CHAPTER IV  
CASE STUDIES  

Although at the beginning of the research study it was intended to probe only a limited number of cases, when the survey proper began the researcher was almost shocked by the number of CSA that were brought to her notice. So the number of cases contacted and analysed increased and as many as 50 victims were contacted. All those cases were not examined in depth. Only a limited number of cases were probed and studied deeply. All such cases were followed up through legal assistance, counselling and other modes of assistance. In this chapter only selected case studies are reported. These are, of course, indicative samples.

Case studies were conducted with the objectives of gaining an in depth insight into the issue and extending emotional and legal support to the child and the caretakers with the aim of helping the victimized child in the process of healing from the trauma. These interactive sessions with the child and the family extended to several hours. Secondly, it was to create awareness among the public, the police, the judiciary including the lawyers about CSA and to conscientise them. The process focused on bringing a change in their attitude towards the crime and the affected children leading to the creation of a healthy social atmosphere. Thirdly, case studies were
conducted due to its academic importance and to compare the findings of the study with those done by others.

Sexual abuse is nearly always a deeply disruptive, disorienting and destructive experience for the child. Consequently, there is interference with the accomplishment of normal developmental tasks. The progression of mastery of one’s self, environment and relationship with others is significantly disrupted by the child’s permanently altered awareness and new role vis-à-vis the perpetrator.

**CASES**

**Case 1**

Joy, a 11 year old boy was abused by four neighbouring men who dragged him and 2 other children to a deserted building and orally abused him one after the other. The other 2 children managed to escape and hide behind a wall. They were witness to this gruesome incident. Though the boy was held tightly by the accused he finally managed to escape. After this incident, another man in the vicinity who heard about the incident pulled the child away while he was playing and orally abused him as if it were his prerogative since others had abused him. The child did not disclose this to any of his family members as he was threatened to be killed. The mother sensed some changes in the child and asked him as to why he was withdrawing into himself. The child did not disclose anything. Finally, on the previous night of his first communion (a catholic Christian sacrament when a child receives the Eucharist for the first time ceremoniously), he confessed it to his
mother. He was in tears and he believed that he had committed a great
sin and it took his mother a long time to allay his fears.

The victimized child's family filed a case. The Magistrate
called the boy and took down his statements. The child's mother and
father had an early marriage at the ages of 18 and 21 respectively. His
father was very possessive about his wife and felt hurt when the
mother was more involved with the children. Their elder son was 16
and the age difference between the parents and children was not much
and there was a communication gap between them. Actually the elder
son and the main accused were of the same age group. The mother
was emotionally disturbed and she had even gone to the extent of
hating her elder son as he belonged to the same age group as the
accused and indulged in the fancies of a teenager. The situation in the
family had become very complex. The mother felt that the abused child
had become normal after she talked to him and pacified him whereas
the elder son had become rebellious and both the parents could not
appreciate or understand his behaviour. So there was tension in
between family members.

As a result of the Public Interest Litigation filed in the High
Court, the case was speeded up and child friendly procedures were
introduced in the court-room. This alarmed the accused who used
various strategies like threats and intervention by local politicians to
dampen the morale of the family. The lawyer tried to coax the child
witnesses to change their statements but utterly failed. He spread
rumours about the mother being an immoral woman. The people in the
village who had ostracized the family later on supported them after an awareness raising programme was held in the village by the researcher. A one-day talk was arranged in the panchayat hall which was attended by several women. Hand-outs which addressed the issue and how it affects the future of the children were distributed through anganwadis. The programme began with a discussion of gender issues and slowly moved on to the issue of child sexual abuse and then went on to the specific case where the mother narrated her child's experience of abuse. This was heart-rending for most women. It served two purposes: firstly, of raising awareness about the issue and secondly of garnering moral support for the family. The support which the family received after the programme was overwhelming. (This approach is incorporated in the methodology of the study.) Despite several strategies employed by the defence lawyers, the accused were convicted for a period of one year.

In continuation, several discussions were held with the concerned police officials and policemen and complaints were registered either in the Superintendent of Police's office or Deputy Inspector General's office to put an end to the threats issued by the accused and supporters. Discussions with the police were conducted mainly with the intention of raising awareness about how child sexual abuse affects the growth of the child and how it is their duty to stop this crime from taking place. Discussions which began at a professional level gradually progressed to the personal level where they were asked to think of a situation as to how they would feel and react if their child would be abused. This was eye-opener for several
police personnel. This approach of introducing the discussion at a
typical professional level and spontaneously being led to the personal
was found to be a very useful method and hence became part of the
methodology.

A common feature observed in most of the cases was an
attempt to defame the character of the mother by branding her as
immoral. They were accused of indulging in immoral activities and so
the child had learnt this habit from the mother and had asked for it and
was a consenting party to it. In brief, they reasoned that it was the
immoral cultural background of the child which caused the abuse. This
was morally dampening for the woman and totally crushed her spirits.
The researcher wrote a letter to the bar association with the twin
objective of raising awareness among lawyers about the issue, the
consequences it has on the child and to pressure them to accept more
child-friendly procedures in the court room. The letter was circulated
in various bar associations.

Case 2

The child is six year old Mumtaz. She was molested by a
neighbouring 28 years old man and the child was terribly frightened.
The child’s father was a peon in the UP school and her mother was a
housewife. They had been married for 14 years. The wife conceived
only after 8 years. She had to take a lot of medicines and gave birth to
the child after 8 months of conception. They will not have another
biological child. Hence they were extremely careful about this child.
The assailant was an unemployed person with a track record of reckless living. He had raped two girls earlier but no case had been registered as the girls were in their adolescence and parents feared that it would affect their marriage prospects. As a consequence of the abuse, the child was hospitalised and had fever for 2 days. She had been playing in the courtyard when the mother went in to the kitchen to clean fish. He pulled the child to his house and attempted to rape her in the standing position. The child managed to run home but instead of talking to the mother she went directly to the bathroom, washed her legs and slept. The mother was surprised, went to the bedroom and touched the child and realized that she was burning with fear. The mother thought that the child must have wounded herself and examined her legs and saw that there were no wounds. When she went to the bathroom, there were blood stains on her underwear. The mother was shocked to see the vagina reddened and enlarged. She woke up and spoke to the child and when she learnt of the penetration, she lost consciousness and fell down. Mumtaz was terrified seeing mother losing consciousness. She felt that something terrible had happened in her life. The mother was so guilty that she did not tell anything about it to her husband that day but told him the next morning. They went to a private hospital fearing the stigma. The lady-doctor who examined the child gave a false report. On being interviewed, she said that she did not have time to spend in courts. In the FIR, the police turned penetration to unnatural intercourse. The child became frightened of the dark. The mother was seriously ill and laid down for several months. After Koottam’s intervention and having several sessions with
her where she was convinced that child sexual abuse is a social problem which affects several children and that she should not take the whole blame upon herself. She should consider it as an accident and help the child heal her own wounds by creating a good environment. After such counselling sessions the mother could garner her strength.

The case was speeded up through a Public Interest Litigation filed in the High Court at the instance of the researcher. The accused was asked to be produced in the Chief Justice’s chamber. As a result of an in-depth dialogue with the lawyer of the accused, he withdrew himself from the case. The case was conducted speedily and the accused was convicted for a period of 3 years. The child suffers from fright as a consequence and has become withdrawn. The child’s sense of self and her body image became negative, with the internalised image having far more effect on how she experiences herself.

Case 3

Anand’s father was an auto driver and mother a housewife. He had an elder sister and grandmother. He was being abused by a neighbour whose two children were of Anand’s age. The child was being taken from the school to isolated spots and abused. The abuse especially took place in a pond in which there was no water. The child was forced to lie down and he got suffocated during oral intercourses. The child now suffers from hearing impairment. The child had been threatened to be killed if he revealed it to someone. The child was frightened that his father would beat him if he knew of what was happening. The child was relieved when his father on coming to know
of the abuse cross-questioned the accused and registered a case. Anand lost all his friends as the news of the abuse was publicised. He has no one to play with. He had to be shifted to a new school. Due to the tension within the family, the elder daughter failed in the tenth standard. Threats were issued by the accused. Due to Koottam’s intervention, the accused was called to the police station and warned. Due to the public interest litigation (PIL) filed in the High Court, the case was speeded up and a punishment of 2 years imprisonment was awarded. Several counselling sessions were held with the child. The first time he came, he could not even play. He had stopped playing, withdrew into himself and his only solace was drawing and painting.

He talked about the abusive experience. He did not know why the accused was taking him away. He was first confused. He hated the force but did not know how his father would react. He was so relieved when his father questioned the accused. Due to the stigma faced by both children, the family was forced to sell their property and shift residence. The child’s sense of relief comes from his engagement in art and craft work.

Case 4

Gautam, a 11 year old boy child was abused by 5 neighbours in several horrifying ways. Showing pornography, they orally and anally penetrated him. He was even forced to drink semen and act like a woman. Stories of their ‘adventure’ spread and several other men abused him. The threat was that they would kill his brother who was
the sole earning member of the family if he disclosed it any one. The boy finally disclosed the matter when he began having ulcers in his mouth and could not swallow food. He stopped his studies and could not go out as people used to tease him in the streets. He also started having fits and losing consciousness for a long stretch of time. The reason was of course psychological. Feeling of guilt and fear overpowered him.

He belonged to an agricultural family and his parents had to work in the paddy fields to earn an income. He had an elder brother and an elder sister. The elder brother working in America was the sole earning member. Gautam felt that he brought ill-reputation to the family. The abused child was of a shy nature and peace-loving. He never picked up fights. He used to help with domestic work. The abusers were neighbours and his brother’s friends who had been looked after by Gautam’s mother in their childhood.

In the counselling sessions, Gautam recounted how he was made to act like a woman character in the films. They pressed and pulled at his breasts. Now he faces the identity crisis of whether he is a man or a woman. As he was threatened that his brother would be killed if he revealed it to anyone, he was terrified and did not know whom to speak to. It was only when he developed ulcers in his mouth and could not eat that his mother asked him the reason. The parents had noticed certain changes in their son but they never expected that he was being abused.
The police registered a case but it was taken up for hearing only after 3 years and the proceedings were conducted in the open court. The child was subjected to gruesome cross-questioning by 5 defence lawyers who were keen to prove that the child had consented to it. He fainted in the open court-room. On hearing about the incident from the bench clerk, Koottam decided to intervene. Koottam filed a Public Interest Litigation in the High Court praying to enforce in-camera proceedings, have child-friendly atmosphere in the court-room, have the presence of a third person intimate to the child and not any witness during cross-questioning. The magistrate should use his discretion and intervene when the child is put through harrowing questioning. The High Court immediately responded with an encouraging order. The researcher held detailed sessions with the Sessions Judge, Magistrate, Assistant Public Prosecutor and all defense lawyers to convince them as to how traumatic the cross-questioning can be for the child. Efforts were made to build up consciousness on the need to counter CSA and the urgency for legal deterrence. Gautam had been undergoing convulsions since the abuse. The doctor said that it was not epilepsy but a disorder which had developed out of fear. He would have an attack of fits, start banging his head, hands and legs on the floor and lose consciousness for several days and would have to be hospitalised. During the second round of testimony, the researcher could prepare him well for the trial and he answered all the questions with confidence. After initial sessions, he again called up the researcher and revealed that he was not only abused by these 5 people but some other men in the village who
were friends of his maternal uncles. He was in a dilemma that he had not included the names of other accused in the case.

The whole family was put through deep turmoil. The parents wept bitterly, they had to shift residence to another locality unable to bear the sarcasm. He stopped his studies unable to bear the sarcasm of villagers when he went to school. But now Gautam has come a long way through the counselling sessions. The researcher succeeded in inspiring him to undertake exercises so that he overcame his negative body image and hatred for his body. He has started working in a temple and now he finds solace in prayers and worshipping in the temple.

To some extent the victim who is keeping a secret and helping to protect the family is in a position of some power and control. Gautam was so frightened that his intelligent elder brother would be killed that he could only fall at the feet of his brother and weep. He could not explain to his family members why he was doing this or how he was subjected to abuse. Mumtaz who had been abused by a neighbour was so frightened after the incident that she immediately washed herself and went off to sleep. She also had a high temperature and only on her mother’s probing managed to disclose. The child did not know how or in which language to disclose this to parents. Joy only disclosed her experience to his mother when he received his first communion. He was under the impression that he had committed a grave sin and could not be forgiven. Several survivors of child sexual abuse started speaking about their experiences after they were exposed.
to a workshop which helped them disclose and de-link the issue from the stigma it is attached with.

**Case 5**

Jasmine, a 15 year old girl who was studying in the 10th standard was raped by her teacher. He was cunning enough to molest children even in the classroom. In this case he called the girl to his house under the pretext of giving grammar text book and raped her. This leaked out. The issue was taken by the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and posters denouncing the crime were hung in the school premises. The PTA demanded his suspension. Action was taken by school authorities and he was suspended. The child is being ridiculed by all the neighbours and villagers and she finds it difficult to move out of the house. She could not appear for the 10th standard exams, due to the tension and fear. All relatives blame her for not informing parents immediately.

**Case 6**

Kripa was the daughter of a divorced mother growing up with her mother and grandfather. She was a pampered child and this had impaired her natural development. She was subjected to abuse by her maternal cousin 4 years elder to her. Since the abuse started at a very young age, she had felt that this was an expression of love. In her adolescence, she began to hate it and resisted it and her energy was expended in resisting the abuse. She was so frightened when she had her menarche that she did not inform anyone about it for several
months. Her posture was badly affected and she could talk in a baby prattle.

The male cousin was brought by his mother in an atmosphere of strict discipline and was supposed to be the best in academics and literary activities. As the elder son was mentally disabled, all her hopes rested on the younger son. He was treated like a prince by all aunts. Kripa resented this pampering and protested against this. Meanwhile, she developed an affair and this was taken up as an issue by all the male cousins and she was beaten up. Finally, it was decided that she should be taken to the psychiatrist. This was shocking for the abuser as he realized that the family would come to know of his involvement in the matter. Unable to cope with the situation he committed suicide by jumping into the waterfalls. The family blamed her for this and it was even more traumatic for the 16 year old girl. Several counselling sessions were conducted with her and she was sent on various exposure trips which opened her mind to the world beyond the home, the traumatic experience. She shows considerable improvement.

**CASE OF SURVIVORS**

**Case 7**

A survivor of child sexual abuse, Elizabeth, who was abused by her father is now in a commendable position. She feels as if she has lost half of her self. Even now she has bouts of terrific anger which she sometimes releases on her child and sometimes on her infant and later on feels terribly guilty. She says that if it is your father who abused
you then 'your half life is gone', 'you are done with, destroyed'. She keeps repeating these words. She feels guilty of not having disclosed the sexual abuse to her partner but since there is very little communication in between them, she never feels confident to discuss this issue. She also does not understand her own need to protect her father. In the effort to save the family from disintegration, she has not yet disclosed it. She is often blamed for her rudeness by some other members of the extended family. The tendency to indulge in excessive masturbation which she developed after the abuse has formed a barrier in having a satisfying sexual relationship with her husband. Elizabeth is angry with her mother who did not have the guts to divorce her father despite severe marital discord. She appears complacent but is seething with anger from within. She feels guilty for not being able to rise up to the norms set down for a good daughter-in-law. She is also seething with fury because she is not able to recollect how her father molested or abused her. She has so disassociated herself from the memories that it is not possible to recall event.

**Case 8**

Mukti, survivor of incestuous sexual abuse was the eldest of 3 children. Her father was an ex-military man, counterfeiting money and running private buses. Her mother was his second wife. He had divorced his first wife who had 2 sons claiming that the sons were not his. He used to physically abuse all three children dragging them on the road and kicking them in their stomach. The mother felt that they should bear all this as they would lose their prestige if they returned to
the maternal family. The girl children were subjected to vaginal and oral intercourse. The brother saw his younger sister being abused by his father and he reported it to his mother. The mother was shocked and she took her to the maternal home where she grew up. She became the butt of all sorts of ridicule. Her father had relationship with several women but the mother never believed that he would subject her children to abuse. Abused till the age of 13, Mukti realized that this is not the way all fathers behave. She struggled to ward off sexual attacks and then he indulged in other forms of physical abuse. Mother felt that all he needed was psychological treatment. He was taken to three psychiatrists but no one could actually address his problem. The issue sobered down for some time and continued again. As the younger sister abused him in open, he threw her out of the house. He did not let the family participate in her marriage which was arranged by the maternal family. Mukti also hated her mother for not having protected them. She was also under the impression that if her mother kept the house clean and washed herself properly then her father would not abuse her. While being abused, her father kept saying that your mother’s vagina is not tight enough.

Mukti spent several years of her energy fighting against her father and developed several illness like arthritis. Finally, they escaped from that house to the maternal house. They have filed a divorce case and in addition another case to get access to the house. During Koottam’s intervention, while we confronted him, he said that his daughter is of an immoral character and she has had abortions. It was a
tiresome experience to get the case registered as the police had to be explained for 5 hours before the Deputy Superintendent of Police was convinced of the need for registering the case. Several counselling sessions were conducted to help her feel that she is not dirty or damaged and make her feel self-reliant.

Case 9

Shahbanu, a survivor of sexual abuse who had been abused in various ways by several relatives at a young age. Totally confused and disoriented, she, later, started entering into several relationships which were basically exploitative. Her husband used to beat her, spread tales about her abuse in the village and she was referred to as an AIDS patient. She was divorced and after the divorce she again developed relationship with a person much younger to her. He then went around spreading tales about their sexual relationship. She was always in a state of confusion and fails to take decisions about these relationships and putting them to an end. She entered into newer relations and collapsed on realizing that the same pattern of abuse has been repeated. She was not able to maintain smooth relation with anyone in the family. She also felt that she was suffering from several diseases mostly related to reproductory organs but on examination the doctor realised that this was merely a feeling. She is now under psychiatric treatment but has a tendency to discontinue the treatment. But on the
whole she has come back to a normal life as the scars of the horrifying assaults have started fading from her active memory.  

**ANALYSIS**

As described by Burgess and Holmstrom [1975], Child Sexual Abuse is most often kept a secret by both the perpetrator and the victim. When the secret is disclosed by the child victim, he or she is held responsible for the incident. Disclosure of child sexual abuse can be expected to cause profound disruption for the victim, the victim’s family and the perpetrator as seen in all the cases mentioned above. Based on an analysis of the cases narrated above and many other cases that the researcher had to handle the following

**Intrusion, Isolation and Frozen Fright**

The child experiences intrusion, both physical and emotional from sexual abuse. Depending on the child’s resources and supports, a sense of damage-sometimes less: I am altered and sometimes more: I am damaged- and a sense of powerlessness is experienced. (Wieland Sandra, 1997). The sense of damage, feeling dirty and sense of powerlessness were experienced by every child.

A sense of isolation is apparent in the accounts given by abused children. Like Anand or Gautam they often feel different from their school fellows. They kept themselves far away from friends. They were ashamed of themselves, their families or their condition.

---

1. All the names of the children have been changed to maintain confidentiality
Furthermore, abusive parents tend to discourage friendships as seen in the case of Mukti and Kripa. Abused children cannot be intimate with anyone outside the family owing to their feelings of guilt and shame. They will suspect genuine kindness because of their inability to trust and their sense of their own unworthiness and so they keep people at arms length, carrying the burden of their secret alone. Children who feel mistrustful and isolated will be heading towards stagnation and despair rather than being full of ideas for change and hope for the future as closely seen in the cases of Mukti, Elizabeth and Kripa.

The victims always experience frozen fright. Frozen fright is not simply a stunned paralysis. The victims are apparently calm, quiet and obedient. The initial quiet, before the compliant phase, explains why so many perpetrators are able to claim that their victims must have liked the sexual activities. For many years, child protection workers have recognized ‘frozen watchfulness’ in physically abused children. This is present in the form of extreme compliance in cases of sexual molestation. In many cases of child sexual abuse, the perpetrator befriends the victim and is gentle and kind, only to become overpowering and threatening on other occasions. Mukti says how her father appreciated her cooking, her way of keeping things clean and handed all the receipts and pass-book to her for safe custody and at the same time took on a demoniac form when he called her upstairs. The very call made her stop breathing out of terror as she realised that the purpose was abuse.
Nearly all child victims met by the researcher exhibited some symptoms or signs of depression after the disclosure of sexual abuse. In some victims there were some overt signs of depression with the child appearing sad, subdued or withdrawn while in others the depression was masked and expressed as complaints of fatigue or physical illness. This actually corroborates the findings of Sgroi M. Suzanne (1989) All the children had physical illness. Mumtaz was terribly frightened and withdrawn. Joy suffered the least due to the excellent parenting skills of his mother who engaged him in various extra-curricular activities and made him feel convinced that it was no fault of his. Other children had extreme forms of depression and severe physical manifestations.

**Fear for Others and Fear for Themselves**

It has been established that perpetrators groom children to prevent disclosure by using overt threats, or by using more subtle methods. Children are usually threatened by perpetrators of hurting the child’s nearest and dearest ones. Children may have considerable anxiety about the well-being and fate of other people if they disclose. They may fear for themselves and a sense of guilt is instilled in their minds. They feel that they have done something wrong. In the case of Gautam who have been abused by 5 neighbours, despite strong oral evidence and collaborative medical evidence, the accused were acquitted. There was great celebration and distribution of liquor. Threats were again issued. Gautam . Joy and Anand were so frightened that their dear ones would be killed if they revealed. The secret
weighed heavily on their hearts and they felt partners to a sinister crime.

The worst experience of the victims, one might say, is that they are objected or commodified as soon as the truth about the abuse is revealed. The sexually victimized child may be viewed neither as a child nor as an adult but rather as a piece of "damaged goods" lacking the attributes of both childhood and adulthood. When viewed in this way, children are particularly vulnerable to an indescribable sense of unbelongingness. Mukti was constantly presented to everyone in the village as a damaged piece of good by her father when she openly revealed the abuse and registered the case. Gautam and the other child who were abused by her teacher were constantly teased by people in the village and they had to stop their studies and had to be confined to their homes. If they are perceived as so altered and damaged that the usual constraints and restrictions about sexual behaviour do not hold, sexually victimized children may become 'walking limitations' to others who wish to act out. Shahbanu was portrayed almost as a sex worker and young men thought that she could be sexually exploited.

Sexual abuse inevitably involves parts of the body that are referred to with a degree of shame and embarrassment. From the earliest days, children are so often shamed into mastering bladder and sphincter control. The parts of the body involved in these functions also happen to be the primary sites for sexual activity.
Children usually have limited sexual vocabulary and even if they can repeat words they are often unaware of the true meaning. Health professionals need to be alert to sexually abused adolescents who either have no interest or show aversion in sexual matters which is quite unusual for their age and seem overly ingenuous. Kripa pretended that she had no information about her own body parts or menarche or sex even in adolescence when she actually had started menstruating. She felt dirty that she was being abused and had knowledge about the genital organs and the sexual activity. She felt that in order to be a good girl and appreciated by others in the family, she had to pretend ignorance.

Negative feelings can extend beyond victims’ thoughts about themselves to visual images about themselves. It is not unusual for victims of child sexual abuse, especially incest victims to describe themselves in derogatory terms. Their very identities are at issue and they ask as pointed out by Suzanne: ‘who am I’, ‘I am both a child and a sexual partner of someone who is supposed to be parenting or nurturing or protecting me’ (Sgroi M. Suzanne) Kripa felt extremely dirty and confused when her father, while engaging in intercourse told her that he did not feel satisfied with her mother as she had a loose vagina and she did not keep herself clean. She was being compared with her mother and this was shocking to her.
Repressed Anger and Hostility

Although the abused children may appear outwardly passive and compliant, most child sexual abuse victims are inwardly seething with anger and hostility. First, victims are angry at the perpetrators who abused and exploited them. They are also angry with parents or family members who failed to protect them from the sexual abuse or in some cases may have set them up to be abused. The rage and hostility felt by victims may extend to neighbours, friends, school personnel, classmates and others in the community depending on their responses to the disclosure of sexual abuse. Most often, the victims’ anger is repressed rather than expressed or acted out. Sometimes the repressed rage is manifested by depression or withdrawal, sometimes by physical symptoms and sometimes by aggressive fantasies or behaviour. Mukti internalised what her father said and felt that it was her mothers untidiness which was causing the abuse. She blamed her mother for failing to protect her or send her away to a safe environment or making arrangement for her studies. Mukti was extremely bitter about her mother that she saw her father’s psychiatric treatment and her marriage as the only solution for these problems. Elizabeth is angry that despite having a job, her mother did not take a divorce but continued with the relation. She felt that her mother should have divorced her father and given them a safe family environment. Kripa was extremely angry that her mother and aunt used to give special treatment to the cousin when he came and so she threw all the things in a fit of rage. She felt that her
mother had failed to protect her and as she was the child of a divorcée, her male cousins made her a laughing stock.

**Low Self-Esteem and Poor Social Skills**

Low self-esteem combined with a feeling of being somehow spoiled or damaged in turn tend to undermine the victim’s self-confidence which was the experience of all children.

Many victims of intrafamily child sexual abuse have been pressured by their parents to limit outside relationships and to depend only upon interaction with other family members to meet their social needs. This has caused serious psychic stress and consequently the victims often feel helpless and are rarely assertive on their own behalf.

Negative feelings can extend beyond the victims’ thoughts about themselves to visual images about themselves. It is not unusual for victims of child sexual abuse, especially incest victims to describe themselves in derogatory terms. Many slender and attractive girls who have been sexually victimized describe themselves as fat and ugly. Some find themselves so unappealing that they will initiate a series of sexual relationships (often with disastrous results) to prove to themselves that they are “desirable”. Possessing inadequate social skills, they tend to act out sexually and thus reinforce society’s image of them as seductive and promiscuous creatures who are themselves to blame for the sexual abuse by an adult. Shahbanu had so poor a self-image that she initiated a series of relationships to overcome this fancied inadequacy.
Blurred Role Boundaries and Role Confusion

Child sexual abuse is disorienting because the victims frequently experience role confusion due to the inevitable blurring of role boundaries between the perpetrator and the child. For an adult who occupies a power position to turn to a relatively powerless child for a sexual relationship implies a profound disregard for the usual societal role boundaries. Although the sexual activity is primarily in the service of non-sexual needs, the premature and inappropriate sexual experience with an adult generates a great deal of role confusion for the child victim. If the adult occupies a familial relationship with the child, role confusion is greatly magnified, causing disastrous consequences.

Fear and Anger

In her study, Kubler-Ross noted: 'when the first stage of denial cannot be maintained any longer, it is replaced by feelings of anger, rage, envy and resentment [1970]. The revelations made by the victims bear out this observation. These strong turbulent feelings of anger and fear have to and will be expressed somehow. Anand was terribly angry when he slowly lost his capacity to hear and he turned all his anger against his elder sister. She was so depressed about her brother’s suffering that she could not concentrate in her studies and failed in the examination. For victims, it can be too uncomfortable and too dangerous to direct them against their abusers. This will result, on occasions, in their being turned against the anonymous ‘outside world’. They are often directed against the very people who are trying to
protect or rescue the victim. Mukti was caught in between the messages that her mother had constantly ingrained in her mind that she should not reveal the fact to the outside world or they would lose their social prestige and that she would be stigmatised. But on revealing the fact, she realized that several people were sympathetic towards her and treated her very differently. They appreciated the way she had struggled and registered a case against her father. This was very encouraging for her. But in moments of depression, she felt she should have listened to her mother’s words as the legal system is time-consuming and painful. She felt angry with the counsellor on such occasions as it was the counsellor who had made her face the fact.

**Withdrawal, Dissociation and Shame**

Some victimised children indulge in self-abuse by withdrawing from friendships, by becoming involved in abusive relationships, by engaging in promiscuity, by behaving in ways they know will be punished, by over-exerting their bodies or by neglecting their bodies. Academic failure or overachievement may also reflect self-abuse. A survivor of child sexual abuse who was anally abused by several men channellised all his anger and pent-up emotions into academics.

It has been reported that another effect of an internalised sense of damage is the disruption of normal development of sexual awareness. (Hindman, 1989) As the child matures sexually and begins to experience normal sexual curiosity as well as sexual sensations and arousal she/he is likely to misinterpret both the curiosity and the
arousal in such a way that she/he becomes incapable of a proper awareness of her/his own sexuality. Feeling that there is something about themselves and especially their sexuality that is altered or damaged, children who have been sexually abused do not have a chance to enjoy a natural unfolding of sexual awareness. They attach a sense of damage or wrongness to the normal changes in their body and to normal learning about sexuality. Elizabeth has failed to enjoy the sexual relationship with her husband. When sexual relation takes place in the absence of any communication between them, she feels frightened. Her habit of indulging in masturbation as a consequence of abuse makes her feel terribly guilty. This habit does not give her satisfaction but is like punishing herself. Gautam says that he hates himself if he feels sexual arousal and starts weeping uncontrollably. Shahbanu says that she never feels sexually satisfied as her clitoris was torn.

Many abused children use disassociation as a defence. They almost seem to move out of their body and either cease to exist during an assault or have a sense of watching themselves being abused in a detached manner. Either way, the physical and emotional pain is numbed. This is an aspect of denial. Abused children, riddled with fears, are mistrustful. They are trying to win the love of their parents but as long as the abuse continues, they seem to be failing. They are full of doubts about themselves and the safety of their environment. Mukti says that when the abuse was too painful, she moved out of
herself and watched the child being abused. She often punishes her body by not eating for several days.

Shame is another enduring feeling of abused children. Children at quite an early age learn that being naked and fondling with private parts is seen as rude. Sexually abused children invariably feel that they are to blame for the abuse and this leads to the generation of a sense of shame besides that of guilt.

**Ambivalence and Unworthiness**

Children having abusive parents are torn between contradictory and conflicting emotions. When the parent is not abusing and seems to be behaving normally with the child, the child feels guilty for the hatred she/he had felt when the parent had been abusing. The child is confused as to whether this could be the same person. As pointed out by Pizzey (1974) there are cases in which this confusion is further complicated by strong feelings of compassion and pity because the parents look helpless and in need of the child’s love and affection. Elisabeth stated that when her father was admitted for treatment for de-addiction from alcohol, she felt pity for the man who seemed to be weak and needed care. She said that she was relieved when her mother told her that her father’s character was not clear. For the first time, she felt relieved of the confusion that she was not wrong. She can trust herself. This man who was supposed to protect her had abused her, was her consoling thought.
The abused child develops a sense of unworthiness because of the feelings of shame and guilt evoked by mistreatment. This results in a sense of inferiority which is reinforced by the child’s seeming inability to win parental approval and love.

Role confusion also occurs when the child becomes responsible for family members and takes on a parental function. Ronal Summit while discussing the way that children adapt to sexual abuse underscores the role they themselves should play when she writes: ‘the child, not the parent must mobilise the altruism and self-control to ensure the survival of others’ (Summit, 1983). This means that the child may feel bound to keep the family’s secret, whatever the cost, in order to ensure that the family is not split up. In many cases it is too heavy a responsibility to be fulfilled by a victimised individual.

Ambivalent feelings are also experienced towards the non-protecting parent. There is a betrayal of both trust and care-taking. The child experiences betrayal and or hurt as something that happens when she/he becomes close to someone or when someone is important to her/him. The child internalises betrayal and hurt as a characteristic of people who are close.

When a child is sexually abused by someone close to her the child does not have an opportunity to internalise healthy self and generational boundaries. The child who becomes the pseudo-adult not only becomes trapped in adult-like behaviour but also loses normal childhood experiences.
Promiscuity

'Promiscuous' is a term used to refer to young people who have less well-defined sexual boundaries than those of their peers and who will engage indiscriminately in consenting to intercourse with frequent change of partners. This has to be measured against the common behaviour of other youngsters of the same age and cultural setting.

Children who have been abused have been made to believe that they are only acceptable to other people on sexual terms. Their lack of trust and self-esteem is such that they are unable to sustain intimate relationships. They therefore constantly seek attention and affection by the only way they know—by offering a sexual affiliation.

It has been accepted that a child's sense of self is built up from her/his experiences. (Harter, 1983). And as the abuse is experienced or judged as bad, the child judges and subsequently experiences himself as bad, as an object to be used. This is internalised, creating an inner sense of being looked down upon or diminished, a sense of shame. (Fossum and Masai, 1986: Frierdich, 1995).

Perpetrators lose sight of the identity of their victims during the abuse. They do not either care about or block from their minds the pain or suffering they are causing. As stated before they objectify the victim. It is the objectification of the child that is so dangerous and can lead to the death or serious injury of the victim. A screaming or resisting youngster becomes just a thing or object that has to be subdued even if that involves strangulation or suffocation, leading to death.
The researcher had conducted the work at various levels. Emotional and legal support was extended to the child and the family under the organizational banner of Koottam. In this way, it was also easy to contact the judiciary, the police and the lawyers. With smaller children, the researcher had only play sessions but slowly moved onto serious talk when they had to face the court. A lot of effort had to be taken with the non-abusive parents to help them come out of the shock, not blame themselves and feel guilty for not having protected the child. They were helped in creating a good family environment for the child. Several workshops and in-depth dialogues were conducted with the police in order to convince them as to how this problem affects children. In some places, awareness camps were held for the general public. Several discussions were conducted with the magistrates, lawyers and public prosecutors to conscientise them on the issue of CSA and how a child-friendly atmosphere should be created in the court room. It is gratifying that all these efforts produced very positive responses and results.

For example, there was remarkable change in the attitude of the police officers who attended the workshop for them. Their perception of CSA cases changed. The First Information Reports (F.I.R.) of CSA cases filed by some of the officers who attended the workshop bear out this changed approach. The very positive and liberal response of the then Chief Justice of the Kerala High Court is another mentionable factor. As mentioned before, he sent a circular to the magistrates of the trial courts directing them to adopt child-friendly procedures including
in-camera trials. The dialogues with the prosecutors had a salutary effect and resulted in helping them to look at the cases from a different angle - sometimes from the victim’s angle. This changed the nature and course of the trials to the relief and advantage of the child victims. The experiences with the doctors who examined the abuse victims are also comparable. In short, the contact established by the researcher with those who are to be associated with CSA cases yielded positive results, sometimes on expected lines and sometimes beyond expectations.

**Summing up**

Child sexual abuse inevitably damages the growth and development of the child. The level of damage differs from child to child depending on the inner resilience, the frequency of the abuse, the proximity of the relationship of the perpetrator and the supportive atmosphere which the child receives after disclosure.