosure. It seems that even though the children may have disclosed to persons they perceived as being supportive, the reactions they faced were varied and sometimes unexpected. One of the common myths is that very young children do not get raped. Though medical examination plays a crucial role in securing conviction for the abused, it should not be considered as the only piece of evidence as in most cases the girls gets molested which in some cases cause more psychological harm to the child than penetrative sex.

The relationship between the victim and the offender can be categorized into 3 main categories:

- Close / Blood relationships-In 13 out of 32 cases of sexual abuse the offender was either the father, brother, uncle, stepfather, brother in law of the victim.
- Close Acquaintance includes mostly those who have an easy access to the child. In 6 cases the offenders were mainly the employers, 7 were older boys in the same area. In 1 case the abuser was the driver and in another it was the neighbour.
- Strangers-In 15 of the cases the offenders were drug addicts living on the streets, men or shopkeepers, etc

PRESENTATION OF ABUSE

- ✓ Disclosure-in many cases were made to the social workers / street educators
- ✓ Behavior-child demonstrated behaviors, which alerted staff to carefully assess unexplained changes in behavior, new behavior, and resurgence or prolonged continuation of behavior previously associated with abuse.
- ✓ Injury
- ✓ Routine medical examination
- ✓ Physical symptoms-vaginal discharge

IMPACT OF ABUSE

Abuse was found to have deleterious effects on psychological functioning. Some of the children also showed extreme degrees of behavioral problems such as

- ✓ Fear of adults or particular adults
- ✓ Poor peer relationships
- ✓ Social isolation and withdrawal
- ✓ Aggression/verbally abusive
- ✓ Frozen awareness (a combination of a lack of expression, lethargy, and watchfulness)
- ✓ Detachment or indiscriminate attachment
- ✓ Eating disorders
- ✓ Sleep disturbance
- ✓ Running away
- ✓ Sudden changes in behavior / Poor school performance
- ✓ Psychosomatic complaints
- ✓ Self-destructive behavior

The way that a child interprets violent experiences significantly determines its impact.

INDICATORS OF CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

- ✓ A child's verbal allegations or disclosure must always be taken seriously.
- ✓ Physical symptoms-vaginal rupture or external injuries, STDs
- ✓ Children's sexual abuse of other children
- ✓ Compulsive masturbation
- ✓ Sexualized talk, behavior, projections (play, drawings); awareness of penetration, oral, anal sex-unusual not age appropriate
- ✓ Persistent running away
- ✓ Drug / alcohol abuse
- ✓ Chronic urinary/vaginal infections
- ✓ Exposure of genitals
- ✓ Clinical depression
- ✓ Unexplained money or gifts
- ✓ Fear of particular people or situations
- ✓ Developmental regression
- ✓ Self mutilation
- ✓ Temper tantrums / stubbornness
- ✓ Conduct problems-stealing, biting, lying
- ✓ Academic underachievement
- ✓ Interpersonal dysfunction

- ✓ Low self esteem
- ✓ Enuresis/ soiling
- ✓ In ability to adjust
- ✓ Suicidal ideation / attempts addiction to drugs

Around 19 of 32 children subjected to extensive and chronic abuse suffered from serious emotional disturbance, evidenced by severe anxiety, depression, or withdrawal, or untoward aggressive behavior or hostility towards others and the parents. Inappropriate sexual behavior, such as frequent and overt sexual stimulation and inappropriate sexual overtures to other children was commonly found among most of the victims of sexual abuse including both boys and girls.

Such psychological effects are seldom addressed let alone assessed even by the professionals and the whole process is treated mechanically. However there are some stress resistant children who despite apparently parents showing rejection survive to be reasonably well-adjusted individuals. The impact of abuse is influenced by factors such as the degree or nature of abuse, perpetrator, duration, coping strategies, etc.

Out of all the feelings expressed by the respondents, anger was found to be prominent followed by disgust. Even several years after the abuse has occurred the children continue to have a wide range of negative feelings about it, almost all perceived the experience negatively. Very few children said anything about their experiences to anybody. Most of them were afraid that they would be blamed for what happened. A child's parents or a supportive individual can play a crucial role in affecting a girl's vulnerability to sexual victimization. One needs to understand how the effect of trauma can impact the subsequent adjustment and functioning of children.

The disclosure could open the door to practical assistance, help the child find meaning behind the abuse and allow her to ventilate her feelings. The personality of the child also influences the disclosure process.

Gradual exposure and processing aim to help sexually abused children overcome posttraumatic stress and related difficulties. Gradual exposure helps to reverse the conditioned responses by encouraging children to confront abuse reminders through a gradual and therapeutic process which encourages them to share the details of their abusive experiences as well as their related thoughts and emotions. Ultimately previously automatic anxiety or avoidant responses to abuse related thoughts and discussion begin to decrease, thereby, freeing children to process their abuse related feelings and concerns more effectively with the assistance of therapists or non offending professionals or parents (*Deblinger and Heflin, 1996*).

CHILDREN'S PERCEPTION OF VIOLENCE

In a session, three girls who had been sexually abused were asked to draw a figure. They drew human body parts. Eight year old Pallavi marked out armpits, breasts, vagina, legs (all sexually sensitive). Pallavi preferred to depict her feelings and thoughts through drawings rather than verbalize them. Once while drawing she said, "you don't know what happens to the girls on the streets. They get ruined....I have stopped trusting everyone. My trust is my biggest weakness. My fate is bad....." On the other hand, 10-year old Manvi was much clearer in her perception of her father. Her feelings of detachment, hatred, anger, and reluctance were quite clear and she was very vocal about it. She would

tightly fold her chunni (shawl) around her chest before going off to sleep. Even in her sleep she would dream that her father took her to a secluded room, removed her clothes, and raped her. Manvi, during her disclosure, drew out a posture of a figure which was not a usual one. She first drew a triangular shape which she called 'lund' (penis). She disclosed that her father used to insert his penis into her mouth and would have oral sex. If she refused he would slap her. Feelings of disgust, fear and hatred were clear in her body language while she described the abuse. If she revealed it to her mother, she would be accused of lying. Once when her mother confronted her husband, she was brutally beaten. Pallavi queried, "Why can't he do it with his wife and why he has to do it with me?" Pallavi expressed her wish to retaliate if she is forced into responding to her father's sexual overtures. Her responses –attempt to flee, slap him or even stab him shows the anger and degree of helplessness she feels when she is unable to do so. During the conversation she kept on fiddling with the caramboard, was not maintaining any eye contact. And suddenly she asked the social worker, "do you know what is revulsion? When a child does not want to tell you something that is called 'Ghin'" (disgust).

Sonam was sexually abused by "so many men.....that it was hard for her to separate them all or have a clearer picture of one. In the court the defense counsel even went to the extent of commenting, "agar main bhi iske ghar ke paas rehta to yeh mujhe bhi accuse karti." ("if I happened to reside near her house she would also accuse me") Sonam was caught up in her own story she was relating in the court. She was so traumatized that she even accused the children or the male staff to have abused her.

Her father would abuse her every night. She responded by staying out most of the night, hanging out in the local park. Since she felt betrayed by her own mother who had left her when she was a small child and by her brothers who would take their chances to rape her with the father's consent, she had no one else she felt she could trust, and hence kept the reason for her absences secret. The defense counselor charged that Sonam was a run away and had been abused by local men other than her family members. The whole onus of the crime was laid on her instead of attempting to understand the matter from the child's perspective.

8-year-old Pallavi was chronically sexually abused by her father. For her he was the only stable support in her childhood. He was perceived by the child as a source of love, security and esteem and the onset of abuse in such cases of incest largely produces experiences which are perceived as threatening to the child. Pallavi often demonstrated feelings of confusion, insecurity and diminished self-esteem. This was particularly so when the dates of court trials were approaching and when she was remanded to the Govt. Custodial Home. Intra familial abuse was found to have a more harmful effect than extra familial abuse and more so if the perpetrator happens to be the father. Even the removal of the child from the home or from the perpetrator who is a family member as a result of the abuse coming to light had heightened the experience of loss or grief caused by the abusive situation.

When she was removed from her father, Pallavi developed confused and ambivalent feelings about her own sexuality and its implication for her father. She used to perceive herself and her body as dirty or worthless. She also learned to take pleasure from sexual activity. She was worried about the consequences of revealing what had happened to her and wanted to know what would happen to her father. Whether she can meet or write letters to her father.

Thus, it is from the sensitive understanding of the children's narratives that we can guess what their confusions and problems are. However, most often the formal and bureaucratic procedures of the legal system ignore the reality of how children think, speak, or act.

Pallavi's abusive experiences were so much a feature of their everyday normal life that it literally might become normal happening to her. Though Pallavi was aware of such distortions, she learnt to develop her own coping strategies which denied or downplayed the gravity of what had happened to her or happening to them. Distancing, denial and blocking are some of the often-used strategies to deal with her distress. Helping Pallavi to express her pain was an extremely delicate and lengthy process and could have been hampered by a hasty process.

The incompatibility between the therapeutic needs of sexually abused children and the demands of the legal system was vividly demonstrated by the experience of the three girls. Both the siblings-Sonam and Tabu- expressed deep frustrations with the legal technicalities that detained them to the govt home. All the three girls spoke about their difficulties they had relating to others, the need to keep troubles within, self doubts about how others perceived them.

In cases of Pallavi, Sonam ,Tabu ,the long drawn out legal trials required them to keep the incidents of abuse fresh in their mind for repetition at the trials. In most cases, even the therapy does not follow or allowed as evidence in the trial cases we handled. The therapy was abruptly stopped and the girls were remanded to the Govt Custodial Home. Sonam and Tabu were summoned a couple of times for testimony, some of which resulted in adjournments. The repeated delays caused a great deal of anxiety and stress among the siblings. The Juvenile Welfare Board (under whom the custodial homes are managed) members who were all females showed extreme disbelief to the incest. They went to the extent of accusing the organization, which had rescued the children of spinning stories-of teaching bad things to the children.

Their testimonies were largely in monosyllables and confusing. It was the fear of rejection or disbelief, the insecurity, guilt, shame, which continued to harbour them and eventually resulted in resistance from disclosing in the court. Given further time, trust and security, they may have provided information about who did what to whom which is not possible within half an hour question hour session in front of a crowd. On the other hand, Pallavi started bedwetting following a testimony in the court against her father. The children were exposed to too many queries from different people regarding the abuse she underwent. Both of them had answered too many questions, satiated too many curious minds and talked a lot about their traumatic experience. They saw how different people reacted to their tales of horror. Such children are very sensitive and they may sink deep into their shell in case they perceive a negative response in the form of disbelief. All three girls felt considerably dissatisfied with the legal proceedings and what happened to them-contrary to their wishes. This itself made them wary of disclosing what had happened to them for fear of the consequences for, and from, their families. The children once again felt their sense of powerlessness. They eventually blamed themselves for what had happened to their fathers.

Cases of these three children give us a glimpse of their fragmented world of many such children who undergo similar abuse and stress factors. These accounts provide us an insight into the emotional needs as expressed by the children and highlights the need for

us to advocate and negotiate for priority to be given to the needs of children who are caught up in this manner.

Sexual abuse of boys commonly known as sodomy is largely under-reported. On the other hand, as experience has shown us that, even if the cases are reported to the police, it is hardly considered as serious as the sexual abuse of girls. The reasons are: the victim's fear of homosexuality; a response to the stress caused by the abuse through externalized behavior; the culture of masculine self-reliance and ideas about youthful male sexuality (Mendal 1995) and even the lack of medical evidence accounts for the inadequate attention given to the crime. Male sexuality, which is largely, equated to power, control and dominance in our patriarchal society further compounds the problem.

NATURE OF INTERVENTIONS IN ABUSE CASES

Immediate action to secure the safety of the child in these circumstances is the first step taken. The Juvenile Justice Act 2000, bestows upon professionals or public persons right to report cases of suspected abuse or neglect. When a call is reported as in the case of Childline, the social workers investigate to determine whether the child is in need of help. Once confirmed about the extent of abuse, then usually two options are available to protect the child.

- Removing the child and placing him or her in an institution.
- Or providing the family with social support such as referrals, counseling etc.

In retrospect, neither of the solution is ideal and involves risk. For instance, a very young child may not understand why he or she is being removed from the home. Children who are removed from abusive homes may be protected from physical damage, but they still suffer emotional harm. The emotional harm arises from the fact that abused children still love and have strong feelings for their parents and do not understand why they have been removed from their parents and homes. Often abused children blame themselves for the abuse and hence require special psychological care, which makes it difficult to find a suitable placement for them. They are usually taken into custody with their emotional baggage, which the caretakers find it difficult to deal with.

MENTAL HEALTH INTERVENTIONS

Most of these children are at a risk for physical, mental health and developmental problem. 12 children had received therapeutic help from mental health professional as a result of emotional and behavioral difficulty. However there is a general shortage of treatment for sexually abused children and it is an expensive process. If these psychological problems are not addressed it continues to persist or gets aggravated and gets carried into adulthood thus making the need for therapy all the more important. Equally important is to sustain and reinforce the desirous effects wherever the child continues to stay in the long term. However the emotional processing of the trauma after the child had disclosed the abuse, facilitating recovery to pre abuse functioning and evaluation via follow ups rarely takes place or gets interrupted .

RESIDENTIAL CARE AND TRAINING OF THE CAREGIVERS

The data demonstrates that around 43% of the children were placed in Children's homes as a result of the mistreatment by their families or relatives and their unwillingness to return to them. Among them 12 children were visited by their parents and few even later

went back to their families as the relations between the family and the child began to improve.

Recently there have been many debates about how to provide good care for children placed away from home. We do not have sufficient data to demonstrate abuse in institutions, however, in recent years more and more cases of child abuse are coming out in the open. Children, who are abused, neglected or those who cannot be cared for by their families for various reasons may be placed in the protective care of a custodial Home. However a child in a residential care forms an 'at risk group' as a consequence of earlier abuse, neglect, abandonment and inadequate care at home. Many children entering care have already been harmed psychologically and emotionally and have developed antagonistic behaviors and may at times also experience dysfunctionalities. The caretakers may have under their care more than one child with such difficulties, as such, they often struggle to cope with the demands of these emotionally vulnerable children whose maladjusted behavior and patterns of communication may at times be misinterpreted. Hence, these issues are central to the rehabilitation of abused children and calls for continuous training and support programmes for the staff to equip them with the necessary skills to handle such children. Their experience, training, and support will be crucial to any success in meeting these children's long term and complex needs.

Ashima ran away at the age of 8 years from her home in Hyderabad. Her mother had expired and her father used to have sex with her and often beat her. She met our street educator at the New Delhi railway station who brought her to the crisis center. Ashima was referred to a residential school. In past 6 years Ashima has run away from various children's homes. The wardens complained of her stealing, lying, bedwetting and other problems. On the third attempt to run away she was caught and the "home" refused to take her back on the ground that they cannot take a risk. Ashima was sent for counselling and therapy. Now she has a new home, friends and studies hard to prove herself. Her behavioral problems have reduced but some continue to persist.

New Delhi Railway Station, Butterflies Contact point, 1996

As a child of 8 years, Suman use to be withdrawn, curiously dissociated from her present environment and unwilling to answer any personal questions. For a child her age Suman seemed to have an almost adult intensity of dissociation and did not respond with either fear, curiosity or shyness. She did not receive any formal education and spent most of the time helping with the household chores for which her father frequently beat her. In the therapy sessions, Suman finally revealed that her father was an abusive alcoholic who routinely beat up her mother and her. She hated and feared him and was completely unwilling to consider going home because of him. She said he sexually abused her by inserting a finger in her vagina, which he did at night and threatened to beat her, if she spoke. She experienced pain and fear but was unable

to tell him. She therefore saw her running away as the only way to escape him. Her sexual abuse has turned her into a frightened confused child but her distance from the father had helped her to feel safe. The sessions helped her to share her feelings around the abuse and free herself from guilt and shame. She understands clearly that her father is a bad man and she need not feel responsible for what he was doing to her. In the last session, she did say that she wanted to go back to her mother but is very clear that she does not want to be near her father and is not sure that her mother will protect her. Suman's mother or her family in village could not be traced. She was referred to a residential school where they found her lack of interest in usual things and withdrawal state beyond their understanding. She was soon labeled as a 'problem child' and ultimately ran away from the Home. The Home refused to take her back and after much efforts another Home with few children was identified where she now continues to stay and studies in 4th standard. She no longer yearns to go back home, her cheerful greetings warm everyone and is working hard to speak English.

Childline South zone, Butterflies, 7th November 2000

These glimpses highlight some of the important issues surrounding the often-difficult behavior of abused children and the difficulties faced by the caretakers. Caregivers and supporting professionals need to anticipate that the child is likely to have ongoing, often complex needs that are difficult to meet and may cause problems to the caretakers and other children in the center. Adequate supervision with sensitivity along with other appropriate support on a regular basis is important in such cases.

✓ CHILD REARING PRACTICES

Another significant factor is the issue of standards of parental care and behavior in the absence of a defined one due to diverse cultures is a major problem for professionals. Poverty, deprivation, unemployment, lack of infrastructure, and other macro issues significantly influence the rearing practices across nations. This makes the Indian cultural context poles apart from that of the west. An area, which is, regarded as highly personal and rarely welcomes any sort of intrusion easily.

However differentiating between culturally normative and abusive parenting becomes a critically difficult but essential task for professionals.

✓ JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

The primary task is to protect the children and that where necessary one should employ the full force of the law to ensure this.

The **Child welfare Committee**, stipulated under the **Juvenile Justice Act 2000** is an apex body, which acts primarily on behalf of children wherever risk is perceived. In cases where the family ceases to provide a protective environment for the child, the legal authority must pitch in and ensure that the child gets a safe place to stay.

However in reality, the provisions are rarely implemented. Often too much emphasis is placed on restoring children to their parents despite assessment of the families by organization and professionals stating otherwise.

- A father who is accused of physically and sexually abusing his children gets the custody of the children.
- An adolescent girl who was trafficked on a couple of occasions by the stepfather and was subjected to abuse both sexually and physically by the employer is sent back to the same treacherous stepfather in a remote town of Bihar by the sessions court.
- The custody of a 5-year-old girl is granted to her adoptee mother who thrashes her daily.

These are few of the appalling instances, which reflect the insensitive approach of the legal bodies. It calls for a need for child-focused approach, with much more emphasis on assessing families for potential risk. The agencies responsible for the care and protection of children need to be aware of the fact that families can be dangerous and distressing places for children and to intervene more authoritatively into families in the light of the knowledge that abuse of children by their parents is more widespread than had been previously thought to be the case.

✓ **How Children Perceive the Judiciary**

- I feel ashamed to speak out in the court in front of so many people
- I am scared to face my father in the court.
- Why do these people speak in English? I can't understand anything
- We will tell the judge that we don't want to stay at the remand home
- Will they send us back to our father?
- I don't like to repeat my story to different people again and again
- Could you stand with me in the courtroom when they ask questions?

These are some of the many questions children ask when they come in contact with the legal bodies, questions for which even the perplexed adults have no answersa system which fails to understand the psyche of the child. Listening to the child victim and providing mental and medical support are primary actions taken to aid the child 's recovery, at the same time ensuring severe punishment for the abuser.

The Indian legal system needs to undergo certain changes particularly in relation to child sexual abuse. Some constraints present in law are reflected below.

- ✓ The section 375 and 376 states penile penetration in a vagina is the only kind, which constitutes rape only. Oral or object penetration is not considered. A rape with an object is not a greater offence than a rape with a penetration.
The scope of these sections needs to be widened and make it gender neutral to include those boys who get sexually assaulted
- ✓ Also a differentiation needs to be made between child sexual abuse by a parent and its extended family and strangers as the former has more serious psychological repercussions than the latter one.
- ✓ Section 354-outraging modesty-also has some major flaws. A sexual assault, which is non-penetrative, can be equally detrimental to a child than a penetrative sex.

In addition, even in a medico legal cases the child is attended to after 3-5 hours of waiting in the emergency and in most cases the gynecologists rarely mention the details of the damage, which is important for the case.

Due to few clear-cut medical signs of abuse, whether physical or sexual, often the abusers go scot-free. Especially in young children external injuries in the private parts gets healed much faster and hence fails to prove as medical evidence. Because of the lack of hard scientific evidence and because of the very secretive nature of sexual abuse of children, which makes it unlikely that anyone but the perpetrator and the child know that the abuse is going on, the child's account of events becomes a crucial factor. Nevertheless, there is still tremendous pressure placed on children in legal proceedings and this acts as a deterrent to those deciding whether to prosecute alleged offenders or not.

The criminal history of the families or guardians, which is disclosed, must be relevant for child protection purposes. This means that a person's conduct will have had or is likely to have a detrimental effect upon a child in terms of causing significant harm. Such conduct would encompass not only previous relevant convictions /cautions but could also include acquittals and a situation where criminal proceedings of a relevant nature are pending. It also needs to consider the need to bear in mind that the child protection process works on the civil balance of probabilities which implies that it is also important to take note of suspected offences but where there was insufficient evidence to prosecute. A parent or a guardian with a history of violence or drug or alcohol abuse could also be a relevant factor.

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

The protection and welfare of the child must be of paramount consideration in all our interventions. Certain measures have been put forth which can make the intervention strategies in abuse cases and the protection services more effective, focused and holistic in their approach.

- Children are best protected when all the concerned agencies work together. Information sharing between agencies is of crucial importance and takes precedence over other issues. A set of procedures must be laid down and followed to ensure prompt and effective action help to children.
- Training and support groups for parents. In as many cases as possible we have tried to maximize parent involvement.
- To promote a shared understanding of the role of the various agencies involved in child protection work such as GOs/NGOs, police, Hospitals, Judiciary, Schools, transport, media and so on. One needs to recognize that the protection of children from abuse requires not only the application of appropriate legal remedies, counselling and medical care but also a commitment to work jointly and effective liaison between all those involved.
- As of now the major focus of work with children who have been abused continues to be on discovery and inquiry. However, prevention of abuse should take on a higher priority in our work.