Chapter 1
Introduction

Children, in the societal ladder of power and authority fall at the lowest level, mainly owing to their dependence on adults for survival (at least initially) and physical and verbal limitations associated with their biological age. When these already dependent children are forced to sustain themselves in difficult circumstances like dysfunctional families, broken homes and open streets; their vulnerability increases manifold.

Realizing the importance of children and their vulnerability in a society dominated by adults, nations the world over, have kept provisions for securing their rights in every possible way. Much before the United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child (UNCRC) emerged in 1989, the Constitution of India \(^1\) (1950) directed the State to ensure protection of children from all forms of abuse and exploitation. The Directive Principles of the State Policy further led to drafting legal provisions to protect and promote the interests of children. Although the intention was good, poor implementation of these laws, legislatures, along with various policies and programmes, remained a grave concern. (Bajpai 2006). Measures, ranging from the National Policy for Children \(^2\) as early as 1974, to the very recent, Right of Children to free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009 \(^3\) have constantly been struggling to ensure a safe and healthy environment for wholesome development of children. But, even in 68 years of functioning as an independent nation, our country has not been able to safeguard things as fundamental as right to life suggested by the lower sex ratio in Census of India (2011), nutrition (42 percent of children suffering from malnutrition according to Hunger and Malnutrition Report 2012) quality education and freedom from all forms of exploitation. Even though, efforts are being made, at least on paper, to ensure an environment of growth and development for the future of

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\(^1\) Constitution of India. PART IV. Directive Principles of State Policy. Article 39-e states that the children should not be abused and that they should not be forced by economic necessity to enter vocations unsuited to their age and strength.

\(^2\) National Policy for Children of 1974 presented issues like health, nutrition, education, protection against abuse and exploitation to be addressed with regard to children.

\(^3\) Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act (2009) aims to provide free and compulsory education to children below the age of 14 years. The act makes education a fundamental right.
the country. The very recent National Policy for Children\(^4\) (2013) has called for ‘a long term, sustainable, multi-sectoral, integrated and inclusive approach for the overall and harmonious development and protection of children’, recognizing the heterogeneity in broad categorization of children itself. But the maltreatment pertaining to children is far from being even recognized in its many forms, pushing the dream of protecting the children further away.

More so, comparatively new forms of abuse and exploitation are coming to light with rapid transitions in society. From the 1960s article by Henry Kempe, surfacing battered child syndrome, to the more recent forms like cyber bullying (Li, Smith and Cross 2012; Mishna, Saini and Solomon 2009; Slonje and Smith 2008; Smith 2008), the ways in which a child can be illtreated are increasingly becoming more complex and challenging. The physical, emotional and sexual forms of abuse are moulding them to find their way around, even in a society better equipped to deal with the issue at hand.

World Health Organization (WHO) has given global figures on child abuse and maltreatment raising the need for serious interventions to deal with this social problem. According to the WHO factsheet, in the world, 20 percent of women and 5–10 percent of men report are being sexually abused as children, while 23 percent of people report being physically abused. In a country like India, which is home of the largest number of children in the world [United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) 2011], reported crimes against children is also on an all time high. The Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India; conducted a study, in the year 2007, using a child friendly research methodology, to tap the prevalence of child abuse and neglect in thirteen states. Child Abuse, according to this study, included ‘any act, deed or word which debases, degrades or demeans the intrinsic worth and dignity of a child as a human being’, including physical and psychological abuse, neglect, cruelty, sexual and emotional maltreatment.

\(^4\) National Policy for Children (2013) recommends the state to have laws, programmes and policies to uphold the rights of the child in areas of survival, health, nutrition, education, protection and participation.
They came up with the astounding revelation that more than half the children (those below 18 years) in India are abused sexually. 69 percent are physically abused in one situation or another, (i.e. 65 percent of children were found to be beaten up in schools, 56.37 percent were physically beaten up in various types of institutions and 58.79 percent were beaten up in employment) across the country. Even emotional abuse was assessed among twelve thousand four hundred and forty seven children and 48.37 percent reported it to be present. The high rate of prevalence of forms of abuse was consistent with findings of organizations like RAHI\(^5\) (1998) and TULIR\(^6\) (2006), which found 76 percent (adult women survivors) and 42 percent (both males and females) to have suffered sexual abuse as children. An estimated 28 million children in the age group 5-14 years are engaged in work.

These figures however, are not completely devoid of the discrepancies in the way abuse and maltreatment are defined in law, academia or at the level of execution. This is the problem, which is specifically grave in defining sexual abuse. Central to what or what not will be considered ‘sexual abuse’ is the debate surrounding the age of consent. The very recent is The Protection of Children From Sexual offences Act (POSCO) of 2012, declaring that a child’s age to give consent for engaging in sex to be 18 years, makes any sexual activity before that as illegal. There has been a lot of debate around this protectionist move of the court, and hence, creating more confusion around the definition of ‘sexual abuse’ per say. (Raha 2013). Although the Directive Principles of the State Policy (Part IV of the Constitution of India) always proclaimed that children should be given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner, in conditions of freedom and dignity and that childhood and youth should be protected against exploitation and against moral and material abandonment, their protection against sexual forms of crimes and exploitation were clubbed under the legislations for women. Sections of Indian Penal Code, Sec 354 (outraging modesty), Sec 366 (kidnapping, abducting or inducing to compel marriage), Sec 375 (rape) and Sec 377 (unnatural offences which applies to the case of sex involving

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\(^5\) RAHI or Rahi Foundation is Non-profit Organization based in Delhi, registered in the year 1996, to work with women survivors of Incest and Child Sexual Abuse  

\(^6\) TULIR- Centre for the Prevention of Healing of Child Sexual Abuse is a Chennai based leading organization working for the prevention of and protection from sexual abuse and exploitation.
minors and coercive sex) are some crimes which mainly concerned women and played with the definition of ‘child’ and ‘adult’ around the legally decided age of 18 years (e.g., with regard to marriage, consent, sexual intercourse with or without consent). It is only after the Justice Verma Committee report (2013) that changes were made in the Indian Penal Code, Criminal Procedure Court and the Indian Evidence Act of 1872 to provide safety against sexual violence to women and children. Justice Verma Committee report (2013) had a special section focused on Child Sexual Abuse, giving it the attention needed, instead of merging it in the other crimes against women and children. These developments, from all the intellectual corners, depict the progress made by the government, policy makers and the civil society alike in accepting this grave problem, which was till now, conveniently hidden under the structures of the society.

In the wake of all the debates, it becomes very important to look at who a child really is. Is it the one who is allowed to work after the age of 14 years or the one who is considered a juvenile till the age of 18 years? What really decides childhood, an age number or the physical, psychological and emotional maturity, or simply a complete socialization to a world of adults and the wisdom to behave in already defined ways charted by the society in general? The philosophical underpinnings with regard to defining a child and his abilities, derive a lot from a comparatively new discipline of the sociology of childhood which tries to look at child, not limiting to his/her chronological age but to his/her maturity in dealing with issues related to self. More focus on the understanding of childhood will thus; require a look at the philosophical ideas underlying it.

Understanding Childhood: The Biological and Social Constructions

Childhood has always been popularly defined and perceived under the contours of developmental psychology, as a stage ‘lower’ in process terminating at adulthood, which is placed ‘higher’ in the ladder. The human development perspective, thus, presents an inherent belief that a child needs to fulfil certain developmental tasks to make himself fit to function and perform in the adult world, the environmental context for which, is provided by family and the active socialization process that a child goes
through. This conception of childhood not only restricts it to a universal biological objectivity but also indicates its social *grooming* as per the already decided norms set by an adult society. Also, this concept limits the understanding of the child to the confines of the family, ignoring a large group of children and adolescents socialized outside the conventional institution of family. The acknowledgement of child as a human being with individual traits and differences with regard to caste, gender, race, and ethnicity were conveniently ignored under this position.

With advances in the field of theory and research and rise of feminism, childhood is being increasingly seen as an institution in itself, interpreted in the tasks specific to the early years of human life. (James and Prout 1997). The belief that children are active agents in their own social life and that they have their own sets of social relationships and ways of interpreting and behaving in social scenarios, provide certain agency to the child as well. This conceptualization of childhood has been drawing its supporters in India over the past decade. A recent study by Bisht (2008) shows the perception held by adults about children in different stages of childhood as defined by them. Her findings, rooted in an urban town of Northern India, clearly shows the demarcation that exists between the adults and children and a need felt by these adults to teach and control children so as to make them fit to their society performing certain cultural norms and values.

But in a country like India, with a rigid patriarchal family system, the powerlessness of a child is expected under the authoritative domination by adults. Every other day there is a newspaper report showing how an adult in authority beat up a child profusely for issues as menial as not doing his homework or coming late to school (The Times of India, July 2014; The Indian Express, June 2014). In 2010, the Ministry of Women and child development banned corporal punishment in all schools, making teachers liable for fine and jail term in case of any violation. But what about the parents and other trust worthy adults back at home? The vulnerability of a child owing to his biological age and cognitive maturity becomes prone to the various forms of abuse at the hands of adults in authority the recognition of which, is impossible. Physical punishments at home/school coupled with verbal assaults are so common in the Indian culture that it is hard to differentiate between abusive and
disciplinarian behaviour. This old debate of ‘spare the rod, spoil the child’ is still lopsided in the favour of ‘fitting’ the child to the existing norms and ways of the society.

In the environment of a the street which adolescents run to, sometimes to break the shackles of poverty back at home, or just to escape the authoritative regimes of parents, the violence inflicted by the various actors is insurmountable. Whether it’s the local goons on the roads or the hawaldaars, the physical pain these children go through is beyond imagination. Debates have been doing the round since last three decades now, to find the ways to ensure a safe and secure environment for the child but not much has been achieved. Plethora of work available in the academic literature makes sure to bring forth the prevalence and possible consequences of violence against children. But the cultural nature of the society which had physical and verbal abuse so intricately woven within the idea of disciplining the child, does not allow the children of this country to enjoy growth and development in a healthy environment. The one atmosphere which provides a child with the most independence and at the same time, exposes him to the most violent adult behaviour are the open streets of a city. The child who comes to a city in look for freedom usually has to go through a unique process of socialization to get accustomed to its ways. In the process, the mechanisms acquires to deal with the self and the world around it develop with the acquisition of certain self sustaining attitudes and behaviours, thus making streets an interesting context to understand various forms of abuse.

Life on the Streets: Vulnerability to Independence

Street children are usually referred to as the ‘hidden’ children of the society. These are that category of children, who are forced by the unfortunate circumstances to land on the so-called ‘harsh’ atmosphere of open streets at a young age. They could be the homeless children, or with shelter, could be pavement dwellers (Patel 1990) or living on and off in institutions. An understanding of street children thus, needs special attention.
A working definition used by UNICEF (1988) states that ‘street children are those for whom the street more than their family, has become their real home; a situation in which there is no protection, supervision and direction from responsible adults’. Thus, the role of adult supervision is given importance in understanding who actually are street children. But this understanding is based on the assumption that children need constant supervision, care and protection of adults, has been contested in the academic realm (Panter-Brick 2004). If lack of adult supervision is one major criterion for them to be ‘labelled’ as street children, what about those who live on the street with their families or those who are accompanied by adult siblings on the streets? What, in that case is adequate adult supervision? Thus, adult supervision as an ultimate criterion for children on the streets is debatable.

In an attempt to understand who really these children are, John G. Cosgrove (1990) and Lusk (1992) tried to classify them in different groups. Lusk (1992) divided street children into four categories

1) poor working children returning to their families at night, they are likely to attend school and not being delinquent, 2) independent street workers, whose delinquency is increasing 3) children who live and work with their families on streets, 4) those living on families and broken off all contacts with their families.

Lusk called the fourth category the ‘real’ street children. Thus, contact with families is an important consideration in defining and understanding street children, but Lusk has arguably associated some categories with more or less delinquency. This brings forth strong assumptions, usually held against these children. The same two dimensions have been used by Cosgrove (1990) to understand the nature and type of street children.

Street children are vulnerable to serious health and social consequences, highlighting the need for research efforts focused on intervention (Greene 1997). Research clearly indicates that street children, because of their bio-psychosocial limitations owing to age, uninhibited interactions with the open streets and their noncompliance with the roles and expectations of a normal child become vulnerable to various forms of abuse, neglect and exploitation. As they are left to survive on their own wits, street children are usually maltreated, malnourished and abused.
(Rooyen and Hartell 2002). Sexual abuse (specifically) in runaway and homeless children is reported much higher than that in general population (U.S. Department for Health and Human Services 2002; Guernina 2004). A considerable number of studies exist in India to indicate the high vulnerable status of street children (Mathur 2009; Saathi 2004), due to involvement in hazardous occupations (Patel 1990), exposure to brutality of the police (Human Rights Watch 1996) etc. A crosssectional survey with 163 children living on the streets of Mumbai led to the finding that 80.98 percent of them were substance abusers; 31.9 percent had been sexually abused and 53.3 percent had been physically abused. (Gaidhane et al. 2008).

Interestingly, abuse and violence against children has been widely understood as a causative factor as much as a by-product of living on streets. This implies that various forms of abuse are not only experienced by children on the street but could also be the reasons for a child to leave the comforts of her/ his home and make the street her/his habitual abode. A study by Saathi (2004), indicated that 43 percent of the runaway girls in Mumbai left home due to unpleasant home environment, 22 percent due to physical abuse caused by parents and 12 percent due to sexual abuse and same number due to coercion (emotional abuse). Thus, looked at from a psychological perspective, the foundational age of personality i.e., childhood, for street children; is severely affected by stress provoking micro level experiences like physical, emotional, sexual abuse and maltreatment, in the backdrop of macro-level phenomenon like poverty, unemployment, homelessness etc. (Rao and Mallik 1992; Verma and Dhingra 1993.) The harsh realities of the street, the reasons for leaving home, or being forced to leave home and then, getting sexually maltreated; can have delimiting impact on the psychological and well being of these children causing drug abuse, depression and suicide (Guernina 2004).

But interestingly, this sympathetic assumption is often criticised for its oversimplification in understanding street children. Although, the life of a street child is considered inappropriate for a naïve mind of the child, this idea deriving from the middle class notions of morality, has been disputed by empirical evidence (Felsman 1981). Rather, the idea has been questioned in the new millennium to understand that “the street can be a unique learning space for children to become psychologically
strong, have well crafted coping mechanisms and could be more resilient” (Veale et al. 2000)

Also, the gender difference in understanding the interaction of the street child with her environment is also an area requiring exploration. Thus, when seen from an ethnographic approach, the experiences of a child on the street, or her reasons for coming to the street or even leaving it, could be very different from the paternalistic view of street children as sad and hopeless about their life.

This clear deviation from the popular understanding evokes interest in analyzing, from the perspective of the adolescent herself towards her/his life, the socialization and enculturation process on the street, in relation to experiences of the past, i.e., life in the family, or the memories of landing up on the street; the individual and group characteristics which determine the response to difficult circumstances on the street, impact of the past and present experiences with focus on future aspirations. For some children, abuse inflicted at home, resulting in running away, could have very different influences compared to those who are continuously abused by a family member or peer on the street itself. (seen as sign of empowerment by Tyler 1991). If accepting that the independent life of the streets is a coping mechanism for the first, the second one could develop certain other ways of dealing with a similar situation. Thus, interaction of abuse with a street child, and the resultant impact on the sense of self of that child, is highly complex.

**Evolution of the concept of the Self: Looking for a Theoretical Matrix**

Attention towards ‘the self’ started with very early western philosophers like Rene Descartes (1596-1650). Sometimes considered to have inaugurated the era of modern psychology, Descartes who threw light on the mind-body problem (Schultz and Schultz 2007), put forth the preposition that the mind is mainly to think and reflect whereas the body performs the physiological functions, an idea very new for that time. His belief of the ‘self’ as peoples’ ‘higher sense of individuality’, moved the attention of the ‘being’ to be more than physical bodies, carnal desires and urges centered around the body. The acknowledgement of “innate ideas”, was as per Descartes, developed through a person’s consciousness, thus, giving mind, a thinking
character. He, even at that time, proposed that some innate ideas are generated through experiences. About the same time arrived John Locke (1632 – 1776) who concerned himself with the way humans acquire knowledge. To him as well, “experiences” were the source of the knowledge gained. From these experiences eventually, he proposed, that ‘the self is derived’. But much before the understanding of ‘self’ as an object for philosophical thought, the Upnishdas, ancient texts from the Indian subcontinent, reflected on the existence of self and its basic nature. The Brahananical school of thought considered ‘self’, aatma or the ‘soul’, a pure state of consciousness, which is separate from the ‘physical’. They were followed by the Buddhists and the Caravas who considered the ‘self’ as the meaning it takes in describing the being. From then, till now, the self has come a long way, in finding its way not only in the philosophical movement but also psychological advancements.

The understanding of self, in the psychological arena, moving from the philosophical thought, became categorized for the first time by William James (1890) through his famous chapter called ‘Consciousness of the Self’. At that time, James made an attempt at understanding the ‘self’ in four categories, ‘the material, the social, the spiritual and the pure ego.’ From then till now, ‘self’ as a concept has gone through varied classifications, leading to generation of some highly abstract and overlapping terms. Ambiguous nature of the concept has led theorists and researchers take their own course in defining and empirically testing them, making a conceptual understanding even more confusing. The importance of ‘self’ has been discussed by Leary and Tangney 2012), in the ‘Handbook of Self and Identity’, who have mentioned how the ‘self’ has developed theoretically over the years. They owe the increased psychological interest in self to the development in theorizing and assessing self-esteem along with strides in conceptualizing self-concept in the 1960s and 70s which made ‘self’ get its long due attention in the academic arena. Centered around the basic idea of ‘self-reflection’ (Leary and Tangney 2012) have charted a history of the concept and saw its popularity rising among psychologists and sociologists in the second half of the 20th century.

A lot of credit for these sprawling ‘self’-associated concepts can be attributed to psychological and specifically, personality theories, which have appeared on the scene
in the last century. The appearance of Freud\textsuperscript{7} and the wave of psychodynamics, directed the attention of self to the interplays of id, ego and superego, making self mainly internal, with a strong executive component, visible in their understanding of defense mechanisms and a voluntary play of ego. However, the advent of behaviorism caused a major blow to its evolution. It dominated the psychology theme from 1930s to 1960s and focused on the external actions of human beings. Although, alternatively, in the 1930s, George Herbert Mead’s symbolic interactionist paradigm was gaining importance, which depicted self as completely social and not just arising under the umbrella of the term ‘personality’. (Mead 1999).

It was not until the humanistic wave, that the self came back into focus in the main psychological domain. The works of Abraham Maslow (1973) and Carl Rogers (1995a, 1995b) have made tremendous contributions in explaining the self as a dynamic entity, which moves beyond the understanding of human personality undergoing constant internal psychoanalytical crises of the id, ego and superego with a major role of the unconscious, as well as, the determinism forced upon it by the stimuli outside the self in the Behaviourist tradition. Both Maslow and Rogers saw self in the present and not in the traumatic memories of the past as psychoanalysis does. Importance to ongoing experiences in life and not just the early childhood experiences is coupled with an understanding of self as having an internal as well as external component. Influenced strongly from the phenomenological movement, Rogers in his theory, clearly talks about the internal, the ‘self concept’, which is about the ‘I, me, myself’ as well as perception of the experiential world influencing the self. Both these humanists believed that self tries to reach an internal equilibrium aiming towards a higher actualized self or to become a self-fulfilling person. The series of experiences help ‘self’ reach this state, and in turn, lead to formation of the self. According to him, personality can be understood only through a phenomenological approach, that is, from an individual’s own viewpoint based on his/her subjective experiences.

\textsuperscript{7} Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) has published most of his work which spanning from the years 1871 to 1939. This period marks the development and maturation of Psychoanalysis. (Retrieved from http://www.freudarchives.org/accessing.html)
DEVELOPING A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Understanding the Self: The Psychological Basis

The understanding of self, in a positive adaptive sense, was fresh and more humane when compared with the earlier traditions. The self became psychologically linked with the philosophical foundations of the aspect. But humanism has its own problems and critiques. The vagueness in concepts like ‘self actualized adults’ and ‘fully-functioning person’ and many more such loopholes, have always raised doubts. But one major contribution of Rogers would always remain, linking the ongoing self with the ‘external’ experiential world. Similar to believers of phenomenology, Rogers believed in the subjective perceptions instead of an objective reality. The uniqueness of every individual in adapting to an environment lies in his/her subjective perception of each environmental unit. This phenomenological basis of understanding the world around is consistent with Rogers’ understanding of self.

The link between personality development and the social (external) relationships was well depicted in Erikson’s personality theory of psycho-social development (1980). When he talked about the development of an ‘ego-identity’ which is the continuously emerging ‘sense of self’, he emphasized the role of personal interactions at each stage, instilling the qualities of trust, intimacy, initiative, guilt, doubt etc. in an individual.

The realm of social psychology, which was developing, parallel to the central developments in psychology, has also added to the understanding of ‘self’ tremendously. This branch of psychology considers ‘selves’ as an integrated whole, formed through continuous interactions with other beings. Answers to questions like, “what others think of us?” acting as social feedback, lead to formation of the conscious self. Intersubjectivity, as it is sometimes called, gives the ‘self’ its nature. Symbolic interactionism (Mead 1932 cited in Boronov 2004) as a philosophical thought has been a significant development in understanding the self, which is considered to be acting as “I” and introspecting as “me” in continuing social interactions. Adding a broader, collective aspect to the self, Forgas and Williams (2002) suggest that ‘the subjective phenomenological experience and the external, interpersonal, social and cultural information… are in an organic, interactive
relationship” in formation of a conscious self. Following from these social aspects of self, relatively recent has been the categorization of the self as “the individual, the relational and the collective’. (Sedikides, Gaertner and O’Mara 2011). A much less cumbersome and wholesome understanding of self, in its real abstract nature, has recently been mentioned as a better way of categorization by Morf and Mischel (2012). Forgas and Williams (2002) had also in an edited volume on ‘The Social Self’, have classified the ‘self’ as having “cognitive, interpersonal and the intergroup perspectives”, while compiling the various ideas of the self presented through papers presented at the Sydney Symposium of Social Psychology, 1999. This interaction between the ongoing construction of self and the social world, as perceived and made sense of, by an individual, form the theoretical basis of the study. From the understanding of the internal self in personality theories of development to the more interactive nature of self in humanistic school and social psychology perspectives; an understanding of self has found basis in various perspectives for this particular study. But clearly, the ‘self’ as a ‘internal aspect with constant influence of the social world has been the basic theoretical standpoint on which the objectives of the study have been built. Further, the social environment has also been looked at theoretically, to understand the aspects of the street, home and the shelter in relation with each other.

**Social Environment: Negating the Linearity of Social Engagements**

The relationships a person engages in, need to be seen as having a cumulative effect on an individual. The individual is perceived to be existing in an ecosystem consisting of a micro level, mesolevel and a macro level, suggesting the nonlinearity of any relationship and its effects on the individual in the centre. The constant interactions within and among the micro, meso and macro systems influence the environment of a child as proposed by Bronfrenbrenner’s (1970) ecosystems theory has a cumulative effect on the child’s development. The micro system, which consists of the interaction between the self and the immediate people, is followed by the interactions between these individuals and groups and the actors at the meso-level. These interactions are within one level of system and in interaction with each other. For example, for a child constantly moving between the street and the shelter; the subculture on the streets as
well as the interactions in the shelter act as the micro system whereas, the interactions between the organization and his family on the street will be affecting the individual through a meso level. Thus, Bronfrenbrenner proposed a set of such relationships, rooted in an outer most system consisting of say, the culture of a society, which, in this case for example, perceives a child as a being different from construction of childhood in a different culture. How the micro, meso and macro systems around a person are in function and in what ways they interact with the person, decide to some extent how a person’s social relationships will be affecting his/her sense of self.

**TOWARDS A CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE SELF**

An understanding of the topic at hand required a thorough theoretical understanding of the self which as seen above; has, philosophical, psychological as well as social roots. To understand the relationships embedded in the street and environment, the interplay between the self and the environment needs reflection. This relationship cannot be said to be entirely influenced by any one paradigm. The linkages between the psychoanalytical and humanistic theories, as well as symbolic interactionism basing socio psychological perspectives can be looked together to conceptualize a sense of self. Because, the ‘self” cannot be confined to a set nature of personality characteristics derived with resolution of an internal crises at each stage or completely socialized without a significant contribution of individual meaning-meaning. No one theory of personality can be used completely to understand the nature of self.

There are ample reasons for this particular area of enquiry not to be fit completely in one domain, as street in itself, is a complex social environment. On a street, the boundaries between the *child* and the *adolescent*, as discussed in the western psychological paradigm, are blurred. Significant signs of development like emotional maturity, economic independence, and sexual exploration; are available to be experienced by a person who has not yet reached ‘that’ age in terms of just a number. Thus, this demarcation between the child and the adolescent which is integral to the well known personality theories, need to be revisited through the findings of the study. Secondly, personal interactions do not have a set nature on the street. There is not necessarily a school or any adult in authority. The peer group might act as figures
of trust but the family members could act as a liability. For example, Erikson’s (1980) understanding of significant relationships at different stages of human development are perceived as objective realities and did not recognize the uniqueness of each person to perceive and comprehend the web of social relationships subjectively. What relationships would lead to what kind of effect in a child or an adolescent is highly individual and culture specific. Thus, objectivity of relationships were revised to understand them in the wake of a plenty of environmental characteristics and the internalized experiences, continuously engaging to construct a sense of self. This also suggests that the sense of self and the environment having a bidirectional nature.

While the environmental characteristics decide how the self is formulated, the unique mental makeup of an individual decides how (consciously or subconsciously) to perceive and make meaning out of them. This provides a construct for understanding the self of adolescents who have survived through the street and the experiences of abuse. The experiences of physical, verbal, sexual and emotional abuse, netted in particular socio-cultural context, are differently perceived by adolescents, on the basis of gender, socio-economic backgrounds, relationship with significant others and the patterns of abusive behaviours, suggesting the uniqueness of perceiving each separately.

‘Self- reflection, which gives one’s ‘self’ a distinct character, can be said to be influenced eventually leading to a continuous process of self construction, through a non-linear play of the unconscious, the subconscious and the conscious; the childhood memories, whether pleasant or traumatic; the past, the present and the future experiences; the individual, interpersonal and intergroup or collective perspectives, all voluntary or involuntary put together in an extremely complex whole through ongoing self-reflections.

**Sense of Self: Deconstructing Mental Health**

In order to understand the concept of ‘self’ as a dynamic property of the mind, one cannot devoid a look into the influences that the domain of mental health has, over the conceptualization of the self. It’s been more than sixty years since WHO gave the definition of Health stating how it is more about ‘well being’ than just absence of
disease and illness. Thenceforth, the ‘Mental’ component of health started fluttering to draw attention in the theoretical and practical realm of ‘health’ practice which is otherwise, strongly rooted in the medical model of treatment. Starting from the earliest attempts of understanding Mental Health and ‘the good life’ (Jahoda 1958; Kubie 1954; Menninger 1947) to the more recent ones (WHO 2001/2003/2005), mental health has come a long way.

But even after six decades of trying to delineate the components of positive mental health, its understanding still peripheries around the symptomatology of mental illnesses. Difficulties in theorizing the meaning of mental health makes one conscious of the continuum of health with illness and well-being at its opposite extremes, instead of these two existing as binaries. The placement of an individual differs from another on this continuum, more interestingly so, from oneself at different stages of life, owing to the dynamic nature of interactions that a person engages in and the diverse ways in which individual makes sense of it cognitively, emotionally and psychologically. Taking lessons from the famous nature-nurture debate, mental health has come to be understood as a dynamic state which is incessantly influenced by the interaction of an individual with her everyday environmental experiences and internalization of these experiences by the individual in a specific developmental stage, in the backdrop of a larger socio-cultural context. Some of such factors are clearly listed in the report by WHO (2001), which states that psychological well being (a component of mental health) is affected when sufficient social stimulation is not provided (like lack of caregivers or death of a parent), interpersonal relationships are not satisfactory and when there is failure in ability to cope with stressful situations. To validate this, a plethora of empirical work has proved that risk of mental disorders is higher among the poor, weak, neglected, powerless, dependent, etc. (Beiser 1974; Berkman 1971; Everett and Gallop 2000; WHO 2003, Rodriguez and Irons-Georges 2001). In this group of the physically weak and economically dependent, children are considered the most vulnerable category, for being believed to be socially, psychologically and cognitively immature. However, I prefer to look at this presumed psychological-cognitive vulnerability of children as more socially maintained. In other words, it can be said that social construction of childhood is such, as to ensure
that they remain ‘children’ in a world of adults and are conditioned through a process of socialization to emerge as individuals in compliance with the already existing norms of the society. While the external environment does have an effect on the psychological make-up of a child, how significant is the supervision of adults is in these mental make ups is debatable. For example, constant adult supervision and economic dependency eludes the children in the independent atmosphere of the street. A child on the streets is way less ‘protected’ and/or ‘controlled’ in the commonly held meaning of the terms. Then, what differentiates these children from the ones growing up in homes is worth noticing. The socialization processes which are very different from the conventional understanding of them through regularized social institutions, how they influence the mental make-up of a child is also to be seen.

Today, mental health has been widened as a concept, i.e. ‘a state of well-being whereby individuals recognize their abilities, are able to cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively and fruitfully, and make a contribution to their communities’. (WHO 2012). This comprehensive understanding of mental health has come after an extensive conceptualization developed after rigorous research, to delineate the overlapping aspects of mental health. Some of these being; the sense of self, including self concept, self esteem, self confidence, self reliance, self awareness, self identity; sometimes seen as mutually exclusive and mostly as overlapping concepts; getting influenced and/or indicating autonomy and independence in decision making; independence in leading life and environmental mastery, especially with respect to interpersonal relations. With the peculiarity of the interpersonal relationships, growth of the self, evaluations of the self based on very distinct parameters; the sense of self of a child could be very differently shaped than any other child.

The theories of psychology suggest a clear relationship between the interpersonal relationships and the resultant psychological and behavioural characteristics of children. For example, the outside social environment, if provides stimulation of love, affection and care, can lead to pleasant personalities (Erikson 1980), otherwise leading to mistrust, shame, guilt and other negative emotions, seen much clearly manifested in the adult personality. Freud was among the first ones to clearly suggest
that childhood wishes are regularly associated with anxiety, specifically in dangerous situations, at the loss of an object of love and by internalized fear of one’s own moral precepts or conscience (Brandell 2012). Thus, traumatic experiences in such a developmentally critical stage, makes a child more susceptible to mental health problems (WHO 2003). In an atmosphere of street with the constant engagement of the mind to maintain the physical self in the highly demanding environment, coupled with the expectations to lower one’s moral guards, development of mental health of a child is bound to be peculiar. The psychological importance of figures of trust and love in relationships makes one look at the kind of relationships they form on the street, and even before and after that, thus looking at their psychological make-up and mental health.

After an exhaustive search for conceptual clarity, mental health, a very broad and abstract term, has been confined to understand the ‘sense of self” for the present research along with its understanding from a psychological and socio-psychological point of view. It is known that construction for self is a social phenomena. (Robins et al. 2005). For an individual who leads a life of heightened vulnerability and has developed interesting ways of coping and ensured self resilience, understanding how the self takes shape is to be seen. To understand the psychological and mental health, the self can be greatly influenced or can even be influential in dealing with life on the streets and histories of abuse. The Self, if fragmented, can be seen to have overlapping concepts. For example, self concept, i.e. the overarching idea of one’s self is, in a way, a combination of the other, individually studied concepts like, self-esteem, self-efficacy, subjective well being, self-identity etc. How one looks at this self as being formed throughout the course of life, presents that self construction taking its own course. While self esteem and self worth are more evaluative aspects of self, self identity and self awareness are more descriptive. Which aspects of the self would be preceding the others in a group of adolescents who narrate their life on the streets and their dealing with abusive experiences was left for the findings to suggest.
RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Embarking upon a journey of exploration into lives of children with histories of abuse, the researcher was presented with ethical and practical dilemmas at every step in making this endeavour a reality. The initial idea was to just explore the ways of internalization of experience of ‘sexual’ abuse in children. But, as a close review into the literature progressed, it was realized that understanding of sexual abuse among children is extremely difficult to put under one bracket. If it was a quantitative study, sexual abuse screening questionnaires as well as tools like psychological tests and surveys would have helped in ascertaining its prevalence, symptoms and consequences, as has been done previously by researchers with children and adolescents as subjects. (Daignault 2009; Evans et al. 2005; Walsh 2008; Whitfield 2005). But, the approach here was purely qualitative, with utmost importance given to the person’s own understanding and perception of abuse. Thus, a realization into what abuse is and how it is experienced was necessary. More importantly, the ethical issues concerning interviewing a child who is currently going through sexual abuse could not be ignored. One of the major reasons for this was, interventions with a child, who is found to be a victim of sexual forms of exploitation, is beyond the scope of a researcher. Thus, just for the purpose of gaining information, approaching a child and making him/her vocalize the trauma was completely unacceptable. Another concern that emerged when planning a study of this kind was consent from participants. For a person below the age of 18 years, consent from the parent/guardian is mandatory. But the literature on sexual abuse suggests incest as one of the most common ways in which this form of exploitation can happen. Thus, the dilemma about asking permissions from the parent/family member itself was doubtful.

These are some of the reasons why majority of literature on sexual abuse focused on adult survivors’ recall of abuse and its impact on them. (Daignaeault et al. 2009). Talking to adults about their past experiences had its own set of problems. The major one concerning the researcher particularly was the ‘self’ being influenced by a plethora of other factors through a lifetime of socialization, thus, diluting the influences of sexual abuse over time. Of course, recall and issues associated with retrospective understanding about sexual abuse were other concerns which have earlier been demonstrated in the
literature concerning CSA. A detailed discussion on the ethical issues has been included in the methodology. Thus, the researcher made the topic under research moulded in a way so as to keep it as ethically sensitive as possible. The research at every step, had to ensure that the study causes no harm to the child in any circumstances and if goes well, was hoping to even benefit the child and the system to deal with the issue at hand. Concerning the issues associated with researching children and surviving adults, the researcher made a choice to focus on older adolescents i.e. individuals in a state of transition from childhood to adulthood, a time when they are trying to find their identities and plan for the future. Street as a space of vulnerability was recognized and it was decided to look at this space from the eyes of the participant. It was also learned that the street as a space makes a child prone to a combination of forms of abuse and the high prevalence of physical abuse on the streets could not be ignored while understanding the ‘self’ and ‘sexual abuse’.

Looking at the connections between the street as a space, the prevalence of physical, verbal and sexual forms of exploitation and their interconnections in influencing the self, became even more essential for grasping the experiences of children with respect to these phenomenon. Thus, the study, finding its base in the phenomenological principle of “epoche” (Husserl cited in Cooper, Mohanty and Sosa 1999) looked at the way children perceive abuse on the streets and left it to the participants to come up with its forms. Also, the researcher moved from other forms of abuse, to finally understand sexual abuse, with influences of other ways of exploitation and their perception on the ‘self’. Thus, as is explained in the methodology of the study later, the first three objectives of looking at the perception of abuse in general, embedded in the environmental context of streets; led the researcher to pursue the third objective, dealing specifically with sexual abuse.

Throughout the process of data collection, the researcher has tried to understand this ‘self’ and the way it is influenced by the events around an individual, rooted in the environmental context. Based on the responses of the participants about their lives, in the past and the present and their internalization of experiences, the various themes around the self have been developed. The methodology has been explained in the next chapter, also throwing light on the way the self will be assessed through the tools used.
Chapter 1 Introduction

Taking inspiration from the innate capability of a child to take decisions for him/herself, the present research looks at a child as a ‘being’ instead of ‘becoming’ and relies on the child’s accounts of abuse and maltreatment experiences. But the study does not negate the psychological underpinnings giving voice to the individuality of a social person. Throughout the process of data collection, child’s own understanding of life, people, social relationships and structure as well as, their own unique subculture was continuously focused upon. Considering that the adult control, supervision and/or protection on the street is comparatively less than in a closed environment of home, the study aimed at understanding the self report of adolescents about abusive incidents experienced earlier in life. But this in no way supports a notion of child as the ultimate independent being in need for no external support, protection and intervention. Rather, the responsibility of the society is very well acknowledged in providing an environment of growth and development to a child and in cases of ruptures, ensuring immediate intervention and long term support. The next chapter, elaborating on the methodology of the present study, will go further into ways children and adolescents have been perceived and ways in which, the ontology and epistemology foundations have shaped the study.