



# From Trauma to Triumph: A Qualitative Inquiry into Sexual Abuse Survivors Healing Journeys

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## Abstract

The rate of sexual abuse of women is startlingly rising daily. Women and children are not safe even in their own homes. In addition to causing physical injury, sexual abuse ruins the victim's overall emotional well-being. The path from "victim to survivor" is not a simple one. In these cases, a highly skilled and empathetic social professional should treat the survivor and use appropriate intervention to reintegrate her into her family and social life.

In order for these survivors to recover from the trauma, social workers are essential. As part of the survivors' rehabilitation process, they use various trauma-care techniques and therapies. Additionally, they provide emotional support, care, and counselling to their family.

Under the Nirbhaya project, the researcher, a practicing social worker, assists in the rehabilitation of survivors of sexual abuse. The purpose of this study to depict the psychological issues faced by survivors of sexual abuse. This research is qualitative and descriptive in character. Data from the respondents was gathered using a case study. The study highlights the significance and necessity of social work practice among survivors of sexual abuse.

This case study highlights the survivor's experience underscores how systemic power imbalances—such as poverty, political weakness, and social isolation—can leave victims vulnerable to exploitation and extreme violence. This evaluation emphasizes the necessity of accessible mental health services, stronger legal protections, and community interventions to prevent further victimization and aid survivors in reclaiming their lives.

**Keywords:** Sexual abuse survivors, trauma recovery, psychological impact, emotional well-being, social work intervention.

## Introduction

Sexual abuse results physical wounds and psychological scars that wounds and scars remain for years. Many sexually abused survivors experienced shame, guilt, trust issues, depression and even suicidal attempts when they dealt with the survival process. Healing journey begins with accepting those psychological distress and seeking help from the Psychological professional and support from the family, friends, and peer groups. When came to the rebuild the trust within and outer self of the survivor became a difficult task, because in majority of the cases accused persons were their closed one.

Restoring one's faith in oneself and others is another essential step in the healing process. People who have been sexually abused frequently struggle with trust, which makes it challenging to establish and preserve good relationships. People can examine these problems and create more positive interpersonal relationships with the support of therapy. Managing and undergoing the healing process is a complex journey and it may vary from each individual's cases. People who have been sexually abused frequently struggle with trust,

which makes it challenging to build and sustain good relationships. People can examine these problems and create more positive interpersonal relationships with the support of mental health professionals and social support (Zia Sherrell, 2024).

Strong support from the Professionals, friends, and family are needed to restore this trust, which has been damaged by traumatic events. These tactics are based on dependable gestures, constant reassurance, and steadfast support. Above all, it is necessary to acknowledge the vital role that caregivers and other individuals who support in the healing process. They are among the most crucial stakeholders involved in fostering the development of a positive atmosphere. Caregivers who are knowledgeable and encouraging can be invaluable supporters in promoting candid dialogue, comprehension, and the healing process as a whole (Taparia, 2024).

## Materials and Methods

The researcher was a social worker in Nirbhaya project and had two and half years of experience in working with the

sexually abused victims under rehabilitation project. This study focuses on the psychological health of sexually abused victims-a using case study analysis in Trivandrum Nirbhaya home. The researcher was keen to know the

- i). Socio-economic status of the victims,
- ii). Identifying different forms of and manifestation of sexual abuses,
- iii). Psychological health of victims, and
- iv). Social work intervention.

The study is a qualitative study and descriptive in nature. Case study method was used to gather data from the respondents. Two respondents were selected to share the psychological health and social work interventions among sexually abused victims. The researcher fulfilled all the ethical aspects including the respondents' consent and confidentiality strictly followed through entire research process. For collecting data, the researcher used in-depth interview tool and Budgell (2008) <sup>[19]</sup>; Boeije (2010) <sup>[1]</sup> case study format was followed to explain the psychological health among the sexually abused victims.

### Case Study 1

**Introduction:** Ms. A (18-year-old) waiting for S. S. L. C result; two brothers aged 4 and 5 years respectively. Her mother was working on daily wage jobs and her father runs a small shop. Family belongs to Dalit community.

**Case Presentation:** Ms. A completed SSLC examination and waiting for the result. She used to help her parents whenever they get huge orders. Father is an alcoholic person and every time he made disputes with mother. Their arguments usually end up with beating and kicking her mother. Sometimes father also used to beat children. Due to the behavior of father no one came for mingling with their family. Their family remained isolated in that village. When one new family came in their neighborhood, they started talking to Ms. A's family. They belong to Dalit community. They visited daily to Ms. A's home, and share all the things each other. As Ms. A said early, usually day times she will be lonely in the home. One day, the neighborhood uncle came to her house asking for some sugar. When she came to kitchen, he followed Ms. A and covered her mouth with his hands. He used knife to hold her and told "if you try to escape from me I will use the knife". She couldn't cry, because of fear she became voiceless.

She did not know what to do next? Her mind went blank. He forcefully had sexual contact with her. After the sexual contact, he threatened not to disclose it to anyone. After he went out, she could not move a single step, she became silent. When her mother and younger brothers came to home, she could not express her feelings. In one side she wants to share the incident with mother but the threatening of accused person and she thought that when father came to know he will kill her; so she remained silent. Her mother continuously questioned because of her strange behavior.

But she did not disclose the incident with anyone. She thought that she had become impure and she is not worthy to live in this world. Her emotions, stress, hallucinations and fear all are forced her to attempt suicide. She used harpic but fortunately when her mother noticed she fell on the floor, mother tries to wake up her but she didn't respond. Mother called her father and they took an auto rickshaw and rushed to nearby government hospital.

She escaped from that incident even though her fear, sleeplessness, hallucinations remain same. When the hospital

authority advised to consult a counselor; through the counselling session she shared the incident, the counselor reported to Child Welfare Committee and rehabilitate her in Nirbhaya home.

In the beginning, she could not respond to the social worker, she remained silent in during the whole time in the shelter home, and three times she attempted suicide because the sexual abuse incident had that much broken her mind and body. So, it's very difficult to the entire team of Nirbhaya to bring back her in to normal stage. Firstly, we identify the interesting area of the victim, then prepare care plan for engaging her in during the day that make a positive change in her life. Slowly therapies implemented, slowly she come back to a normal life. But still sometimes she became becomes silent and feeling fear to interact with the opposite sex. That trauma and fear will be there and sexual abuse is not only affects the body its but also affects the mind of the victim in during their entire life.

### Management & Outcome

Miss A has issues of suicidal tendencies, fear, sleeplessness, and mood disorders, so firstly the counselor gave counseling, after the first session, the counselor prepared an individual care plan for the client or victim, in order to overcome these issues clinical psychologist applied Gestalt therapy and stress-reducing therapy. The client victim has undergone 8eight counseling sessions.

After the counseling sessions and the therapies, the client victim overcomes severe stress and fear. And she survived the issues like sleeplessness through proper treatment and counseling.

Sexual abuse incidents make the victim insecure, sleepless, fearful, suicidal attempts, and even hallucinations.

### Discussion

Broken family and the socio-economic background also plays a vital role in sexual abuse, here the respondent economically and socially insecure, politically also they are powerless. So, it's easy to exploit a person from the weak economic and social background socially and economically weaker section. At the same time the respondent victims faces severe Psychological health issues, inn though to some extent it was resolved, but that remained it remains in during their entire life.

After the proper treatment, the client victim survived the trauma, and later she continued her education with the help of the NGO and now she is staying with her family. Education is the most powerful weapon, so the survivor actively engaged in her education field and success to get a government job. For this, the NGO provided full support to the family and to the survivor.

### Case Study 2

**Introduction:** Ms. B (18-year-old). Studying in Higher secondary, Father's father is a fisherman; mother is a day daily laborer. Two brothers; one is studying and the second one working in a private company. Family belongs to the other backward caste category.

**Case Presentation:** Her father had an extra marital relationship, which who stayed next to their village. Once in a week he visited her home. He had two sons in by that extra marital relationship; they were working in construction fields construction workers respectively.

Like all Sundays, she went to church for prayer. Church is nearby her home. After the prayer one of her friends called

and told to her: "Your friend calling you, it's some emergency work she needs your help". She is her best friend, her childhood friend. Without any rethinking she followed him. When her house appeared, he told "she is inside the room, you go and meet her. He will wait outside". When she entered room, suddenly the door closed, and two strangers came from the hidden area they caught her from back side, tied her hands and mouth with a cloth. She cannot move a single step they tied her hands and legs also even she cannot utter a word, her mouth also tied up with cloth. Even though thousand words roaming in her mind but unfortunately, she cannot spell a word, she undergone through was in an utter helpless situation. She could not imagine what will happen to me her the next moment. They sexually abused and threatened me her "If you disclosed to anyone, we will spread this incident to your brother's friends. Then what will be happen? You should know the result". "If you disclosed to your friends we will kill you and spoil your entire life".

Later the incident, her behavior changed. She spent all the time in her room; she could not talk to her parents even to her friends. She became afraid to attend the prayers in church. Slowly, she disappeared from the prayer groups and skipped from friend's groups. She remained to be silent in home. She feels felt alone, sometimes she feel wished to run away from house in order to escape from the problems. During that time, her friends suggested to visit a counselor for a relief, because she used to talk to a counselor if she feel uncomfortable or face any problems or issues in family. She feels felt relaxed when she used to share her issues to counselor in school. First meeting, she cannot utter a word, she cried silently that whole day in front of the counselor. Second day she conveyed her helpless situation and the counselor immediately refer referred the case to Child Welfare Committee and rehabilitated her Nirbhaya shelter home. On the first day, she could not mingle with the other residents, she spent her all the whole day in a sleeping hall, she didn't interact and even hesitate hesitated to take food also.

On the second day, she attempts attempted suicide by hanging. Suddenly immediately the team entered admitted her in the government hospital and undergone for treatment. Later, that when during the second session, she remains remained silent and crying in front of the counselor. On the fourth day, she expressed her bitter experience, after that incident she didn't want to live her life, and she faces faced everyone with a fearful eye; she undergone was under severe depression. She took months to overcome from the trauma. Currently she had completed vocational higher secondary education and looking for graduation courses.

### Management and Outcome

Sexual abuse resulted in mental trauma and psychological health issues like depression, fear, and suicidal attempts. The suicidal attempts tendency is high among the sexually abused victims because of the psychological imbalances after the sexual abuse case. Here the victim was highly depressive after the incident. More than two times she attempted to suicide because of the sexual abuse incident in her life, which make made her to feel inferior and feel she is not worthy to live. That incident broken broke her emotionally and mentally. For reducing fear and suicidal tendencies, counselor gave 6six counselling sessions for the client victim and also for the family. For Depression to reduce depression, the counselor consulted medical help for reducing depression with medicines. After three to six months treatment, the client victim recovered, and showed interest to join studies and back

to a normal life. For that one this was possible because the NGO make made sure about the protection and care of the inmate victim and counsel the family and re integrate the survivor in to a normal life.

### Discussion

Broken family, socially-and economically, backward community (fishermen community) and politically powerless community. Their powerless used by the accused ones to abuse the respondent their powerlessness is taken as advantage by the abusers. Here In this case, the respondent victim became was helpless to escape from the accused ones, here helpless situation make made them cruelled to even to killing kill her, because of that incident the fear followed her a long time and that fear itself make made her to attempt suicide in order to solve in those problems escape from the fear. After the incident, her trauma increased, depression, fear, and suicidal attempts tendency are reduced and 2 she is now partially recovered from those psychological issues impacts by the effective implementation of therapies and care. Sexual abuse is not only broken breaks the body of the victim but also it entirely broken breaks the psychological balances in her body.

### Suggestions and Social Work Intervention

It's a high time to sensitize the public about the importance of psychological health among sexually abused victims.

- Community level intervention should be implemented for preventing sexual abuse cases incidents.
  - a) Community level groups like self-help groups, Jagratha samithy, Adolescent group of girls and boys all these groups should integrate and conduct Programmes programs to create awareness on sexual abuse, Suicide, Depression.
  - b) Social workers should include family members of the respondent victims for counselling, in some cases they were not willing or in some cases they may be the accused one in the case the social worker should identify anyone who supports the respondent.
  - c) Strictly follow the Individual care plan for reducing depression, suicidal attempt and fear
  - d) Life skill trainings for inmates the victims will be helpful. for the respondents
  - e) Mental health campaigns should be conducted for the inmates' victims
  - f) Social work methods of Group work and case studies will be more helpful and make easiest easier the journey of victim to survivor
  - g) Therapies like game therapy, Cognitive behavior therapies and appropriate other therapies will be helpful for improving the psychological health among the victims.
  - h) Yoga, Martial arts, Meditation, and Relaxation therapies such us Progressive muscle relaxation may help the respondents' victims to reduce stress and maintain peaceful mind.

### Conclusion

It's It is an alarming a very crucial time to recognize the importance of Psychological health of the sexually abused victims, State should address the importance of sexual sexually abused victims' health-both physical and psychological, this This should be implemented through the NGO through NGOs so that effective intervention of social workers and clinical psychologists, the sexual sexually abused

victim can be survivor in her life and feel free to live her life without any fear, depression or feeling intend to end her life in a single thought. So it's the time to include their Physical and Psychological health to build a survivor.

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