



"The Bitter Truth"

analysis of
200 letters
from victims and
survivors of
child
sexual abuse

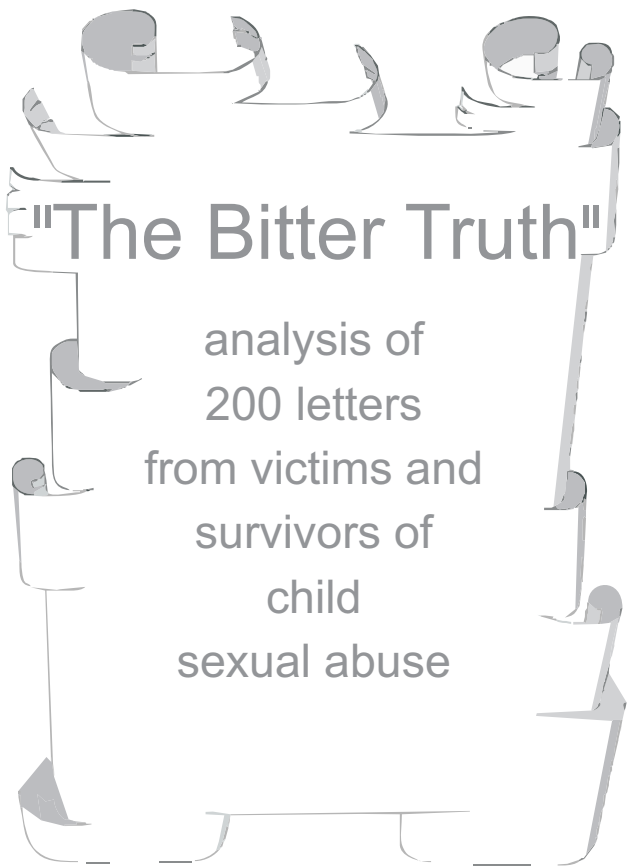


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Aangan would like to thank all the survivors of abuse who had the strength and courage to seek help, share their stories and overcome the darkness...

INTRODUCTION

Contrary to common opinion, child sexual abuse continues to be a practiced crime in Pakistani society. Research suggests that across the globe, the incidence of sexual abuse of children is at least 15 – 20%, and a small-scale research done in Pakistan has also produced similar results. This is further supported by Aangan's own experience of working in the community with children from diverse groups and backgrounds.

Aangan, a Rozan program, works on the emotional health of children in general, and focuses on child sexual abuse in particular. It raises awareness in society about child sexual abuse, provides counseling and works towards capacity building of individuals, communities, community workers, professionals including teachers, doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists and organizations working with children. Counseling is offered in person, over the telephone and through letters and e-mails.

Over the years Aangan has received hundreds of letters from survivors and victims of child sexual abuse. The present report is an analysis of the first 200 letters received by Aangan during the years 1999-2002. The letters were received in response to a series of articles on child sexual abuse in an English children's magazine. The findings are based on information given by the survivor or the victim in these letters. (Any recognizable details have not been included in the report.)

DEFINITION OF TERMS USED

Child sexual abuse is defined as any activity in which an adult or an older person uses a younger child in a sexual way. In our society older individuals have authority over children and children in turn trust their elders, and child sexual abuse can be understood as a gross violation of this trust. An adult taking advantage of a child's trust exerts his/ her authority over the child to use the child for sexual purpose of some kind. The lack of clarity of the term "sexual abuse" often leads to denial and prevents the community from taking the issue seriously.

Types of Child Sexual Abuse

- An adult gaining sexual satisfaction through watching naked children
- An adult making suggestive comments to the child that are sexual in nature

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1. Lloyd, Duhaime, Barrister and Solicitor, "Child Sexual Abuse", WWLIA.
<http://www.wwlia.org/childsex.htm> (online).
 2. Population Council of Pakistan, "Enabling factors to CSA among school going children in Islamabad/Rawalpindi"

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- An adult revealing his or her sexual parts to a child
- Encouraging or forcing a child to read/watch pornography, giving pornographic literature, pictures or movies to a child or using the child in pornographic material (i.e. photos, videos, etc.)
- Kissing a child with sexual undertones/inclinations
- Fondling a child's breasts or genitals or if an abuser forces a child to fondle his or her genitals
- Encouraging or forcing a child to masturbate with the adult as either a participant or observer
- Encouraging or forcing a child into oral sex (using one's own or the child's mouth in a sexual act)
- Vaginal penetration
- Anal penetration

Who is a Child ?: According to the Child Rights Convention (CRC), to which Pakistan is a signatory, a child is defined as an individual below 18 years of age

Abuser/Perpetrator: A person in a position for power who uses and manipulates a child through sexual means.

Victim: A child currently going through and dealing with child sexual abuse

Survivor: A child or adult who has experienced sexual abuse in the past and the abuse is not currently going on.

Incest: Any form of sexual abuse where the perpetrator is related to the child by blood or by law.

Objectives of the Present Study

Despite its high incidence, the public appears generally unaware of the issue and its possible physical and psychological effects. Since any discussion related to sex is considered a taboo in Pakistan, layers of denial surround the issue of child sexual abuse. Due to this, the issue of child sexual abuse has remained unacknowledged and unexplored. This report is an effort on Aangan's part to raise awareness about this issue. The objective of the study is:

1. To explore the dynamics of CSA within the context to Pakistan especially viz a viz how gender differentially impacts variables such as:
 - Age at the time of abuse
 - Form/type of abuse
 - Relationship between the offender and victim

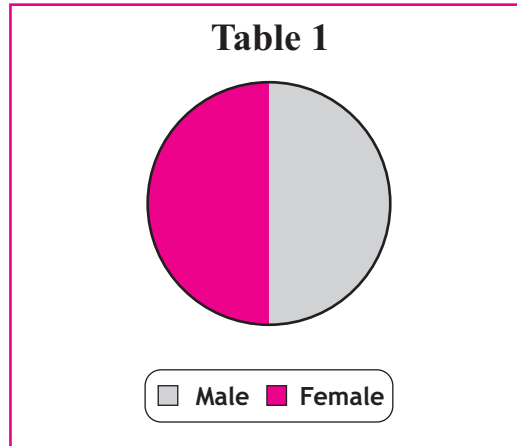
Limitations: As with many secondary data researches, this research faced certain limitations as well, especially viz a viz limited information regarding socioeconomic class. However, keeping in view the fact that the data relies on a person's ability to read, write, have access to an English newspaper and e-mail, the data received can be attributed to children belonging to middle and upper middle class, from a school going urban or peri-urban setting.

PRESENTATION OF STATISTICAL DATA

The following are some of the patterns that were found from the study:

Gender of the Client

Out of the two hundred letters received by Aangan, 49.5% were from boys and 50.5% were from girls, as shown in table 1.



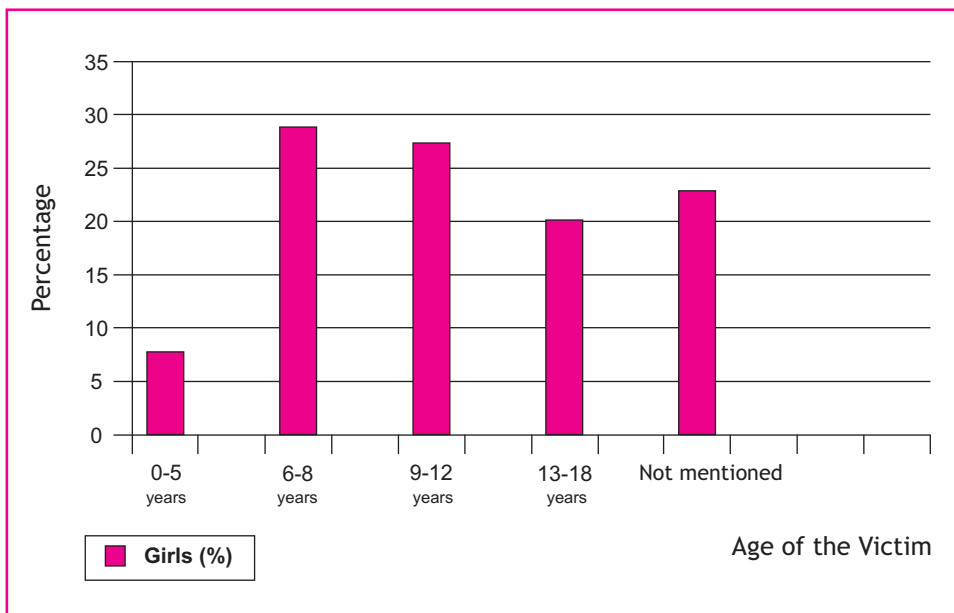
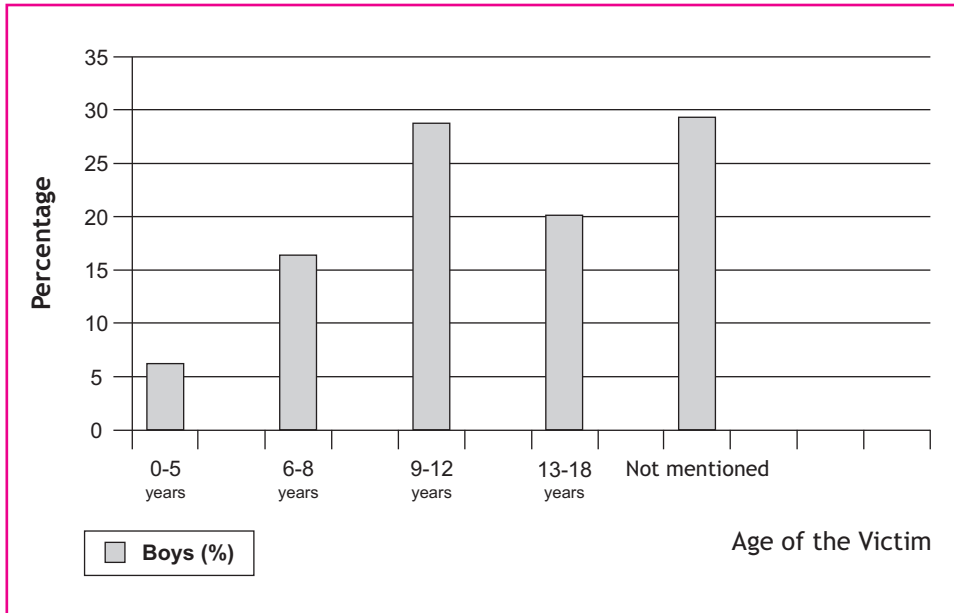
The almost equal representation above could have been affected by societal restrictions placed on girls mobility, privacy and access to information.

Gender v/s Age at the Time of First Incidence of Abuse

Majority of the children as reported in the letters were abused between the age of 9 and 12. The lowest age reported for both girls and boys was between 0-5 years. For boys, there is a marked increase in the percentage of the first incidence of abuse between the ages of 9-12 (28.3%) as compared to ages 6-8 (16.2%) (Table 2). This may be because as boys grow older they are not so protected within the confines of the home and are allowed to move independently outside the home as well, so their vulnerability increases to the possibility of abuse outside the home.

For girls, between ages 6-8, the percentage of the first incidence of abuse is much higher (28.7%) as compared to boys (16.2%). This may be due to the fact that at a younger age girls may not be protected as much as they are when they reach puberty and therefore access to them is easier at this age. Looking at the percentage of girls it is interesting to note that between the ages of 13-18 there is a decline in the incidence of abuse (14.9%) from 6-12 years of age (26.7%) This may be due to the reason that in Pakistani society, as girls reach puberty they are more protected and more societal restrictions are placed on their mobility and therefore their interaction with males even with male cousins is also restricted. However, this could also be due to the fact that girls may not be reporting abuse between the ages of 13-18 due to virginity issues. Thus in Table 2 it is apparent that the percentage of incidence of abuse decreases as the age of the girl increases, whereas in case of boys as the age increases their vulnerability to abuse increases.

Table 2



Gender v/s Age When Writing to Aangan

Even though the majority of the clients reported being abuse between the ages of 6 and 12, majority of the letters received were from individuals who were between 10 to 18 years old as shown in table 3.

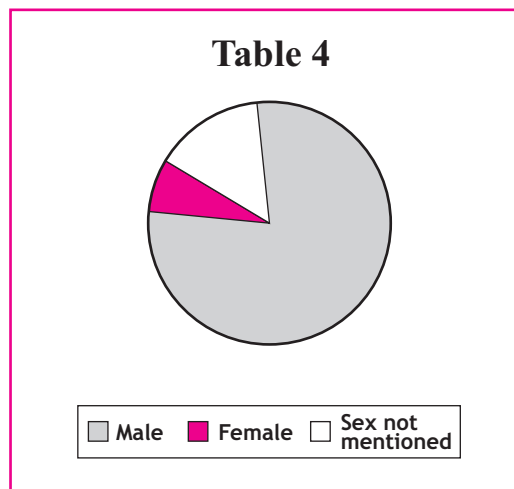
Table 3

Age of victim at 1st letter	Victim		Total (%)
	Male (%)	Female (%)	
10-18 yrs old	42.4	36.6	39.5
19-30 yrs old	30.3	25.7	28.0
30 yrs & above	3.0	5.0	4.0
Not Mentioned	24.2	32.7	28.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Perpetrators

Among the perpetrators 77% were male, 6.5% were female and in 16.5% of the letters the sex of the Perpetrators was not mentioned (table 4).

Table 4

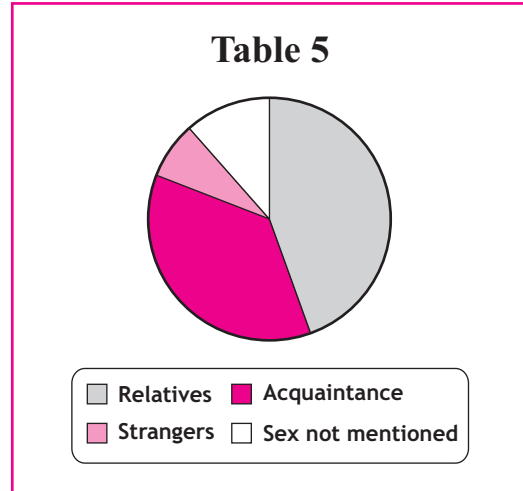


Letter From A Survivor

It all happened when I was only three years old. Though I was very young at that time the memory of sexual abuse is still very vivid in my mind. It was my servant who did this to me. The servant was a very old and trustworthy person and was just like our family member. My parents used to leave me alone with him. One day when my father was at the office and my mother had gone out for shopping, he asked me to play a game called 'cops and robbers'. While playing the game he took off my clothes and touched my private parts. I was so scared and confused. I did not know what to do. I hated him for doing this to me. This continued for a long time and I was not able to say no to him, though I tried in many ways not to allow him to do this, but in vain. I could not tell my parents as he threatened me that if I tell them he will kill me with a knife. I was so scared. After a year, we moved from that city and finally my trauma came to an end. I am now 14 years old, but the horrible memory is still fresh in my mind.

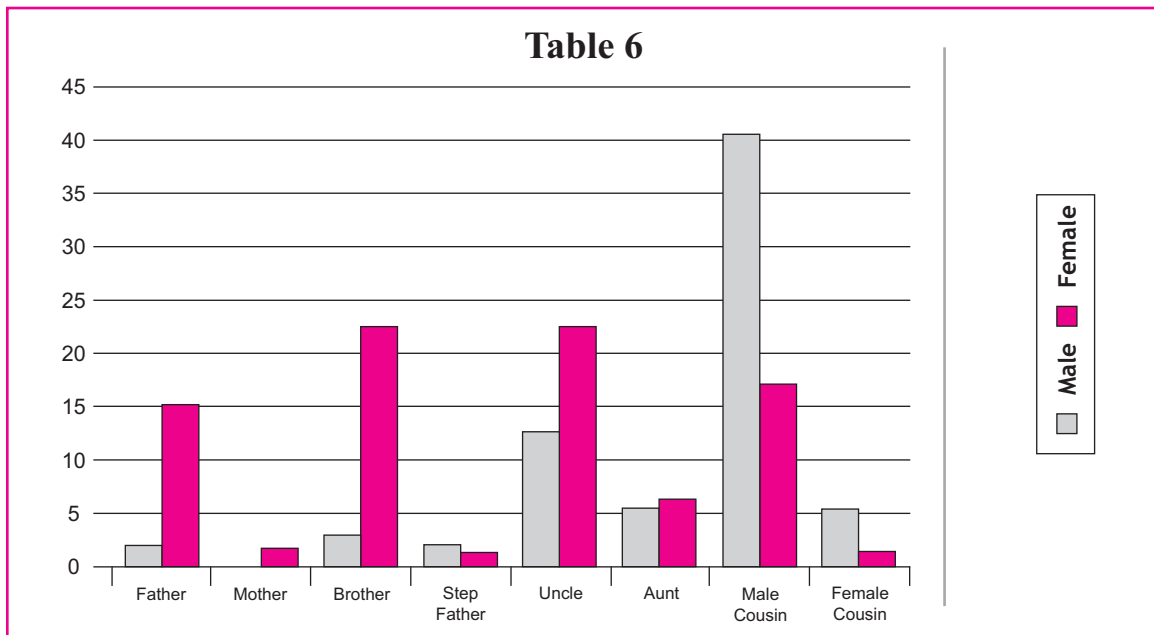
Relationship Between Perpetrators and Child

The type of Perpetrators with the highest percentage was that of relatives (49%) and the second highest was that of acquaintance (43%). The smallest percentage of Perpetrators was that of strangers (7%), which shatters the common myth that Perpetrators are usually strangers to the child. The data in table 5 clearly supports the fact that Perpetrators are known to the child and are those whom the child trusts.



Perpetrators within the Family

Table 6 below shows abuse that occurs within the family. Majority of the boys who wrote to Aangan were abused by an older male cousin, while in the case of girls the majority of abusers were uncles, brothers as well as male cousins. This pattern could be due to the fact that in Pakistani culture, girls are told to keep a distance from most male individuals for their own protection, but his advice and supervision often does not extend to uncles and brothers who are considered safe, thereby increasing their vulnerability. Boys are almost never restricted or supervised in their interaction with male members of the family.



Acquaintance

The highest percentage of perpetrators among acquaintances was that of servants (39.6%). For the boys, 24.1% and for the girls 56.6% of the perpetrators were servants, as shown in table 7. For boys the second most common type of perpetrators were their neighbors (19.8%), whereas only 7.8% of girls had been abused by a neighbor. For girls, the second most common type of perpetrators was a religious teacher (moulvi), spiritual healer (pirs), doctor etc.

Table 7

Abuser	Victims		Total (%)
	Male (%)	Female (%)	
Neighbor	19.8	7.8	19
Friend (male, female, class fellow)	6.9	3.8	5.4
Step Mom's Sister	1.7	0.0	0.9
Religious Teacher (maulvi), Spiritual Healer (pir), Doctor, Carpenter, Life Guard,	6.9	9.5	8.1
Domestic Helpers (male service provider, maid servant, driver, guard)	24.1	56.6	39.6
Teachers	8.6	3.8	6.3
Shopkeeper	6.9	3.8	5.4
Others	1.7	3.8	2.7

Strangers

Of the letters received by Aangan from boys, 12.1% of the perpetrators were strangers to the child, while for girls, only 2% of the perpetrators were strangers as shown in table 8. The reason for this may be that in Pakistani society girls are not frequently sent outside to run errands nor are they allowed or encouraged to interact openly with men. Young boys on the other hand spend most of their time outside the house where they can be more exposed to sexual abuse by strangers.

Table 8

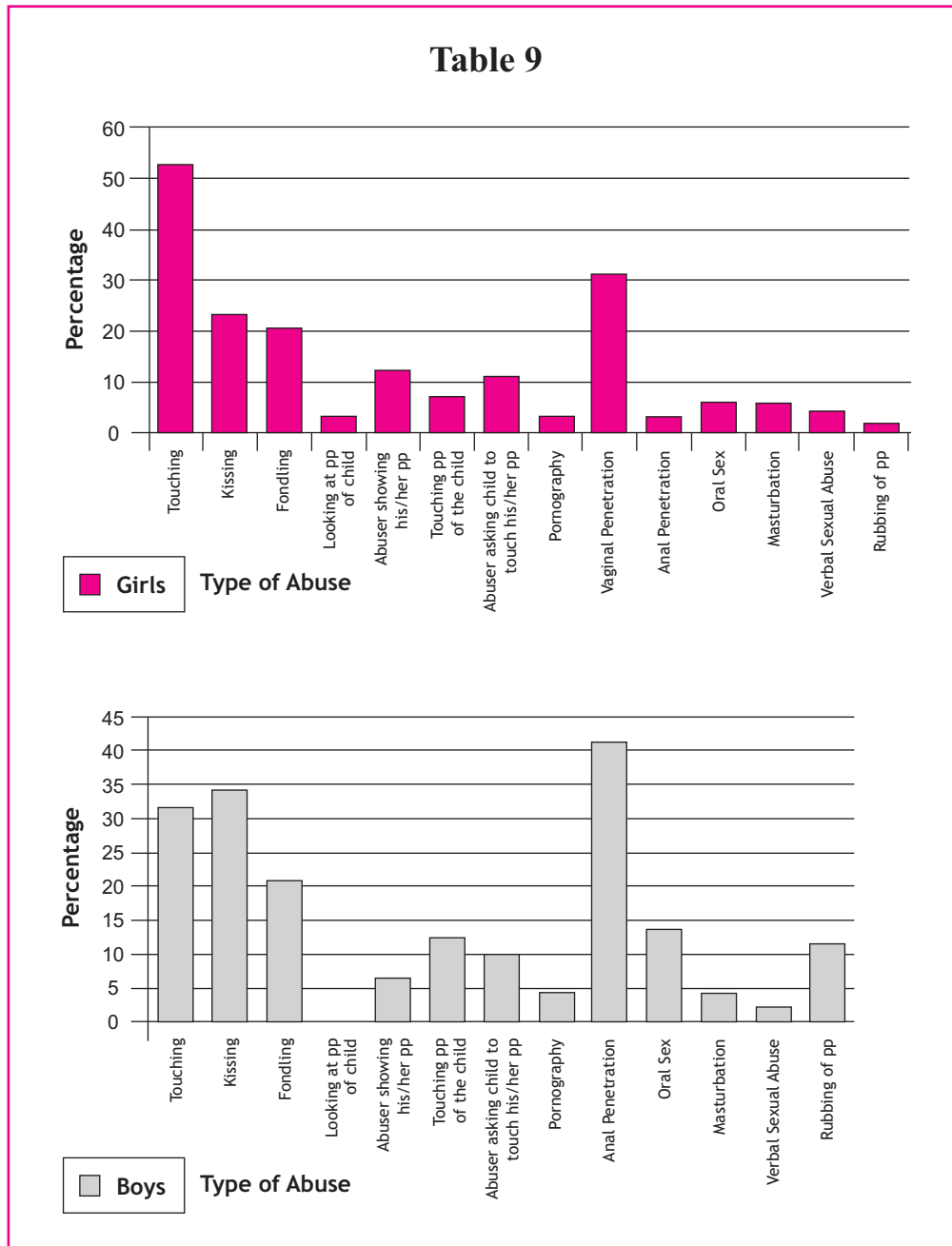
Abuser	Victims		Total (%)
	Male (%)	Female (%)	
Strangers	12.1	2.0	7.0

Letter from an Incest Victim

My problem is my parents. Parents are supposed to be role models for children, they are the ones who teach you what is right and wrong. But when one grows up and starts recognizing what is right and wrong we come to know that parents are not perfect, and they can be wrong as well. I know now that what my father is doing is wrong but I don't know what to do about it. I cannot tell anyone because I do not want to break my family ties. Now that I have grown up and have recognized what my father is doing to me I cannot fulfill the wishes of my father, I cannot do what he wants me to do. My refusal makes my father angry and thus he is irritable all the time and also fights with my mother. Everyone is upset because of this tense environment and is confused by his behavior because no one knows about his problem except for me. I am scared all the time, I cannot sleep as I am scared that he will come in to my room to fulfill his sinful wishes. I wait for my sisters to sleep so that I can sleep with them. I am scared to go alone in the kitchen or any other place at home as I don't want to be alone with him, but I can't help it as he is my father and he can be present everywhere at home. Sometimes it seems that its all my fault. Should I obey my father's wrong wishes? I do not know what to do. I can't share it with anyone.

Type of Abuse

Most of the clients reported touching (48.8%), kissing (28.8%), sodomy (21.9%) and fondling (20.5%) as the most common types of abuse. 16.4% of the clients also reported being raped. The statistics mentioned below in table 9 show that rape and sodomy are not the only form of sexual abuse but less severe forms such as touching, kissing and fondling are also common forms of abuse.



As shown in table 9, the highest percentage amongst girls for type of abuse is touching (41.8%), vaginal penetration (31.5%), kissing (23.3%) and then fondling (20.5%). Amongst boys the highest percentages are for anal penetration (41.1%), kissing (34.2%), touching (31.5%) and fondling (20.5%).

Effects of Child Sexual Abuse

Child Sexual Abuse tends to have numerous, multifarious effects on the victims and survivors. These effects can be emotional, psychological and physical. Victims deal with a variety of feelings, which affects them differently in intensity and extent. Also since the effects of child sexual abuse directly or indirectly play out in the individual's attitudes, interactions and relationships with others.

The type of effects reported in the letters by victims and survivors as shown in Table 10.

Table 10

Type of Effects	Victims		Total (%)
	Male (%)	Female (%)	
Lack of confidence	14.3	13.8	14.0
Guilt	45.2	40.0	42.7
Shame	4.8	7.5	6.1
Fear	19.0	17.5	18.3
Anxiety	3.4	5.4	4.5
Depression	25.4	40.5	33.8
Suicidal Ideation	13.6	13.5	13.5
Concerns about homosexuality	11.9	1.4	6.0
Helplessness	6.8	8.1	7.5
Guilt feeling about masturbation	27.3	6.7	18.9
Feelings of abusing others	9.1	6.7	8.1
Feelings of sexual attraction toward males	9.1	0.0	5.4
Problems in interpersonal relationships	0.0	13.3	5.4

In this regard, the age at which the victims were abused and the time they were able to disclose the abuse needs to be taken into consideration. Among the effects reported, the feelings of guilt rated the highest. Abuse most of the time seems to occur at an age where children do not completely understand their own bodies and are just beginning to understand their sexuality, therefore they might not realize the consequences or may find the activity pleasurable. Due to this they may think of themselves, as consensual partners thereby increasing the guilt associated with the abuse. The second highest reported effect was that of depression. It is interesting to note that the feelings of

depression are higher in girls as compared to boys. In Pakistani society females are brought up in such a way where they have few opportunities to disclose their abuse, which makes them silent, further internalizing the anger, shame and guilt, which can lead to depression.

Fear was another emotional effect experienced by most of the victims and survivors. Manipulation by the abuser plays a big part in instilling fear in these individuals. Most of the time the abusers might threaten the child to ensure that s/he does not disclose the abuse. In one case, a girl was told at the time of abuse that if she told anyone her mother would die. At that time she had been young and innocent enough to believe the threat, however she had internalized it to such an extent that she kept this abuse a secret and when she reached adulthood, she still feared that her mother would die if she told anyone. Suicidal ideation is another effect common in both boys and girls, which emerges mostly due to the fact that the children consider themselves worthless due to the abuse and their guilt and shame is so profound that they start thinking of taking away their lives.

The boy survivors experienced homosexual tendencies or homosexuality more than the girl survivors as reported in the effects. The confusion among boys about their sexual preferences or homosexuality may also spring from the fact that child sexual abuse for boys is mostly a homosexual experience as mentioned before. Their sexual preferences may be influenced by the abuse, as it was their first sexual experience, therefore causing them to associate sexual pleasure with the act and the sex of the abuser.

One of the boys who wrote to us was very disturbed and depressed because of his homosexual tendencies. He had been abused in his childhood multiple times by different men. He shared that whenever he saw a boy he would feel sexual feelings for him and was very concerned about his sexual identity. In counseling, he revealed that he does have feelings for girls as well.

Majority of the boys also reported excessive masturbation. Although masturbation is a common activity which adolescents engage in, some children that were abused were introduced to it at an early age by the offender. The main feeling, which was highlighted when they talked about masturbation, was that of guilt. Since discussing issues like masturbation and sex are taboo in Pakistani society, children do not have correct information about such issues. Most boys felt that masturbation was an effect of the abuse not knowing that most children start masturbating during adolescence without ever having been sexually abused.



Letter from a Survivor Showing Effects

After gathering a lot of courage I am writing to you believing that you will surely help me . I am an 18 year old girl studying in college, recognized as a brilliant student. I was sexually abused when I was only 6 years old. We had just shifted to a new city. An unknown man probably 30 year old sexually abused me. He touched my private parts and made me to touch his. I told my mother about it , I don't know what my mother did about it as he was stranger to us but related to our landlord. I never saw that man again. Then later in the same neighborhood, one of my uncle started abusing me. He would say that he was "checking" my body. I found out from my neighbor that he was abusing other children as well, and we used to talk about it with each other. These incidents have affected me a lot. I have become so shy and under confident that it has badly affected my studies. I was a very confident and bold girl but these incidents have totally changed my behavior. Now if someone or even my teachers admire or appreciate me I feel like they are insulting me. I always feel exposed and naked. Recently one guy told me that he loves me I wanted to cry at that time. I am feeling helpless. I have started hating everyone; I don't have any best friend as I feel uncomfortable if I am alone with them. It seems to me that I have become a psycho case. Please help me!

DISCUSSION OF EMERGENT THEMES

- **Boys and girls are equally vulnerable to sexual abuse**

Child sexual abuse is prevalent in our society and affects both boys and girls. The statistics goes on to disprove one of the commonly held beliefs that girls in conservative societies are more protected and are sheltered thus making them less vulnerable to abuse. Males are usually not seen as targets of sexual abuse and fewer measures are taken to protect younger boys from such a crime.

- **Children between age 6 and 12 are also vulnerable to sexual abuse.**

It is a common perception in Pakistan that children between the ages of 6 and 12 are not sexually developed enough and thus are not that vulnerable to sexual abuse. However, these statistics seem to suggest that sexual abuse tends to take place during the age group where the child becomes more independent and requires less supervision than before. Between the ages of 0-5, the child has much more parental supervision. Care givers may also think that sexual abuse is directly linked to physical maturity and or puberty and that girls are more vulnerable to abuse when they physically mature, especially between the ages of 13-18. However, from the statistics we can see that children are vulnerable to abuse at any age, especially between ages 6 to 12.

- **Majority fo the abuse takes place between the ages of 9 and 12, however majority of the disclosures are made between the ages of 10 and 18**

Most of the individuals who wrote to us were between the ages of 10 and 18, however the age at which they had been abused was between 9 and 12. The realization that abuse has taken place seems to occur to individuals mostly between 10 to 18 years of age. This could be attributed to a number of reasons:

- In early adolescence to adolescence, children become more aware of their bodily changes and their emerging sexuality. Often times they do not have proper information about these changes and may feel uneasy about them or attribute them to the abuse. It is at this stage that children also have more frequent flashbacks about the abuse that took place in their childhood and have more autonomy, outlets or means than when they were younger.
- As children grow older and realize that the abuse was not something “normal”, their suffering intensifies and they want to share their feelings with someone to lessen the suffering and the burden of carrying the memories of the incident.
- The children are also more autonomous at this age where their individual identities are developing and they become more aware of how their life experiences are different from those around them.
- The children at this age have more outlets as they develop close relationships outside the home and feel secure enough to discuss issues and concerns with trusted friends, even discussing issues related to matters within the home.

- **Females can be offenders, even though the reported percentage is lower than men**

Contrary to common belief that only men sexually abuse children, the data collected through the letters revealed that women also sexually abuse children. Women in our society are generally thought of as, maternal and sexually submissive and incapable of exploiting another individual sexually. One girl shared her experience of sexual abuse by a Quran teacher. She shared that her mother used to drop her at the house of the teacher for Quran lessons. Her mother had told the girl that women are trustworthy as compared to males. The abuse continued for a long time and because the child was never told that women could also be abusers, for a long time she thought that there was nothing wrong with what the teacher was doing or that it wouldn't have any impact on her. Our data shows that women are also perpetrators although the percentage is modest as compared to men (as shown in Table 4). The small percentage of female abusers could also be attributed to the fact that most of these cases go unreported, as men may feel societal pressure to be proud of early sexual activity, no matter how unwanted it may have been at the time. Additionally, if a male child is sexually abused by a woman, society may see him as submissive and less masculine which is insulting and shameful for men.

- **Within the home, servants tend to form the largest category of abusers**

In Pakistani middle and upper class society where domestic help is commonly available, servants have easy access to young children within the home. It is surprising to note that within the home it is the servants more than any other person in the family who abuse children. Often times, hired help is thought of as inferior or less powerful and therefore are not expected to go against the will of the employers. Servants, especially those whom have been with the family for a considerable amount of time are blindly trusted and are asked to baby-sit and supervise the child in the parent's absence or when they are busy. As such servants often have more private access to children than anyone in the family.

- **Sex offenders vary based on the mobility of the victim. Girls are abused inside the home while boys are abused inside as well as outside the home**

Society defines certain roles and the behaviors associated with each gender. It also tends to dictate an individual's exposure and mobility. Pakistani society accords boys more mobility than girls and girls are more protected than boys. Girls are often restricted to the home where they are seen as "safe" within the confines of the home and in the presence of family members. Boys usually have no such restrictions and are encouraged to venture outside the house whether to play and interact with the neighbors, or fetch something from the market. It is due to this practice that girls are more vulnerable to abuse by relatives or within the home, and boys are more vulnerable to abuse by acquaintances and strangers.

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