CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

Philosophical Foundations: Looking at the Ontological assumptions

Conceptual foundation underlying the present research is based on the central belief that, ‘reality’ is constructed. The real as an absolute is negated and human subjectivity is considered unavoidable in understanding/observing and making sense of the world. From Max Weber’s interpretive sociology (Burger 1977) to Alfred Schuetz’s (1945) proposition of multiple realities, this concept has occupied the philosophical realm for a long time. Following these ideals, constructivism has found its practical applicability in an interpretive framework while researching people with ‘perspectives’. The interpretive position gives paramount importance to participants’ multiple realities, and their uniqueness. The study, inspired from this framework, takes a social constructivist approach, thus believing that knowledge possessed by participants is historically and culturally constructed. When understanding a phenomenon as sensitive as child abuse, the meaning it holds for a child/adolescent, needs to acknowledge the multiple ways it could be perceived, experienced and coped with.

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann’s (1966) understanding of reality as socially constructed and not as existence of some object/person/event, external to the human mind; has influenced the qualitative research paradigm at the foundational level. The self, they say, is developed during this interaction between humans and the existing environment. Thus, the reality as ‘socially constructed’, makes one look at subjectivity of each individual in making sense of the world external to his or her physical selves. This subjectivity of individual in creating realities unique to themselves has been well discussed under the realms of Phenomenology and Hermeneutics.

The philosophical movement of Phenomenology and the Hermeneutic principles of interpreting human subjectivity, their individual as well as collective perception and meaning making; is central to the understanding of abuse experiences and the way it
influences a person’s sense of self. Phenomenology rests on the belief that every individual has a peculiar way of experiencing the world around her. The ‘consciousness’ of an individual towards her environment, the ‘experience’ she goes through, is the concern of phenomenology. When Edmund Husserl (1962), one of the earliest thinkers in phenomenology, tried to propose reality for an individual as what one experiences in their pure state of consciousness, he asked one to follow bracketing, i.e. putting one’s own biases and prejudices aside in making sense of that experience as perceived in its most true sense. This idea of pure ‘consciousness’ reduced from the previously held ‘biases and prejudices’ was said to be incomplete by Martin Heidegger (1962), who proposed that a phenomenon can never be made sense of, without the influence of other ongoing experiences, occupying a space in one’s consciousness. To him, a better understanding of an event external to a person required, going back to the past experiences which has led to a particular way of perceiving and meaning-making. Thus, the realization of a person constantly being in the world and functioning in his life-world became two major standpoints of phenomenology. Some philosophers trying to understand the central ideas of Husserl and Heidegger tend to see interesting differences and juxtapositions at the same time. Heidegger transformed Husserl’s idea of immediate experience into an analysis of historical human existence. These ideas were further developed into existential-phenomenology when expanded by Jean Paul Sartre (cited in Boronov 2004), who added the aspect of becoming to Heidegger’s being, proposing that the ‘self’ is being formed at all times. Uncovering these past experiences and the ways, in which they are constructed in the mind of the interpreter influencing further meaning making of experiences, has been the central idea behind hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics has developed as a thought, respecting the subjectivity of each individual and has found its course in understanding the reasons of this subjectivity. Intersubjectivity, as one of its aspects, suggests that meanings made of the experiences are never completely detached from the other experiences structured in the mind, thus resting strongly on Heidegger’s understanding of formation of consciousness as not an ordered rational process. Phenomenological thinkers did believe that the interpretation of human subjectivity requires an understanding of the
ways past experiences have been set into categories in one’s mind. The ‘peculiarity’ of each individual’s observation is more on the lines of verstehen, i.e. ‘interpretive understanding’ and not definitive understanding based on observation of external behaviour. The importance of historicity in understanding experiences by each individual is highly essential in interpreting the meanings constructed. This implies that a person with a peculiar life-world influences the way the real world is consciously experienced.

Of all the German philosophers who added to the understanding of Hermeneutics in the nineteenth century, Hans-George Gadamer (1900-2002) has been one of those who advocated that humans are socio-cultural beings, thus, giving paramount importance to social traditions and cultural context of the individual receiving information. (Baronov 2004). The capacity to make sense of a phenomena isn’t one inherent in a human, restricted to just her physico-biological being, but is rather a result of her evolving ability to ‘perceive’ on the basis of the already set categories absorbed through the society. What, as per the participants are abusive behaviors can be understood when one believes in the unique ways in which each individual experiences an event/object/relationship. The historic-cultural as well as social background of an individual influences the relationship that exists between an individual and her relationship with reality. Plurality of meanings, one major contribution by Gadamer, (1960) suggested that not only the past influences the human mind in understanding the present but event the past is subjectively perceived based on the present and ongoing experiences. Thus, the social context, the one Heidegger touched upon as ‘person-in-context’ plays a significant role in understanding how an event or object is experienced, thus, making the background characteristics of each individual, her relationship with her immediate environment essential. For example, in the case of the present task at hand, i.e. to explore the influences child abuse can have on a person’s self, the person’s current consciousness of the present and past experiences constructs the meaning child abuse holds for the person and ways in which the person relates with these constructed realities to get influenced at a socio-psychological level with them. Talking about the historical
events that have gone by will make the participants make sense of these past events in a way as to put them into the present structures of consciousness.

These assumptions became the ontological basis for the present study. The conceptual foundations of phenomenology and Hermeneutics appealed an understanding of the perception of adolescents themselves about abuse experience and the way street as a lifestyle influencing their meaning making. The socially constructed understanding of reality complied with the idea of the study i.e. to understand the way adolescents themselves look back at their experiences on the street and make sense of it, with an ongoing process of socialization of the street in the backdrop. Here, it was strongly felt that the process of socialization could also not be segmented based on the location of upbringing, but the social environment of street coexisting with other social scenarios were looked at and interpreted as much as possible.

Thus, along with a present account of abuse in the context of what is known as real by the participants was focused upon, to ensure a complete understanding of their feelings, emotions, the process of meaning making and the other factors unavoidable in the process of data collection. Several forms of abuse understood by a world dictated by adults were relooked again, from the perspective of a person in the adolescent years of life. The way the objectified reality by the adult is perceived and experienced by the person himself and is internalized subjectively, is what drove the present research. The attempt was to look at perspective of adolescents towards their own perception and experience with regard to abusive events. The researcher felt compelled to understand perception of life on the streets and the abuse experiences, from horse’s mouth, thus, avoiding the ‘obvious truth’ as per ‘others’ regarding life of children ‘on the streets’

**Epistemological Basis of the Study**

Epistemology commonly referred to as the ‘theory of knowledge’ asks the basic question: how do we know what we know. In other words, scope and limits of human knowledge is what concerns epistemology. As Husserl (1964) concisely puts it, “Knowledge is nothing but a justified belief” and this justification is associated with
goodness of reason (Husserl 1952) in making a belief to be accepted as truth. Husserl in one of his lectures compiled by Cooper (1999) does insist that epistemological distinction helps arrive at a difference between the so-called ‘natural’ science and philosophy. He criticized the limits of human cognition in perceiving every day \textit{phenomena} and proposes to look at the external events separated from the already held notions, whether scientific, social, spiritual or material. This epistemological basis became the foundation for understanding phenomenology. Truth can be much more than the ‘belief’ humans can justify for and thus, need to be understood in its purest forms as the transcendental phenomenologists suggest. Epistemology which is the way to find out the basis for knowledge critiques natural sciences by suggesting that what we ‘see’, feel’, ‘observe’ is actually exists for the person ‘seeing’, ‘feeling’ or ‘observing’.

How is the ‘knowledge’ produced or how one tends to ‘know’ is highly essential in approaching a problem for research. Husserl’s phenomenology believes that knowledge is the true ‘essence’ of a phenomena, which means bracketing from all the already held notions of truth, beliefs, values and of course, knowledge. But this is where the epistemology of this research work differs. \textit{Epoche or} bracketing [developed by Husserl (1906) cited in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy 2013] is not what the study rests on. Rather, it believes and renders utmost importance to ‘knowledge’ based on the other life world experiences of the individuals. Cruz (2006) says that knowledge could be strongly influenced by the social practices which moves the theory of knowledge from individual cognition to social interactions thus, bringing Heidegger into the discussion. His hermeneutic angle to phenomenology helps us understand the basis for knowledge. The theory on which knowledge rests in this particular case is thus, the belief in inherent subjectivity of humans in perceiving the world and thus, accumulating knowledge. What is known is what is perceived and understood and further interpreted to lead to a coherent net of thoughts, beliefs and values. The researcher’s interpretation of these interpretations is what hermeneutics proposes. How one makes sense of things has to be looked through the lens of the participant as well as the researcher interpreting it.
The Axiological Stand of the Researcher

The axiological stand of the researcher needs to be clarified here. Venturing into a comparatively less popular way of researching children and adolescents, understanding of ‘children on the streets’ or ‘abuse’ in the present research, lay on the strongly held belief that children and adolescents are individuals in their own right. The study gives paramount importance to the views and perceptions of individuals, no matter which age they belong to. Adolescents are considered *beings* and not *becomings* and they are respected with an inherent agency in taking decisions concerning them. Acknowledging that, researcher has tried to penetrate the minds of young participants so as to understand their lives away from the shadow of the adult world. But this is no way means that the researcher propagates any abusive behaviours by or against children and adolescents. Rather, an attempt will be made to look at the perspectives of children and interpreting the reasons, which make the children, or adolescents think, perceive, act, interact and cope the way they do.

Objectives of the Study

- To describe the social profiles of the participants.
- To understand experiences of adolescents on the streets of Mumbai.
- To understand adolescents’ perspective of various forms of abuse on the streets of Mumbai.
- To explore the relationship between child sexual abuse and adolescents’ sense of self.
- To recommend ways of intervening with adolescents dealing with histories of abuse and experiences of the street.
Research Questions

Q. How does an adolescent perceive experiences associated with living on the street?

Q. How do adolescents living on the streets, sustain themselves; economically, socially and emotionally?

Q. How are the various forms of abuse and their physical, emotional, psychological and social consequences perceived by these adolescents?

Q. How does adolescent experiences sexual abuse and what are his/ her ways of coping with it?

Q. How does the experience of sexual abuse influences the ‘sense of self’ in an adolescent and how do other experiences through the life course influence it?

Q. How does the ‘developmental stage of adolescence’ interact with the experiences of abuse and life on the streets to develop a ‘sense of self’?

Operationalizing the Concepts

Although the study aimed at developing an understanding of abuse based on children’s own understanding of it, for the purpose of giving direction to the research, the following definitions have been used.

Street Children: For the purpose of present research, ‘children of the street’ were those who can recollect living on the street in their childhood years. This target group included different categories of such children, i.e. children living with families on the street or alone; children moving between home and street; children with touch with their families or not; children who ran away to the streets or those who were sent to the cities deliberately. These children were now part of organizations (whether government or privately run) that are working with ‘street children’.

Various forms of abuse, which exist against children, are defined in plenty of ways. The purpose of the study was to understand the children’s own perception of these
forms of maltreatment which later emerged in the findings. Thus, a working definition of various forms of abuse can be as follows:

Child Abuse: It can be defined as any act by any adult or a person in authority, which causes serious physical, emotional or sexual harm to the child, i.e., a person below the age of 18 years. As, a comprehensive definition specific to the Indian context is not available, the WHO definitions, also acquired by the Women and Child Development Ministry’s National Report on Child Abuse (2007) have been adopted.

Physical Abuse: Physical abuse is the inflicting of physical injury upon a child. This can include burning, hitting, punching, shaking, kicking, beating or otherwise harming a child. Here the intention of the adult in authority does not matter. Any act for disciplining the child can also be considered physical abuse if it is harmful for the child.

Sexual Abuse: It’s the inappropriate sexual behaviours with a child. It includes fondling a child's genitals, making the child fondle the adult's genitals, intercourse, incest, rape, sodomy, exhibitionism and sexual exploitation. Although, the National Study of Child Abuse (2007) considered acts conducted by only the people in charge of child’s care as sexual abuse, the focus of this study would be include all acts which are considered sexually abusive either by a known adult or a stranger.

Emotional Abuse: Any act, which causes emotional turmoil for the child due to any act by the people in authority. These could include belittling or rejecting treatment, using derogatory terms to describe the child, habitual tendency to blame the child or make him/her a scapegoat etc.

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As unique experiences of the participants and their perception of the world was the concern of the study, a **Qualitative Methodology** was considered appropriate to understand the adolescents’ subjective experience on the streets and their perception about abuse. Abiding by its philosophical assumption, the understanding of the phenomenon associated with ‘life on the streets’, ‘physical’, ‘verbal’ and ‘sexual’
abuse were built during the course of the study, through constant deliberations with the participants. Basing it on the philosophical assumption of hermeneutic phenomenology, the study looked at how the experiences of abuse are remembered and recollected as a lived phenomenon. Participants’ perception of abuse was interviewed in depth to understand the connections between retrospectively looking at abuse and their interpretation of street life. As, a childhood spent on the streets was one characteristic proving homogeneity to institutionalized adolescents; focused group discussions were carried out to understand this component of past life. Through these groups, survivors of abuse were identified. These instrumental cases (Stake 1995) were interpreted to understand the experience of sexual abuse and in what ways it shapes the ‘self’ with street life in the backdrop. Seven participants, who disclosed their sexual abuse experiences, were finally interviewed. The discussions in groups and in depth interviews became the sources of information for the seven individual cases.

**Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)**

Phenomenology provides an in-depth understanding of the way experiences are understood by social actors. The interpretation of these claims is the concern of IPA. As Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006) have aptly put, IPA has two complementary commitments, one is the phenomenological requirement to understand and ‘give voice’ to the concerns of participants; and second, to contextualize and make sense of these claims. Although, IPA came into being through a major breakthrough in the field of psychology (Chapman and Smith 2002), other social sciences have also gained through this method due to its commitment towards a pure qualitative analysis. (Larkin, Watts and Clifton 2006).

IPA is considered suitable when one is trying to find out how individuals are perceiving the particular situations they are facing, how they are making sense of their personal and social world. (Smith and Osborn 2007, pg 55).

IPA involves an intense understanding of each and every unit of study, making it majorly idiographic. Total number of participants is usually very low. Larkins et al. (2006), even tend to say that it is more of a perspective or ‘stance’ towards qualitative research analysis rather than being a method in itself. The ‘I’ in IPA is of special
relevance as it extends the Heideggerian hermeneutic phenomenology, to the subjective interpretation of the lived experiences by the researcher. IPA engages in interpretation to get as close as possible, to the participant’s account, but also keeps in mind the cultural, social, economical and historical position of the person. This brings one close to the epistemological basis rooted in relativism.

Although, there is basic belief in the subjectivity of experience, objectivity is not clearly negated while doing a qualitative analysis. Phenomenology rests on insider’s perspective and that reality is that which lived by ‘being there’ or Dasien but, some event must have occurred for one to observe it. So, Latkins et al. (2006) suggest that ‘any analysis of our intellectual construction must also reveal something of the objective reality’ And that the understanding of the experiences through persons can inversely lead to the understanding of the phenomenon as such. Taking from here, not only do the research questions dwell into individual perspectives, but they also narrate a common phenomenon in different fashions. These different aspects of looking at the similar events brings one back to the person-in-context idea.

When understanding the accounts of participants with experiences of abuse, the current research makes an attempt to understand the existence of a phenomenon in itself. Here, the phenomenon of child abuse has been looked at but with a careful look at the context, thus abiding by the ‘person in context’ view of Heidegger. A close interpretation of life world of a child living on the street has been attempted with the experiences of sexual abuse at the center. Jonathan Smith is one of the pioneers in the field of IPA, who has talked about the ways of conducting a study based on phenomenological foundations. Not only does IPA revolves around the attempt to ascertain the interpretation of experience by participants, but acknowledges the importance of its interpretation from the subjective frame of reference of the researcher as well.

**Selection of participants**

‘Sample’ is not the preferable term when doing a qualitative study, more so, a phenomenological enquiry with commitment to the theory of hermeneutics. ‘Sample’
with a strong influence from the quantitative paradigm, ensures representativeness and thus, aims at generalizability. IPA, on the contrary, focuses more on depth than width of the data. Interpretation of each individual separately, thus, acknowledging their uniqueness is the basis of phenomenology. Thus, the participants’ group chosen, fairly homogenous, are very small numbers. In this case of ascertaining sexual abuse histories, heightened sensitivity of the issue at hand and the ethics of dealing with children and areas of sex and sexuality in a country like India; the selection of participants had to follow a very well thought out course. The interaction with participants started in bigger groups through Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) leading to individual interviews.

The criteria for selection of participants were to approach them through organizations that work with children living on the streets of the city of Mumbai, Maharashtra. All those adolescents, male as well as females, who are above the age of fifteen and had spent their childhood years on the street, were focus of the study. A number of organizations working primarily with ‘street children’ were approached and four gave the permission to associate with the process. One of the reasons for approaching adolescents through these organizations was to ensure that these individuals have organized mechanisms of help available to ensure a buffer for any strong emotions instigated during the procedure of data collection. Thus, the researcher ensured that a counselor and/or social worker are always available in the organization.

The four organizations, from which data was collected, provided a group of participants with a variety of street histories. The first organization ‘A’ selected for conducting a pilot, is a shelter for girls in need for care and protection. Social Workers from the organization, identify young girls on the street/station and bring them to the centre so as to provide them a temporary shelter and food. This centre works as the first contact point for the runaway girls who are later referred to more institutionalized set ups for shelter and rehabilitation. Here, five girls, above the age of 15 and below 19 were selected for FGDs.

Another organization ‘B’, is a shelter home which provides a roof for children/adolescents (males and females) along with formal and non formal
educational support and other rehabilitative programmes. All the participants in this centre had made a transition from streets/stations to shelters. This organization runs first-phase ‘contact centres’ at major railway stations in Mumbai which are the main congregation points for children on the streets. From these centres, after the voluntary consent of the children, they are transferred to the main centre, where they are provided food, shelter and education. As soon as the child turns 18, he is reunited with his family or guided towards an independent life ahead.

Organization ‘C’ is run by an international philanthropic trust. With the service delivery systems similar to organization B, this shelter hosts children/adolescents (only males) who are found to be in conflict with law and/or are in need of care and protection, sent through Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) functional under the Juvenile Justice Care and Protection Act of 2000. Along with food, shelter and private school education, these children were given the space to continue their interaction with their life on the streets, especially during vacations. Other than this, there are ‘monthly melas’ organized where children are invited to try the services of the shelter and create a better life for themselves.

Organization ‘D’, is also working with ‘street children’, both males and females. They focused on children living on the street and provided them food shelter other than supporting their formal and non formal education. The branch of the centre where the study was conducted consists of a shelter only for girls below the age of 18 years. Whereas, the educational support in terms of helping with admission to schools, teaching and helping with homework and conducting sessions on extra-curricular activities and informative sessions for their all round development, was provided to both, girls and boys. The children on the streets were identified and encouraged to enrol in schools and become a part of the organization for allied support.
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Figure 2.1: Selection of participants

Process of Data Collection

The data for the study was collected from July, 2013 to January, 2014. The period of contact with one group of adolescents ranged from three weeks to four months. The organizations were presented a plan where in, a group of adolescents above the age of 15 years, with experience of living on the streets were asked to discuss their experiences. Also, making it clear that focus would be to understand their perception of sexual abuse as a central phenomenon. These meetings then lead to in-depth interviews with those who shared their histories of sexual abuse with the researcher and were willing to talk on a one to one basis. Although Smith and Osborn (2007), some of the leading experts on conducting IPA suggest that semi-structured interviews with underlined themes in hand would be a better way of collecting data as although it provides the openness to the participant to verbalize her perspectives, the researcher still can probe towards more ‘important’ areas. What exactly is important or non-important for a teenager, institutionalized in a privately run home in Mumbai, should actually be left to that person to decide. To reach the ‘essence’ of the phenomenon of sexual abuse and the experiences subjectively understood in the street, needed a much more open and unstructured mode of data collection. The
researcher thus, avoided any pre-defined structure as such. There were although, a list of themes, the discussion around which was more preferred for the central research question than other aspects of participants’ life. Hycner in the late 90s asserted through his paper on guidelines for analyzing interview data that no one particular method can be set to be the method for phenomenological research and that the ones which bring the researcher closest to understand the perspectives of participants towards the phenomenon should be adopted.

Selection of interviewees happened via FGDs. All the four organizations approached (like the other organizations which had rejected the request for assisting in data collection), expressed that none of the boys or girls have clearly shared their sexual abuse histories with anyone in the organizations. But they did have some knowledge of who might have gone through it. Abiding by the principles of confidentiality, they did not mention any names but expected the researcher to encourage them to seek the help of a counselor or a social worker close to them. They also expected the researcher to intervene as well in the group scenario, mostly to make them aware of the various forms of abuse that exist in the society. Their motive was to have this process integrated with the organization’s ongoing programs on awareness about sexual abuse. The researcher here made it clear that confidentiality of the information will have to be restored but that researcher will try her best to motivate participants to discuss their myths, attitudes and opinions about abuse experiences with any trustworthy professional in the organization. Also, it was made clear in the beginning that consent of the participant will be sought to conduct interviews in case she/he discloses history of any form of sexual abuse. With this understanding, the process began.

The participants throughout the day were involved in a lot of activities i.e. school, tuitions, extracurricular activities and programs of the organizations they were affiliated to. Thus, based on the time available to them, 6-9 adolescents above the age of fifteen were asked to interact with the researcher in a group scenario. Considering the sensitivity of the topic at hand, group discussions with participants became the context in which adolescents with histories of abuse came to the forefront. In-depth interviews initiated from where group discussions had left.
**Conducting a Pilot**

Prior to the process of data collection, group meetings, along with interviews of informal conversational type, were conducted, with six run away girls who had been ‘rescued’ from railway stations across Mumbai. Organization A provided a platform to interact with these girls in a group setting. 9 group discussions were conducted with five run away girls, over a period of four months. The age ranged from 15 to 18 years. Also, twelve in-depth interviews of unstructured type were conducted with four out of six girls.

In these meetings, a number of ice breaking techniques were used along with different strategies to help them share their experiences of abuse in the most harmless manner. Thus, drawings, role plays, story constructions using certain pictures as cues were used, with the help of the counselors and social workers available at the organization to ensure constructive utilization of their time while participating in the pilot. These close interactions helped the researcher in sharpening the skills to work with vulnerable adolescents as well as to test the tools for data collection. Unstructured interviews were conducted with four of these girls, trying to understand their personalities and abuse histories better. These participants shared their life histories, their experiences on the street with disclosure of physical and sexual abuse.

Based on the learning from the field experience, 21 FGDs were conducted with 28 adolescents across the other three organizations, catering to street children ranging from the age of 15 to 18 years. The data from the pilot conducted, was included in the final data for analysis and generation of themes.

**Areas of Enquiry**

Although the tools used were very open, giving importance to the participant’s own flow of conversation, there was a loosely knit structure with which the researcher approached the group meetings and in-depth interviews. The broad areas of enquiry, which guided the whole process of data collection, are as follows
a) Family background of the participant, her journey to the street and then to the shelter.

b) Relationship with the family members and other significant adults on the streets. Here, focus was on social dynamics netted in culture of the street, with the self in the centre.

c) Perspective towards 'life on the streets' and their ways of connecting with the street. Also, the reasons for being on the streets, along with their relationship with the open spaces of the city.

d) Various forms of abuse on the street as per the children, vulnerabilities, strengths, weaknesses.

e) The level of understanding of the participants towards sexual abuse. How sexual abuse is embedded in the environment of the street and to see if it is confined just to the open spaces of the city.

f) Behaviour patterns. This is essential as observed behaviours of such children fall on a continuum ranging from vulnerability through fear to bravado and aggression.

It needs to be noted that for each group of adolescents, the order in which these topics were discussed was flexible. Also, not all the themes discussed were mutually exclusive. For example, being ‘sexually vulnerable’ was one of the things, which the group of females came up with, in the first meeting, leading to a detail discussions on their sexual vulnerabilities, right in the beginning of the FGDs.

**Focused Group Discussions (FGDs)**

FGDs are a qualitative method of data collection which ensures maximum participation of individuals in making sense of their realities in discussion with the researcher. The basic purpose behind FGDs was twofold, basing itself strongly in the social constructivist and phenomenological perspectives. The social constructivist approach influenced the FGDs to get a comprehensive account of realities of the street, to reconstruct shared meanings about environment of the street in which they
have spent their childhoods. Additional to that, there was the phenomenological standpoint, which focused on observing individual motivations and perceptions in the group environment. This involved a careful observation of how each individual contributes to the FGDs and what makes her/him different from the other in the same group meeting. This was possible by observation of each and every participant in the group, their contribution to the topic in hand, and an interpretation of their body language, verbal cues, tone, and behaviour with the other members. Thus, FGDs were not only used for deconstruction of ‘life on the streets’ which happened through a collective view of the streets constructed by members together, but also to unravel their experiences on the streets with regard to physical, emotional and sexual abuse as well as to understand their behaviours, relationships, anxieties, strengths, challenges and coping mechanisms. The researcher acted as a moderator in these discussions.

In the first contact with the participants selected by the organization, the researcher gave her introduction to the group. She explained her research topic to them in a manner that would make them understand what the researcher aims to do. The researcher clearly explained the purpose of the meeting i.e. to get information on their experiences ‘on the streets’. It was vividly stated that these meetings are for the purpose of research and their experience sharing would be helpful. It was also made clear that if at time, participants feel that they don’t want to be a part of the group or do not want to share any information in a group setting; they are free to do so. The researcher asked for their permission to record the group meetings. All the groups were comfortable with voice recording. The researcher promised to the groups that none of the information shared, would be discussed with anyone outside the group. She expressed that she expects the same from the group members. She also comforted them by saying that if there is anything they want to share other than in a group setting, they can approach her separately.

FGDs usually started with an introduction and further meetings always initiated with a revision of what was discussed in the previous meeting. The researcher did use some ice breaking activities with one of the four groups to make them more comfortable. It was assessed through the introductory meetings if there would be need for much ice breaking activities or just conversations on the topic would help gather the interest of
the participants. FGDs were planned in a way so as to focus on their experiences on
the street in the first two meetings, which took a more concrete form with a
Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) activity, followed by a discussion in the third
meeting. The fourth and the fifth (in some cases) meeting was centered on
experiences of physical, sexual and emotional abuse in their lives and meanings
associated with them.

The first meeting always focused on getting information on their introductory details
and family backgrounds. In this and the next meeting, a discussion was initiated by
giving them a scenario and asking them questions around it. After stating the purpose
of the meeting, the researcher gave scenarios to the participants to think on. For
example,

*A young boy fled his village, took a train and reached a big city. Now he is at the
station. What do you think will happen now?*” This question was later branched out to
include other sub-questions like *what do you think he will do first? What all will he
see?*

The researcher tried to keep the question as less leading as possible, ensuring the true
responses regarding perception of the street by those who have experienced it
firsthand. An attempt was made throughout, not to present the street as more or less
vulnerable or dangerous than any other environment. Although the story directly
mentioned initial contact with the street, the discussions followed to include their life
throughout childhood. It was observed that abusive experiences are well embedded in
the everyday life led on the streets, but not all are considered ‘bad’ or ‘wrong’. Also,
these experiences are not confined just to the streets.

**Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA).** A PRA activity, at the end of the first two
meetings, was planned to engage participants in clearly putting out their varied life
experiences on a sheet of paper through discussions in the group. PRA essentially is
an active process of generating data, where the data is gathered, analyzed, owned and
shared by the participants. PRA is better in many ways mostly because of its
uniqueness in breaking down the distinction between data and analysis. (Chambers
1994). Methods of working with research are increasingly becoming more and more
participative and academic work has been going on to find suitable ways of achieving
that. (Sime 2008). Founding itself on the philosophical standpoint that children are individuals in their own right (James and Prout 1997), and thus, believing in the authenticity of their narration of experiences and recollection of memories; the participatory approach aims at providing the children/adolescents the physical and mental space needed to put forth their own perspectives forward. For a phenomenological study, maximum participation was the most sought after, especially crucial in case of children and thus, PRA, altered for children in an institutionalized setting, was considered apt. Although, there are some critical issues like skills of articulation of children at a young age and skills to draw and/or write, which still resist some to use such participative techniques but with school going teenagers, these could work well. (Hill 1997). Spider Diagram is one preferred way of conducting PRA with children (Punch 2002). One of the most important additions of this method is the participation of the teenagers in explaining their experiences. Punch (2002) says that PRA methods like a spider diagram can be very helpful in ascertain the perspectives of the groups towards topic at hand but it works best when combined together with the verbal and more traditional methods of data collection. The present study used spider diagram along with FGDs, to gather data specifically on life on streets, a common factor between all the members of the group. This PRA provided various new aspects of a life led on streets, which might have been missed out in typical question-answer scenario. For example, the interesting names for the range of relationship dynamics that exist on the street like “gotigiri karna”, “dalali karna” (instigating a fight between peers), came up through PRA, which could have been left out otherwise. Many more terms emerged while participants were in active engagement with each other putting their thoughts on the sheet of paper. The participants had already gone through active discussions in the first two group meetings on their experiences on the street. These meetings formed the basis on which they were asked to categorize their street experiences, each represented by different legs of the spider. The researcher gave the idea of a spider, which the participants drew on paper. Ideally, in a rural setting, the resources to develop the map/diagram is arranged by the locals themselves but, in the case of adolescents in the institution, owing to constraints of time, space and resources, big sheet of paper and coloured pens were provided by the researcher.
Interestingly, the researcher had given a neutral topic to brainstorm on, i.e. different life experience on the streets. But, each group decided to perceive the question as per their own understanding, which in turn, says a lot about their engagement with street as a physical and social space. For example, in a group of boys, still living on the streets, the group decided to divide the categories of experiences into profits (faayade) and loss (nuksaan) of staying on the street (Annexure II). In contrast, when asked a group of girls to chart down their experiences, they wrote only negative experiences. In the post PRA discussion, they stated that there are no positives of staying on the streets. The first two meetings used cues to build the discussions further, focusing specifically on abusive experiences in the following meeting.

The next two meetings were focused on understanding their perception of abuse on the streets and how these experiences are made sense of. Obviously, the most prevalent forms of abuse, which are easiest to talk about in There was special focus on ‘sexual abuse’. To encourage more discussion, a visual chart (Annexure III) depicting adult behaviors towards children were presented at the end of these meetings which clarified their stance on what and what is not “soshan” or abuse. This method proved really helpful as the groups engaged in discussions among themselves brainstorming on what could be called abuse and what not. These discussions also gave the opportunity to the researcher to generate awareness regarding various forms of abuse, specifically sexual, and clearing their myths and misunderstandings around the issue.

At the end of these sessions, the researcher clearly stated that if anyone has seen sexual forms of abuse happening to any one or if they want to talk about anything that has happened to them, they can come for individual conversations with the researcher. Four boys and four girls disclosed sexual abuse in childhood. One of these boys did come for the first interview but then refused to give consent for further interviews. Thus, the final number of interviewees was seven. Two of these participants (both females), voiced their sexual abuse memory in the group itself. The other two disclosed it in an interview situation. The number of in depth interviews conducted with each ranged from four to seven.
In Depth Interviews

Information received in FGDs provided a foundation from where, researcher picked up the interviews. For each individual, the initialization of interview process was different. Some participants would clearly or tangentially mention their abusive experience in group meetings. These acts were mentioned as negative experiences of surviving on the streets but the term “laengik soshan” or ‘sexual abuse’ emerged only during the meetings. The researcher made it clear that those who would like to share more with the researcher, regarding the same or similar area of concern, can interact with the researcher individually. The researcher also made it clear here, that interviews might be conducted, if consent is given, as part of the same research. She stated that all the information shared in these interviews would be kept completely confidential. She ensured that the interviewees do not have to worry about being judged or labeled by the researcher.

While making her intention to talk to participants individually on similar lines, eye contact with the participant or a nod towards her/him, would make it clear that the researcher has been attentive to the things she/he shared and communicated, non verbally, that she is willing to talk if the person wants to. But, sometimes, the participant would be extremely silent in the whole group meeting and then voluntarily come up to ‘retch -out’ her memories of abuse. Such participants would just enter the room and start talking about the abusive experiences without much probing. In such cases, it was felt that the person was looking for a channel for catharsis and when he/she found a harmless source, used the opportunity to shed the load of guilt, shame, and embarrassment from her/his shoulders. The researcher ensured that she never said out loud or paraphrased anyone’s encounters bordering to sexual abuse, thus, not giving it any label from her side. Throughout the meetings, she tried to present herself as an extremely non-judgmental person and clearly stated that it is not the child’s fault and she/he is not be blamed in ANY scenario of abuse. Such words and her non-verbal cues (like body language while listening to stories about people engaging in sexual intercourse and related activities, substance abuse etc.), not only made the participants comfortable opening up in groups, but they also felt comfortable in sharing their deepest secrets with her. Her support and comforting attitude towards
those who were waiting for a push to share their feelings was usually expressed through verbal cues in the group meetings, and more importantly through non verbal communications, like eye contact and the nodding and smiling with support, when there is hesitation in the participant’s voice while narrating an incident. The skills of interviewing children suffering from sexual abuse have been well studied but many come from a very investigative approach. Here, the values of research came from phenomenology, accepting what the adolescent had to say. The different stages at which, participants were suggested that each interview had to take its own course. With each participant, interview schedules were differently designed. No set procedure or order could be followed. Certain basic themes central to the area of research were uniform throughout the interviews, but the way of asking certain questions, stage at which they were asked, placement of the questions and probes etc., were extremely sensitive to each participant. But to keep the interviews comprehensive and relevant for the present research, the following guide of broad themes and open-ended questions were always kept in mind. The major themes, which the researcher tried to focus on, during interviews, have been listed later, under the heading ‘Method of Analysis’.

Sometimes, support was required in encouraging the one to come and talk who had given signs of abuse histories in the group meetings. Some participants, who were highly interactive in the group meetings and had touched upon their abuse experiences in FGDs itself, were eager to talk about their sexual experiences in interview settings as well and thus, did not need much probing. With these participants, the discussion started with the narration of sexual abuse experience and as the interviews moved further, they moved on to other areas of life, which mattered to them. Thus, information gathered in the group meetings (usually 2-3 meetings with each group were done by the time the interviews started) as well as the observations made about that particular group member helped the researcher build a premise for the interviews. In three of the six cases, the interviewees immediately started talking about their sexual abuse histories. They did not need much probing. It was felt and as has already been suggested in conducting IPA (Smith 2007) that the least the probing is in interviews, the closer an interviewer can get to the original feelings and emotions of
the interviewee. Three participants had to be cajoled a little and were made more comfortable before they could start sharing. Here, the probing required was more but the questions were never leading or very explicit. Very subtle cues were given to the person to keep going. The reason why the researcher felt that adolescents could voluntarily come to share their troublesome memories was due to the trust built between them and the researcher. She had FGDs as a platform to present herself as a non-judgmental and accepting individual who would listen to their sex related problems and believes without any hesitation and moral preaching. Thus, this method of approaching the survivors of sexual abuse through focused group discussion, aimed at understanding them and their real life contexts, proved mutually beneficial.

The interviews were unstructured and all the questions asked were the ones generated during the flow of the research. As the main objective was to find the ‘self’, constructed in midst of sexual abuse memories and a life of transition between home, street and shelter, the conversations took the course in which the interviewee decided to talk about her life. But the researcher made sure that during their revisiting life experiences, construction of the ‘self’ is elucidated. The two aspects in which this self was sought out from the person herself/himself were ‘self-description’ and ‘self-evaluation’. Keeping the person’s own understanding in center, the researcher interpreted her life story to interpret the different aspects of life in formulating this ‘consciously felt self’. The researcher further analyzed the self, through a comprehensive understanding of each individual’s life and the various aspects of the self, under the umbrella terms of ‘self-description’ and ‘self-evaluation’, which were left for the data to generate. Usually starting with their experiences mirroring the ones shared in the group, they moved on to share their feelings, emotions and opinions associated with the same and more emotionally troubling experiences of life.

These two methods of group discussions and interviews in continuation, also helped the researcher to look at all the forms of abuse, interconnected with each other in an unique environmental context. The simultaneous interactions in group meetings and in-depth interviews helped in making participants involve more in each. This advantage of using focus groups before in depth interviews has been mentioned by Fontanna and Frey (2000), who feel that group discussions could stimulate
respondents memories of specific events, which could help in setting a firm ground for in depth interviews to begin.

Seven out of thirty five participants shared their histories of sexual abuse with the researcher. Two of them did it in the group scenario while the other four disclosed during the interviews. Number of interviews conducted with each of these ranged from four to seven. The duration of each interview ranged from 40 minutes to 1 hour, 30 minutes (approx.). A lot of children with not any specific histories of ‘sexual abuse’ per say, also came to share their life histories. These interactive sessions were thirteen in total.

**A Guide to Interviews**

The guide to interviews consisted of the major areas of enquiry, along with some basic questions in each area. Answers to these questions were further explored through various probes and prompts given, to surface more aspects about the topic in hand. Such a guide with highlighted areas and a few questions has been given below. None of the interviews proceeded exactly like the guide given. The questions given are just exemplary, as originally, just an eye contact or a slight nudge by the researcher would communicate to the participant that she is open to more listening and that she/he can share with her in full comfort. This guide was just suggestive and not prescriptive in a smooth administration of conversational style of open-ended, non-structured interview. See Annexure 1 for a detailed guide.

**METHOD OF ANALYSIS**

Most of the data, obtained from both, FGDs and interviews, was audio recorded, except a few interviews, which were written down by hand. These were for the participants who did not provide consent to audio record. The information provided in these cases, was jotted down after the interview was over, avoiding writing in-between and breaking the flow of the conversation. In these cases, field notes played a very important role.
Recordings were transcribed without any filtering. Transcribing FGDs was not easy as many times, all the participants were speaking at once. Satisfactorily transcribing the FGDs took a lot of careful listening and writing. Once the transcriptions of the FGDs were ready, they were read thoroughly, group-by-group. This was to examine the flow of topics of discussion. Information generated in the first meeting of the FGD was divided into basic themes. Themes generated from the first two FGDs of each group, were put in separate columns of a Microsoft Excel sheet. Initial columns contained basic facts about the group, like average age, average time spent on the streets, average time spent in the organization. This information was followed by the themes that emerged in that meeting. Under each theme, the important information, like the feelings associated, interesting words used; was written. Once the themes were created from the first meeting, further meetings and their themes were put under columns below. As new themes emerged, new columns were added to the excel sheet. A column on observations by the researcher was added which was not a theme per say, but added to the understanding of the group dynamics and the interpretation of the whole group in totality. In the corresponding rows were the names of organization. Each group meeting acquired a separate row with the names of organizations in which meeting took place. This way, themes emerging in each group meeting were visible across one row. The rows were colour coded for gender of the participants.

Transcriptions of the interviews were at the semantic level. Special attention was given to all the non-verbal cues like eye contact, nodding, laughing, smiling, frowning, silent moments in conversations, body language etc. These cues held relevant meanings in both, the FGDs and interviews. For example, the observation of a person’s way of interaction in FGDs was seen in comparison with her interaction in interviews, which led to interesting insights.

A margin was left on the left side of the pages to put the observations around the conversations transcribed. Non-verbal cues, which the researcher observed, were also made sense of and written down around the conversation when it occurred.
Analysis required a long and constant engagement with the data. The ‘interpretation’ which is the key feature in IPA, expected reading and re-reading the transcripts and trying to understand the hidden connections in the realities possessed by the individual, in her/his own social world. As Smith (2007) says, the “…meanings are not transparently available and they must be obtained through a sustained engagement with the text and a process of interpretation.” Transcriptions were thus, read carefully and articulated, for one case at a time. As the FGDs happened first, the data from the group meetings could be seen to be connecting with the data generated in interviews and these connections were also written down in interpretations of interviews for one particular person. For example, attitude towards the family was differently projected by a teenage boy in FGDs whereas the feelings towards the family expressed in the in-depth interviews were much more deep and complicated. Thus, connecting the dots lead to gaining perspectives from participants and eventually interpreting them for a deeper analysis.

As Smith (2007) mentions, there is no ideal way of doing an interpretive analysis. The researcher did get influenced from the standard IPA methodology and deciding to go the idiographic way (Smith, Harrre and Langenhove 1995), by looking at the transcripts of one case at a time. But, certain ways of emerging at themes were specific to the study as it involved FGDs, which provided important information prior to the interviews. For example, the researcher took the transcripts of one participant at one time and read it throughout, in a chronological order, i.e., starting from one interview and going till the last.

In this first step, whichever aspects were coming to mind like significant sentences to be noted, life altering events and their descriptions, and the voice amplifications and contradictions were noted down. Through multiple readings, connections between, say, the first interview and third interview were seen, sometimes contradictory information emerged and some times, further explorations associated with something mentioned in the first meeting was seen explored in the last meeting.

For example, in one of the cases, the participant remembers the time in childhood, when his neighbour was luring him for sexual favors. In the middle of narrating this
story, he started talking about the perception of his stepmother and his relationship with her. This, through the reading of the first transcript, felt like an unintentional deviation from the primary story but as the interviews progressed, the realization occurred that the relationship with stepmother was so strained that he could not disclose to her about the ‘things’, which the neighbour was asking him to do. Being scared of his mother came across as one of the major influences in his process of self-construction throughout his childhood.

This in-depth analysis of a person’s life could not be gauged without a comprehensive reading of the whole series of interviews. All these were noted down as initial comments in the transcripts along with the first hand understanding of the things said and unsaid.

An example of the significant aspects of the person’s life which emerged in this first reading of the first case are listed below.

| ‘attempt’ of sexual assault by neighbor | helplessness, confusion, shame, embarrassment |
| No disclosure- “No one will believe me” | Scares easily |
| Retrospectively perceives oneself as “mand” (retarded). | Awareness of being overtly sensitive and soft hearted. |
| Scared of stepmother. | |
| Retrospective image of step mother as bad | Compared oneself with one’s earlier self. |
| Unacceptance of stepmother as ‘mother’. | Less scared of performing everyday tasks now. |
| Improved scholastic performance. | Glad to have spent less time because he remained oblivious to the vices of the street. |
| Compared oneself with one’s earlier self. | Poverty. |
| Less scared of performing everyday tasks now. | Comfortable in the company of girls more than boys. |
| Glad to have spent less time because he remained oblivious to the vices of the street. | Boys make fun of him. |
| Comfort in expressing weaknesses: “I cry easily” “I feel like crying right now” | Captivated in his own house, back in the native place. |
| Feels shy, no eye contact with the researcher for the first few interviews. | |
Feeling of self-pride to have made improvement in life “ab toh maine bahut kuch kar liya hai didi” (I have done a lot in life by now).

Scared of memories of the street. Strong sense of vulnerability in the present also.

Less time spent on the street. Does not identify with the street.

Protective image sought on the street.

Not good enough for his love interest.

Lack of confidence in speaking to the girl he is attracted to.

Thinks that he doesn’t look as good as other boys.

Afraid to survive by self by the age of 18 years.

These initial comments were further classified under more abstract themes for example: Active self-analysis throughout changes in life, Self-Construal, Feeling of improved self-efficacy, Strong sense of self-enhancement, Self-righteousness. (Arriving from the basic habit of constantly comparing oneself with one’s earlier self). In totality, some of the higher level themes which emerged for one case, are as shown in the box below. These themes further led to a closer look at the interlinkages between different themes in one case and across cases.

1) General Self-Description: Body Image issues. Self-confidence off the streets.

2) Self Identity: “Sadak chaap” (one belonging to the street), chor (thief), Identification with a gender, with particular observation homes. Self-Image: Body Image (dark, short, unattractive, handsome, popular among girls, leader, confident)

3) Self-Evaluation: Self-Enhancement, Self-Efficacy, Self-Improvement (Survival on the street, Coping with sexual abuse, Scholastic Performance, Learning new Skills, on the street, at home and otherwise.

4) Relationship with Significant others: Relationship with the mother, with father, siblings,

Relationship with friends: friends on the street, in the shelter, at home, in observation homes earlier. Other significant relationships: Relationship with the House lady (warden) in the shelter. With the social worker, with the peer group on the street, which was more like guardian than friends. Relationship with the police.

5) Memory of Sexual abuse: Immediate feelings, retrospective understanding. Coping Mechanisms, disclosure
6) Behavioural Characteristics: Shy, submissive, confident, playful, interactive, restrictive, subdued, over confident etc.

8) Adolescence characteristics: Attraction towards opposite sex, body image, gender identity, increased identification with the peer group.

These initial comments were further classified into themes, at a higher level of abstraction. For example, initial comment about the mother like ‘Unable to disclose to the mother’ and ‘being trapped by mother her in the house’ became a theme ‘Difficult relationship with the mother’. These themes were further organized to look at hidden meanings and interpretations to throw light on the research questions. At this stage which Smith (2007) calls ‘Connecting the Themes’; data goes through a more analytical and theoretical ordering as the researcher tries to connect the emerging themes. These interconnections between the themes and a theoretical link were starting to build at this time. Then, further, these themes were put into superordinate themes like, ‘Relationship with the Significant Other’ and further under the bigger theme of the ‘The Relational Self’ as suggested by a theoretical foundation of the self given by Sedikides (2011) the construction of self”.

This three step of reaching the final themes can be explained through the following diagram.

Figure 2.2: Emergence of the Themes
Also, the interview transcriptions of one person were seen in relation with data generated from FGDs. Transcripts of FGDs were read again to see how the participant in question has interpreted, behaved, talked, interacted in, and contributed to, the FGDs happened before. The group behaviour was seen, sometimes in compliance with or sometimes starkly opposite to the expected individual behaviour. The data put together helped in understanding interpretations of social world of participants and their perspectives about incidents of abuse. In similar ways, all the cases were read one by one, along with transcripts of the FGDs.

Similarly, all the interviews were read for initial comments and these comments were then put under broader themes. The next step, as said above, involved an interpretation of the visible themes across the interview. In this case, for example, a sense of connectivity of the self throughout life influencing self-evaluation and appraisal and description, the theme became:

‘Movement between Home, Street and the Shelter: Tracing the Transition’

Similarly, the other cases were read and re-read. The significant aspects addressed in those interviews were listed. After the first two cases, which were quite distinct from each other, the significant aspects that emerged were seen in connection with the findings of the first case study. The concise phrases, which aim to capture the essence of the participant’s experiences, feelings, thoughts corresponding to that particular theme were noted down. Thus, the terminologies used for more academically appropriate but the real ‘language’ and feelings of the participants were not diluted. Main aspects emerging under one theme were further noted down.

**ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Ethical considerations in working with children have seen a lot of work happen in the recent decade. (Cashmore 2006; Cocks 2006; Morrow 2008; Morris, Hegarty and Humphreys 2012; Phelan and Kinsella 2013). Going back to start of the new millennium, a personal account of a geographer working with children, Horton (2001), posed an abstract question, asking what is lacking in working ethically with children, in spite of so many existing ethical review bodies. This gap went on to be
discussed in more concrete ways in the last ten to fifteen years. The dilemma of informed consent and assent emerged as one of the major concerns focusing the attention to a philosophical understanding of children, as presented by James and Prout (1997), who consider a child as a complete being by her/himself. Informed consent of the parent or local guardian, to conduct research with children, went on to be criticized for the major chance of adults filtering the information for the ‘best interest of the child’ and in turn maintaining a cycle of abuse and maltreatment, where perpetrators are mostly known members of the family or friends. Judy Cashmore (2006) thus, presents a need to acknowledge the self-reports of children, especially in cases of violence and abuse. This belief in the assent of the child to provide information regarding him/herself stems from another major development, that is, the UNCRC (1989), Article 12 of which places faith in the abilities of a child to give a voice in decisions concerning self. With ‘child abuse’ in question, these ethics have been even more carefully discussed.

Believing in the inherent abilities of the child, the present research also tried to remove the adult filters as much as possible, to ensure a pure account of the child experiences in a fearless and obligation-free environment. Given that, an inherent vulnerability associated with a child’s lack of understanding of expectations and participant’s rights in a research, made the researcher move cautiously to ensure that nothing in the whole process of research harms the participant in any way. There have been a number of studies conducted just to discover the least harmful ways of working with children with histories of abuse. (Caroll-Lind et al. 2006). Any research study becomes credible only with respect for its participants. An interpretive framework in itself ensures that participants are considered very much a part of the research process throughout and thus, are not put into a marginalized position. The present study tried to make all the efforts so that the well being of the participants was never compromised. Some of the considerations for this study were specific to children while some others were more unique and situational in their character.

Institution’s consent was taken to conduct the research in their existing set up. The children associated with these organizations automatically became the probable participants. The organization themselves provided researcher with a group of
children consisting of individuals above the age of fifteen. In the first group meeting, the researcher gave her introduction and a description of her work, in a way most comprehensible by the adolescents. Considering that these children are exposed to various organizational projects, an outsider coming to talk to them was nothing new. That although made them less resistant to talk about their street life experiences, but posed a dilemma for the researcher to dissociate with their past experiences and thus becoming disinterested and mechanical in their participation. In the first group meeting, it was made very clear that confidentiality in the matters will be maintained what so ever. They were also told that at any moment if they feel that they do not want to be part of the FGDs, they could quit the process.

In spite of this, the researcher do realize that there is always a power imbalance between adult and a child which no matter what, is somewhere influenced their decisions to be part of the group, at least initially. However, it was felt that as the groups moved further, the interest of the children in the topics discussed, brought them back again and again and the feeling of abiding by the ‘orders’ of the authorities played less of a role. They were clearly asked if they are comfortable for audio recordings. A verbal pact was made between all that whatever discussed in the group, will not be disclosed to anyone outside, so that if another member in the group shares something personal, other children should not come to know. This way, confidentiality was restored as a value for everyone to stick to.

Considering Reciprocity, as John Creswell (2011) calls it, is an essential ethic of a research like this and thus followed. The researcher made sure that the data collection procedure was mutually beneficial. Thus, with consent of the organizations and the participants’ they, discussions with participants on their myths about ‘sex’ and awareness on sexual abuse took precedence towards the end of the data collection procedures. As the discussions move towards the various forms of abuse, the awareness towards these forms and ways to deal with them became inherent parts of the discussions. However, the FGDs never took the form of lectures. While discussing abuse also, the meanings were operationalized via open discussions. The researcher also realizes the inherent power imbalance that exists. Thus, every attempt was made to ensure that participants feel independent of any pressures to talk and express
themselves, especially in relation to their memories of violence and abuse. With the end of the FGDs, the participants were asked to engage in in-depth interviews if they wish to. It was made clear that purpose of these one to one interactions would be to get some information for the same research, clearly stating that nothing disclosed, will be discussed with anyone in the organization. These were some of the procedural considerations.

As understood earlier, for the longest time, existence of sexual abuse in children was an unsettling reality. Understanding ‘child’ along with ‘sex’, and that too by adults (many times by adults in roles of protectors) is undoubtedly controversial. Thus, each and every verbal or non-verbal cue of the researcher had to add in making the atmosphere conducive for them to share their inner most feelings and the so called ‘shameful’ memories with comparative ease. The stigma associated with sexual and even physical and substance abuse was discussed in the group in such a way that the participants feel that the researcher thinks differently and more openly than say, their parents, teachers, friends etc. An attempt was made to form a bond of mutual trust which made the participants believe in the promises of the researcher to be acceptable to their hidden realities, being non judgmental and keeping her promise of confidentiality in any circumstance.

As this process led to the disclosure of sexual abuse by participants, the dilemmas associated were very pertinent. Nothing that the researcher does should harm the participants. Thus, volunteering for sharing was one way to reduce any external pressure on them to recall their experiences. Considering the age and maturity of the participants and their willingness to talk about their experiences in an interview and sometimes even in group setting, restored faith in the power of resilience of the adolescents. All these participants were asked if they feel they need to talk to a counselor or a social worker about their issues. They all refused. They tend to believe that more the people know, more will be the discussion over it and more difficult it will be to avoid it. All the seven participants who shared histories of sexual abuse with the participants felt that these incidents had happened in the past and they do not feel the need for it to be made their present again. The reason they said they disclosed it to the researcher is because the faith they have in her for keeping the information
completely confidential. Thus, catharsis acted as a therapy in itself where they could talk about it without worrying about the consequences.

Taking the ethical debate further, it needs to be clear that an adolescent’s engagement in any ‘sexual act’ may not necessarily be ‘involuntarily’. Adolescence is the age of sexual explorations and they become sexually active at an early age especially in the uninhibited environment of street. Thus, an attitude of acceptance towards the sexual explorations and an open mind to differentiate between these acts and those termed as sexual abuse by them were carefully understood. In the process, voyeurism was avoided as much as possible. Sex is a private matter and a deliberate attempt at intruding in that personal space had to be avoided. Persuading an individual to disclose the most secretive and sometimes traumatic memories could not only disrupt the process of rapport formation but could have also lead to re-victimization of the participant. Thus, the researcher was extremely careful in using her words throughout the process. Even while discussing life on the streets, researcher was aware of the inherent gap in the socio economic background and the concept of morality between her and the participants. Thus, she tried to be as unbiased as possible. And even an over sympathetic attitude was avoided.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Studying child abuse, with specific focus on sexual abuse has its own set of grave limitations. Ranging from the diversity of the sample to the time available with each participant was somewhere limited by the practicalities of the situation.

To start with, adolescents living ‘on the streets’ could not be directly taken from the streets and the researcher had to go through organizations. There were two major reasons for this. One was to ensure a professional system available in case an adolescent discloses abusive histories or is found to be himself abusing someone. Another reason was the extremely mobile nature of street children. As this study demanded multiple interactions with the same group of participants, the researcher felt that approaching adolescents directly on the streets would not be feasible.
There was less control over selection of participants, as it was provided by the organization. The criteria for selection by the organization was said to be age and time spent on the streets, but the researcher feels that there could be an inherent bias towards those who were more vocal and confident in talking and expressing themselves.

Maintaining confidentiality was challenging as the organization was always interested in knowing what the researcher was doing in the meetings. Although it was made clear that the information shared by the participants will be kept confidential, but there existed a hierarchical structure in the organization’s set up. The professionals working directly with the children always were keen to know what was going on in these ‘private meetings’.

Obtaining trust of the participants was difficult especially in an organizational setting because despite of constant clarifications, the researcher was sometimes mistaken to be an organization’s representative only. This restricted them from trusting the researcher more than any one else in the center (as they call it). It took some time for the researcher to clarify her position in the entire data collection process.

One of the major limitations of this study is that the children currently abused, cannot be identified as victims of abuse (especially sexual) are going to through trauma and emotional upheavals. The researcher herself is not trained to handle the extremely sensitive cases of sexual abuse. Because of this, the respondents selected for the study have been selected as ‘adolescent’ who were abused in the past i.e. in their childhood.

This implies that the exact age of the participants should be known to put her under the category of ‘child’ or ‘adult’. But, in case of street children, most of them or even their parents, if available for information, do not know the exact age of the child. Thus, it is very difficult to include or exclude a street child in the study, based on her age. For this, the age, as told by the adolescent herself and the age recorded by the organization through which I am approaching the respondents, was chosen for the study.
CHAPTERIZATION PLAN

Based on the objectives of the study, the following chapters emerged.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Methodology

Chapter 3: Social Profile of the Participants

Chapter 4: Life on the streets: Verbalizing Experiences

Chapter 5: Forms of abuse on the street: A Phenomenological Understanding

Chapter 6: Child Sexual Abuse and the Self: Looking at connections

Chapter 7: Discussion and Recommendations