

LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCE



CASE STUDIES OF  
**NON-COMMERCIAL**  
**SEXUAL ABUSE**  
OF  
CHILDREN IN BANGLADESH



ব্রেকিং দ্য সাইলেন্স

**Breaking the Silence**

DECEMBER 2003



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## Preface

It has been all most a decade since Breaking the Silence has embarked up on its mission to act as a platform against Non Commercial Sexual Abuse of Children in Bangladesh. But there is still a denial amongst us to admit that our own children are being abused in our own “HOME”. Home which is supposed to be a protective heaven to a child - often provide an easy access to a sexual abuse perpetrator to a child. As most of these perpetrators are known to the family, and the abuse takes place within the four walls of home; there is a reluctance in help seeking behavior in the family.

The report focuses on a small number of case studies from Bangladesh. Though it does not represent the whole country, it still focuses on the need of these children –for our compassion and support to help them overcome their trauma. We hope that this report will help the readers understand their own responsibility to combat sexual abuse of children. This report is Breaking the Silence’s contribution to a better understanding of the nature and dimensions of the problem, as well as in stimulating a more concerted effort by the civil society to combat non commercial sexual abuse.. Breaking the Silence itself has acquired knowledge from this authentic information of the study findings, which strengthened Breaking the Silence to work on the issue of Non Commercial Sexual Abuse of Children.

We express our gratitude to Dr. Jennifer Mary Clarke for compiling the case studies and providing the analysis. We also appreciate the support of Save the Children Sweden-Denmark and Radda Center authority and the clients of the Center who made the project possible. Without their cooperation it would not have been possible to carry out the research on this sensitive issue.

### **Chairperson**





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## Introduction

**A**buse is a very evocative word, calling forth anger and fear. Sexual matters are disturbing in the least and frightening, even traumatic at the worst. While children often bring out tenderness and care, there is another harsher reality where children in the supposed safety of their own homes or in schools are being subjected to sexual abuse which leaves them scarred, physically and mentally for life. It is this subject, usually denied, ignored or dismissed, that we must all learn about if we are to provide the security and the freedom our children deserve as their human rights.

The sad reality of the matter is that most of us in fact know of cases of child sexual abuse, often from events in our own families. However, such is the society in which we live that the victim is blamed, further traumatised while the perpetrator of this cowardly behaviour is protected and allowed to continue. A conspiracy of silence surrounds this whole issue and the very silence is what perpetuates this pervasive abuse. The time has come to break the silence and set the record straight. We are condemning our children to abuse by not speaking out, we are the guilty ones for failing to protect them but rather being conspirators after the act.

Breaking the Silence is a non-profit, non-political registered NGO which was begun in 1993 by a group of five people who were committed to stop sexual abuse of children. At the beginning of the organization, they realized that no other organization in Bangladesh was addressing the issue of non-commercial sexual abuse of children. One of the greatest achievements of Breaking the Silence is that it has created a space for the airing of such a sensitive issue. This report seeks to document the lessons learnt when mothers gathered with a social counsellor and discussed this issue. The case studies are from the ones which these women spoke about and tried to learn from so that they could protect their children. They are arranged so that all may learn the vital lessons necessary to stop this abuse.

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# Objective of the Report

The main objectives of the report are:

- ▶ to add to the Bangladeshi body of knowledge on this issue
- ▶ to emphasise how child sexual abuse affects children
- ▶ to provide cautionary tales for parents to learn how to protect their children
- ▶ to provoke a response to this issue

The selected cases will be presented here as illustrations of the points to be made and to aid others in using these case studies to look more carefully at the many issues involved.

**The names of the cases have been changed and no recognisable details have been included. However, the socio-economic status and urban/rural site of event is given.**

## Awareness Raising

In 1998, Breaking the Silence recruited a Social Counsellor to run a Counselling Bureau at Radda MCH-FP Centre in Mirpur, Dhaka. This was done through a tri-partite agreement between the Breaking the Silence, the Management Board of the Centre and Save the Children, Sweden. The immediate objectives of the project were to raise awareness in the Mirpur area against child sexual abuse, to provide counselling to affected children and educate the clients and the children attending the Centre about a child's right not to be abused and about gender issues. The Social Counsellor was mainly involved in awareness raising for both the staff and the clients of the centre. She also visited outreach centres and had meetings in the community including for adolescent girls and garment workers.

At the Centre, the social counsellor would gather a group of twenty to twentyfive women and then would start to share about this issue. Some of the information she would share included

- ▶ What is child sexual abuse?
- ▶ What are the types of abuse?
- ▶ What is the truth and what is myth related to this subject?

Once the women had some idea of what the topic meant, they were invited to share any personal experiences of child sexual abuse. Over a three year period, the social counsellor collected a total of 117 cases. These 117 events were committed against children in many different areas, not just in Mirpur, and at different times and in different families. They were often presented as occurring in a neighbour's family although at times the actual incident may well have been in their own family.

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After one member of the group had narrated an event, all were invited to discuss the situation. They were invited to consider the following questions:

- ▶ why did the child become a victim
- ▶ what type of precaution could have prevented the abuse
- ▶ what would be beneficial to the victim now
- ▶ what type of action has been taken against the perpetrator
- ▶ what sort of action should be taken in the future

Since these case studies are secondary data and were not collected in a scientifically valid way, no major inference may be drawn from them. The events of sexual abuse were collected during four calendar years. The increase in numbers is likely to be due to more people participating being willing to share. The types of abuse described showed the following pattern.

| <b>Types of abuse<br/>Year of study</b> | <b>Rape</b> | <b>Attempted<br/>Rape</b> | <b>Touch/<br/>Fondle</b> | <b>Total</b> |
|---|-------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| 1998                                    | 11          |                           | 8                        | 19           |
| 1999                                    | 13          | 7                         | 12                       | 32           |
| 2000                                    | 20          | 1                         | 7                        | 28           |
| 2001                                    | 21          | 3                         | 14                       | 38           |
| <b>Total</b>                            | <b>65</b>   | <b>11</b>                 | <b>41</b>                | <b>117</b>   |

It may be noted that rape is mentioned more often. This may be related to the fact that this is secondary data and most informants are neighbours and relatives. They are more likely to know the more sensational types of child sexual abuse that are common knowledge.

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## What is **Child** Sexual Abuse?

In society, older persons have authority over children and children trust their elders. 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 purposes of some kind.

Immediately from this example can be seen that the physical sexual dimension is linked with the dimension of trust, a psychological function. The physical wounds may heal quickly but the loss of trust lasts a lifetime.

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### **Banu's Trust Betrayed**

The importance of breaking the silence around child sexual abuse is seen in the story of Banu. She was a 12 years old school girl, accustomed to doing what her elders asked. So when her teacher asked her to bring him a glass of water to the library, she obliged. However, she did not expect him to take advantage of their being alone in the library and to fondle her private parts. She was so distressed by this behaviour of a man old enough to be her father that she pleaded illness and went home from school. After school, her friend Shumi went to see her and Banu confided to her what the teacher had done. Shumi told her that the teacher had done this to many girls but they were too ashamed and afraid to mention it to anyone.

Banu told her mother who informed Banu's uncle, a very influential man. Her uncle immediately instituted legal proceedings and the teacher disappeared from that village. The neighbour who related Banu's story noted two important lessons. (1) How many girls could have been spared if someone had spoken up earlier and (2) it is much easier for people of influence to confront such abusers.

### **What are the types of child sexual abuse?**

There are many forms of abuse. Listing them is like a litany of perversion but it is necessary to do so as in many people's minds, sexual abuse is limited to the rape of a girl child by a man. There are many more forms of abuse including:



- ▶ Taking sexual pleasure in undressing and looking at a child
- ▶ Getting sexual gratification from looking at a child’s sexual organs
- ▶ Getting sexual gratification from showing a child obscene pictures
- ▶ Kissing or caressing a child in a sexual way
- ▶ Caressing a child’s breasts
- ▶ Touching and fondling a child’s sexual organs
- ▶ Making a child caress the perpetrator’s sexual organs
- ▶ Using the child to masturbate the perpetrator or masturbating in front of the child
- ▶ Putting the penis in a child’s mouth
- ▶ Inserting the penis, a finger or some object the child’s anus or vagina
- ▶ Using a child for the production of pornography

The child in fact can recognise the abuse because the child does not feel good about what is happening. However, in very young children they do not have the words to express what is being done to them.

Like Moni’s mother, many people cannot believe that sexual abuse can be done to such small children. However, when we look at the age profile of the children whose cases were discussed in Mirpur, we find that the youngest was under 2 years of age.

| Types of abuse<br>Age of child | Rape                | Attempted<br>Rape | Touch/<br>Fondle | Total      |
|--------------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|------------------|------------|
| 0 – 4 years                    | 8                   | -                 | 8                | 16         |
| 5 – 9 years                    | 26 (9 boys)         | 6                 | 15               | 47         |
| 10 – 14 years                  | 25 (3 boys)         | 5                 | 15               | 45         |
| 15 – 17 years                  | 6                   | -                 | 3                | 9          |
| <b>Total</b>                   | <b>65 (12 boys)</b> | <b>11</b>         | <b>41</b>        | <b>117</b> |

### **I never thought anyone would do such a dreadful thing!**

Moni was just 3 years old when she complained that it hurt her to pass urine. After her repeated complaints of pain in her genital area, her mother took her to a clinic. The doctor who is aware of child sexual abuse noted injuries in her genital area. On enquiry, Moni said that Jasmin bhai passed urine in her pants. Moni's mother explained that Jasmin is a 15 year old neighbour who takes Moni for a walk at times. When the doctor explained to Moni's mother what was happening, she could not believe it. She kept saying, " I never thought anyone would do such a dreadful thing to my daughter."

The findings in relation to the age of the child at the time of abuse supports the findings of an earlier study done by Breaking the Silence in 1997.

Of the 117 case histories collected during the awareness raising sessions, 26 have been selected as being the most authentic as well as being illustrative of the points being made during the awareness raising sessions. The data for the children in the specially selected group of case studies is as follows:

| Age in years | Total     | Sex      |           | Types of abuse |                |               |          |          |                     |
|--------------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------------|----------------|---------------|----------|----------|---------------------|
|              |           | M        | F         | Rape           | Attempted Rape | Touch/ Fondle | Oral sex | Anal sex | Provocative display |
| 0-2          | 1         |          | 1         |                |                |               | 1        |          |                     |
| 2-4          | 3         |          | 3         | 2              |                | 1             |          |          |                     |
| 5-9          | 10        | 3        | 7         | 2              | 1              | 4             |          | 3        |                     |
| 10-14        | 10        | 1        | 9         | 3              |                | 6             |          |          | 1                   |
| 15-17        | 2         |          | 2         | 1              |                | 1             |          |          |                     |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>26</b> | <b>4</b> | <b>22</b> | <b>8</b>       | <b>1</b>       | <b>12</b>     | <b>1</b> | <b>3</b> | <b>1</b>            |

The children represented in these figures come from both rural (10) and urban (16) environments. Since the cases were detected in an urban setting, it is not surprising that the figures for urban are higher.

Another noticeable feature is that

**Child Sexual Abuse affects both boys and girls.**

## Zia's mother's eyes are opened

Zia was five years old when his mother became pregnant for the second time. He was already in class one at a local kindergarten. His father is a service holder and his mother is a housewife. After Zia's brother was born, his mother was very preoccupied with the baby and left the care of Zia to the 22 years old young man who had been his tutor for the past two years.



However, when the baby was just a month old, Zia told his mother that he would not study with that tutor any more. When she asked why, he said that the tutor hurt him. Thinking that he meant the tutor beat him, Zia's mother said she would tell the tutor not to hit him. Zia still refused to study with the tutor and he tried again to describe what the tutor was doing to him. The tutor asked him to hold his penis and he also held Zia's penis. At times he did something very painful to his anus. His mother was stunned by this information, in fact she found it very hard to believe. However, she remembered that the tutor closed the door while teaching. So she told her son to go to the tutor but promised that she would watch through a gap in the door. Once she found everything just as Zia said, she threw the tutor out of the house and warned him against such behaviour.

These few figures are beginning to refute some of the common myths related to child sexual abuse.

## POINTS TO PONDER:

1. Is it true that it is easier for influential people to confront a perpetrator of child abuse?
2. Does Moni's case mean that teenage boys should never be allowed to look after little girls?
3. How could Zia's tutor be stopped from abusing other little boys?

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## Exploding the **Myths** about Child Sexual Abuse

### **Myth No. 1.**

**Child sexual abuse only occurs in poor families.**



**WRONG!**

**Sexual abuse of children occurs in all strata of society.**



Bina, the girl fondled by her school teacher, came from a rich family. Of the 117 case histories collected from the mothers in Mirpur, 26 were selected for closer analysis. The distribution of these cases according to socio-economic status shows:

| <b>Socio-economic status</b> | <b>Poor</b> | <b>Lower middle class</b> | <b>Middle class</b> | <b>Rich</b> |
|------------------------------|-------------|---------------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| Number                       | 9           | 3                         | 13                  | 1           |

### **Myth No. 2.**

**Child sexual abuse usually produces physical injury.**



**WRONG!**

**Psychological damage is more common and lasts longer than physical injury.**





Many forms of child sexual abuse do not involve force. In fact, the abuse takes the form of touching and fondling which the child recognises as being of a different type from usual. It will have no physical injury but the effects can be very long lasting as is shown in the case related about Famida.

### **The Burden of Guilt**

When she was 13 years old in class 8, Famida failed her Maths exam. So her father appointed a friend of her maternal uncle as her home tutor. The whole family liked the tutor and he taught her well. However, while he was teaching her, he touched her breasts and Famida was too ashamed and afraid to tell anyone about what he was doing to her. She kept this secret shame to herself.

Famida passed her HSC (Year 12) examinations and her guardian decided to get her married. However, she refused all offers. Her family suspected she had a love affair and asked one of her sisters-in-law to discover the truth. At last Famida was able to speak about her shame. She thought she was sinful and impure as a result of her tutor's behaviour. So she thought that if she married anyone, it would be cheating. All these years, she had been afraid that she would be blamed for what happened and had never told anyone.

Famida had carried the burden of her guilt and shame in the secret recesses of her own heart. There was no scar for anyone to see but she was carrying a psychological scar that affected the important decisions of her life. The effect of earlier sexual abuse on her subsequent marriage was related by Jhorna when she attended a child sexual abuse awareness raising session in Mirpur.

### **The Burden of Fear**

Jhorna and Josna lived in two adjacent flats. Josna was married and 16 years old Jhorna who was still single, enjoyed being in Josna's company. To Jhorna, Josna seemed to have just the right approach to help her deal with life as a teenager. So Jhorna visited Josna almost every day and discussed things with her. However, this happy situation changed for Jhorna when she realised that Josna's husband did not behave properly with her. Whenever he got a chance, he would touch her and at times lost control of his touching.

One day Jhorna went to Josna's house but found that Josna was not there. However, Josna's husband insisted that she sit down. Much against her will, she sat down. After a while, Josna's husband began to run his hand up and down her back and made objectionable advances to her. She wanted to run to her home but he threatened her with exposing her to Josna by relating his story of the day's events. Jhorna was afraid that Josna would believe her husband rather than her friend. The fear generated that day changed her. From that day, she could not look Josna in the eye. Years later, Jhorna married but she continued to fear Josna's husband may tell her husband about that day and this was affecting her married life.



## Fatal Dilemma

Even before she was born, Mita's father had died and she was just eight years old when she lost her mother too. Since then, she lives with her grandmother, and a man in the neighbourhood, called her uncle, gives her various necessities such as Eid clothes, school books and pays for her medical care. At times when entertaining guests, he gave food. Her grandmother who assumed it was out of genuine affection for the parentless girl that he helped them.

When she turned eleven, her grandmother restricted Mita's movements, including visits to her uncle's house. Two years later at the start of Class six, she went to her uncle's house to ask him to buy her school books. She noticed his wife was not home and readily agreed to cook his meal. After the meal, he congratulated her on her efforts and mentioned that they would have to start looking for her husband. This made her feel very shy. After the meal, she lay down for a short while and then she cleaned the house. Only then did she come to the point of asking her uncle to buy her school books. She felt very shy and stood at a little distance to ask him. Her uncle wanted to know why she was shy and asked her to come nearer. When she did, he patted her head and her back and assured her of giving her the books. He asked her to cook for him the next day. Even though his patting seemed different, when she returned home, she said nothing to her grandmother.

She was then caught in a dilemma. When she remembered the way her uncle looked at her and touched her and how he spoke to her, there was something different in it that made her determined not to go again. However, she was afraid he would then refuse to give her books. So she convinced herself that he had not really changed. In the end, telling her grandmother she was off to cook for her uncle, she went. That day he caressed her again. He seemed to enjoy it but she was afraid. On the third day, it was raining and he did not allow her to cook. Instead, he stripped her of her clothes and raped her. That was the last time she went to his house and he did not visit their house again.

After four or five months, she became sick and her grandmother discussed her symptoms with a nearby midwife. The midwife recognised Mita was pregnant but also realised that Mita herself had no idea of it. So, the midwife explained to Ena how a woman becomes pregnant and asked Mita what happened to her. Mita told the whole story to the midwife but her grandmother, she denied any kind of relationship with a man. That night Mita killed herself by taking pesticide.



### Myth No. 3.

**Perpetrators of Child sexual abuse are either mentally ill or mentally subnormal.**



## **WRONG!**

**Only a few perpetrators of abuse are mentally ill or mentally disabled.**



One of the greatest difficulties is that it is impossible to recognise a perpetrator of child sexual abuse. There is no sign that would predict such behaviour. Such people look for opportunities and even make possibilities so that they can exploit the vulnerable. One example is the abuse of Ena.

As shown in Moni's case, the perpetrator of child abuse is someone with easy access to the child, usually someone who is trusted by the whole family. It would be a lot easier if perpetrators were easy to recognise. It is only once the first offence is committed that the perpetrators reveal their real characters. The relationship of the perpetrator to the child is shown below both for the total group and for the selected group of case studies.

| <b>Perpetrator</b>              | <b># of total grp</b> | <b>% of total grp</b> | <b># of select grp</b> | <b>% of select grp</b> |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Close relative including father | 25                    | 21                    | 8                      | 31                     |
| Neighbours and friends          | 55                    | 47                    | 11                     | 42                     |
| House tutor                     | 37                    | 32                    | 7                      | 27                     |
| <b>Total</b>                    | <b>117</b>            | <b>100</b>            | <b>26</b>              | <b>100</b>             |

In both groups the neighbours and friends are the biggest group. However, this again may be related to the public nature of the way in which the disclosure of cases was made. More intimate family matters are less likely to be discussed or if they are, they are attributed to someone else.

### **Hazards at School**

Shefali comes from a middle class family and was seven years old when she was approached by Rana, a boy in class eight. He bought her sweets and ice cream during tiffin time but he also kissed her and touched her private parts. Shefali told her mother what had happened but her mother did not believe her. However, her mother did go to the school during tiffin time to find out for herself. She saw Rana buy ice cream for her daughter. First she spoke to Rana but he denied any wrong-doing. When she mentioned it to the head teacher, other six year old girls came forward and complained about what Rana had done to them. The boy was expelled from the school.

One of the features of the perpetrators is also the range in ages. One of the features noted in the earlier study was sex among those who are children themselves. In these cases, it was also noted that about 10% of the perpetrators are children themselves.

| <b>14 Age of perpetrators</b> | <b># in total group</b> | <b># in selected grp</b> |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 14 – 17 years                 | 13                      | 1                        |
| 17 – 25                       | 34                      | 7                        |
| 25 – 40                       | 52                      | 10                       |
| 40 +                          | 18                      | 7                        |
| <b>Total</b>                  | <b>117</b>              | <b>26</b>                |

Child sexual abuse is committed by both heterosexual and homosexual persons. This has already been seen in many of the cases for example the heterosexual abuse of Moni, Bina and Ena and homosexual abuse of Zia. In all cases, the perpetrator of whichever orientation takes advantage of the innocence and trust of the child and looks for situations that give them access to children.

### **Fear of God**

Their father a lawyer and their mother did not realise what danger their twin boys were in due to the religious teacher who had been hired to control their wayward behaviour. The teacher not only gave classes but also played games with the boys so that the mother could take a rest. The boys, Liton and Latif, were into mischief all day long during the summer holidays but whenever their mother went near them, they would stop talking. At first she suspected they were plotting mischief but then realised they were talking about what the teacher did to them and whether they should tell their parents. The teacher had told them that if they told others, God would stick their tongue to the back of their heads with nails.

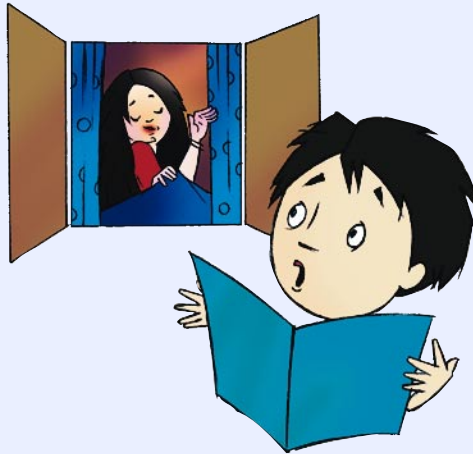
The twins opted to tell their mother about the teacher using them for his homosexual pleasure, including anal sex. Now they were having problems with passing urine and stool. Sometimes they could not sit properly on a chair. Even with a lawyer father, there was no case taken against the abuser but he was told by the leaders of the area that he was person non grata in that area.

In fact, both women and men may abuse boys. Awareness of the possibility of women's overtures and abuse is necessary if the child is to be heard.

### Room with a View

Yunus' home tutor noted that for the past 10 – 12 days Yunus had been preoccupied with something and not concentrating on his studies. He could see no physical problem and so asked Yunus if he was under any mental stress. This was just the opportunity Yunus needed to be able to tell the disturbing events in his life.

The house next to where Yunus lived had a window directly in front of the window of Yunus' room. New tenants had moved into that room and when Yunus was studying facing the window, a woman aged 35–40 would expose herself, change her clothes, show him obscene pictures and call to him to come and join her. Yunus thinks she is immoral but at the same time he is disturbed because he is not obeying an older person. Yunus was afraid if he mentioned this to his family as they would not believe him and scold him. Fortunately, Yunus' tutor had attended a workshop organised by Breaking the Silence and so he was able to help him.



### Myth No. 4.

**Children who make themselves bright and attractive are subject to sexual abuse.**



**WRONG!**

**Children can never be blamed for the abuse they suffer.**



Even babies in arms and toddlers just learning how to walk suffer sexual abuse. That the child is attractive gives the perpetrator no right to abuse the child sexually and this is no reason for the perpetrator to escape due punishment.

### Fair trade?

In 2001, Dalia was nine years old and had a great desire to buy a dress from the International Trade Fair. Her father a bus driver, had no time to take her; her mother could not go alone but her maternal uncle agreed to take her. Night fell while they were at the fair and still her uncle had not bought her dress. He told Dalia the dresses were too expensive and he would take her to another market.

Dalia's uncle earned his living by ferrying people across the river. A rickshaw took them to where he had his boat anchored. Dalia protested that there was no market there. Still assuring Dalia that he would buy her a dress, her uncle enticed her on to his boat. That night he raped her several times.

At home, her parents were concerned that by midnight the fair-goers had still not returned. They went to the uncle's house and found his wife anxious about his absence. In the morning, local people noticed what the uncle was doing on his boat and took him to the Chairman. After hearing his confession, the Chairman sent for Dalia's father. From there, they went first to the police station and eventually Dalia who was in a very bad condition was taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for treatment.

Dalia would surely have been dress up for her trip to the fair but she could hardly have guessed what was on her uncle's mind. In her innocence she went with him, vulnerable to his whims and wishes.

### POINTS TO PONDER:

1. Where would Famida learnt that by being touched she was sinful?
2. What would help Jhorna now so that her married life is no longer affected by her experience?
3. Why would Ena commit suicide when she knew she was pregnant?
4. How can schools help children learn about protecting themselves from child sexual abuse?
5. Why would the twins' lawyer father not take a case against their abusive teacher?
6. How would the tutor have helped Yunus deal with his abusive neighbour? Is he right in helping Yunus keep this from his parents?
7. Was there any way that Dalia could have been spared her ordeal?

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## Vulnerabilities:

### Why a child becomes a victim

Any kind of abuse is related to an imbalance in power. Children are vulnerable because they are powerless in so many facets of their lives. The imbalance due to age and physique is obvious.

#### Gender vulnerabilities

As in so many other issues, there is a strong gender influence on the degree of vulnerability. Girls remain vulnerable as long as they are attractive enough to arouse a desire to exert power. They are often seduced by men much older than they are. This is also compounded by parents and guardians who do not always recognise the sexual changes in their charges.

#### Change in affection

Rubi was the eldest of four daughters living in the village with her parents, sisters and her father's cousin (her uncle). The uncle was the member on the local council. This uncle always showed great affection for Rubi and as she got older, his show of affection increased. No one was in the least bit suspicious of his affection; everyone accepted it as normal. Rubi made no complaints about his behaviour. As member, the uncle was often away from the village and on his return would make a great point of asking after Rubi and saying how much he missed her while he was away.

Suddenly Rubi's mother noticed that she was avoiding her uncle. Her mother scolded Rubi for neglecting her uncle and refusing to answer his call. When she asked her why she was doing this, Rubi did not reply.

One day when Rubi was in the kitchen cooking because her mother was sick, the uncle went looking for her and her mother directed him to the kitchen. Suddenly Rubi ran to her mother crying that her uncle was misbehaving with her. In reply to her mother's questions, she told her that her uncle had touched her breasts and asked her to sleep with him at night. Her mother wanted to know nothing more. However, later at a family meeting, her parents warned the uncle about his behaviour.

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One of the major social problems is that the girl is blamed and the family is traumatised, ostracised and silenced, often by the abuser. No matter what an abuser may do, he will still have no difficulty in getting married. However, the victim is viewed as unmarriageable and this may even affect her sisters. The fear of such difficulty reinforces the barrier of silence.

From birth, the overriding concern about a girl is her marriage. Poor girls are also encouraged to attract a richer boy as husband since this will improve the lot of the whole family. This leaves the girl vulnerable to insincere protestations of love and ultimately sexual abuse. If she becomes pregnant through such a liaison, then the baby is usually aborted or abandoned.

The low status of women as a commodity under some man's dominion leads to violence against women which includes both physical, mental and sexual trauma. While this may not be approved, it is generally tolerated and neighbours are not moved to intervene.

### **A Family Affair**

Hena was in Class seven when her mother went to Dubai, after leaving Hena's younger brother and sister in the care of their grandmother. Hen stayed at home and took care of the household. Her father was a very lazy man and his laziness had been the source of frequent quarrels between her parents. When her mother started sending money home from Dubai, Hena's father started drinking. By the time she was in Class eight Hena realised what he was doing and for bad him to drink alcohol. Nevertheless, almost every night he would come home drunk and beat her while loudly swearing at her. The next door neighbours spoke to him about his behaviour but he continued undeterred.

One night, he was drunk as usual and beat her. This time he tore her dress but she thought it was all part of the beating. Next minute he proceeded to rape her. She cried out loudly for help but no neighbour stirred as they thought it was more of the usual. Next morning the women were surprised to see her sitting outside the house and asked her what happened. Crying and lamenting, she related the full horror of the previous night. Like a flash, the story spread throughout the village. A village leader came and tied Hena's father with a rope. It was decided that a village court would meet that afternoon. Before the court convened, at just sweet sixteen Hena had more than she could bear of this world's pain and she committed suicide by hanging herself.

### **Socio-economic vulnerabilities**

Poverty certainly increases the vulnerability to abuse as the poor are often dependant on the good will of the powerful and so are not in a position to complain but rather must suffer the abuse. So often the needs of the child and the child's right to justice are squashed by the family's need to survive. This is illustrated in the case study of Mukta.



## Survival bought with Silence

Ten years old Mukta worked as household help in an urban area. One day she left her tasks undone and ran home to her mother. Despite her mother's pleading and trying to convince how unsafe it was for a girl her age to be in the slum, she refused to return. Eventually she revealed the old man in the house was touching her private parts. Her mother convinced her that such behaviour towards a child his granddaughter's age was not sinful and returned Mukta to her workplace. The master and mistress were very angry about their worker's sudden flight but the mother apologised to them for her daughter's misdeed. However, she made no mention of the old man's misdeeds. She only requested her not to send her daughter out to the shops. Over the next 15–20 days, the abuse increased and again Mukta ran away. She could not bear what was being done to her.



Mukta's mother made contact with Breaking the Silence and arranged to bring her daughter the following week. However, at that time, she could only report that Mukta's employers had taken her back to their house after scolding her and her mother for her absconding. The mother was silent on its real cause because her husband received a good salary as a gateman for the master of the house and the family could not afford for the father to lose his job. So much as she hated to do it, she sent her daughter back to the house.

Poverty also means that children are vulnerable to being attracted by offers of food and other treats. Children who are then caught in such a trap set by a powerful or respected person feel powerless to do anything. It also means that there is less likely to be any redress as everyone knows that prosecutions take money and influence. However, in some cases, society is so revolted by the betrayal of trust that measures are taken, though often only after a lot of children have suffered as illustrated by the case history of Gias.

## Emotional vulnerability

Economic vulnerability and emotional vulnerability often blend together is a mix that makes the child even more vulnerable. Abusers can manipulate children's emotional needs to gratify their own sexual needs. If the child is desperate for love and affection, then the abuse may be acceptable to the child because it fulfills a need to be wanted. The abuser may fill an emotional vacuum created by a change in the household.

## The Price of a Meal

Gias lives in the village with his grandparents since his father died when he was 4 years old. His grandfather is a day labourer. Like the other boys and girls of the village, each morning Gias would go to Arabic classes given by the Imam of the mosque. The Imam had been in the village for about a year. He lived alone but often invited eight to ten poor boys for a meal of khichuri (a dish of lentils, rice and vegetables), either at noon or in the evening.

One evening Gias did not return home on time so his grandmother went looking for him. Another boy of the village told her that Gias had gone to the roof of the mosque with the Imam. When she went to the roof, she was shocked to see what the Imam was doing to Gias. She did not really understand what was happening but realised it was not good. So, without saying anything to the Imam, she took Gias to the Chairman. The Chairman was horrified by what Gias' grandmother said and encouraged Gias to tell the whole story. Gias then revealed that after the khichuri, the Imam asked Gias to massage his genitals and he did likewise to Gias. He later had anal sex with Gias. This was not the first time. Actually after the first time he was so sore that he was relieved when the Imam told him not to come for three or four days. If he did go any sooner, he found the Imam abusing another boy.

After hearing this, the Chairman investigated with the help of other local people and discovered that the Imam had been abusing all ten boys. The Imam had told each boy not to talk about it to others and so it was a while before the boys discovered that he was doing it to all of them. However, they never spoke of the abuse to anyone else.

Once he had found the facts, the Chairman arranged a salish (informal arbitration court). The salish decided to shave the Imam of his beard, his moustache and his hair, to burn all his certificates and to drive him from the village.

## Lonely Silence

In their middle class urban home, Quddeza and her elder sister were taught by the same tutor. When Quddeza was twelve years old, her sister was married and Quddeza continued with the tutor alone. Her sister-in-law's suspicions were aroused when she noted that the tutor began closing the door. Telling herself it was for better studying did not allay her suspicions, so she decided to look through a crack in the door. When she did so, she was startled to discover that the tutor was fondling Quddeza's breasts as he taught and Quddeza said nothing in protest.



The sister-in-law called the elder sister at her husband's home and asked her to come to the house. Then her sister also observed what was going on. Later she spoke to her little sister about what she had seen. At first Quddeza was angry and then she confessed that she could neither bar the tutor from doing it nor tell anyone about it. As a result, the tutor was dismissed and a new one engaged. Quddeza was warned against such behaviour and her sister-in-law kept a strict eye on the tutoring sessions.

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A particular type of vulnerability is that of the mentally handicapped child. They call for extra vigilance from their parents as they are less able to protect themselves. However, there are people who are ready to take advantage of these children.

### **Innocence betrayed**

Salma's mental development did not keep pace with her bodily development. She was well cared for by her family and they were particular that she did not go anywhere alone apart from houses close by. Among the neighbours was a distant uncle, Mr. Rahman. Salma often went to that house. One afternoon, Salma's mother noted that Salma had been a very long time at Mr. Rahman's house and she went to investigate. She found he was alone but could not give a good account of Salma's whereabouts. She found Salma and when she examined her body and her clothes she suspected that ten year old Salma had been raped. In fact, after talking to Salma, she was convinced that this was not the first time that Mr. Rahman had taken advantage of Salam's innocence.

### **POINTS TO PONDER:**

1. Why was Rubi's uncle merely warned and not banished from the house?
2. How could Hena's neighbours have saved her from her father's abuse?
3. Why did Mukta's parents expect her father's dismissal if they complained about the old man's abuse?
4. Was the punishment of the Imam who raped ten boys sufficient?
5. What are the emotional traps for girls like Quddeza? How could she have been helped earlier?
6. What should Salma's mother do after making her discovery of abuse?

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# How to **help** a child victim of sexual abuse

## Recognition

Since child sexual abuse is shrouded in silence and abusers often insist that their victims keep the abuse a secret, parents and guardians need to be alert to some of the signs. The changes may be in the child or in the abuser.

### The Silent Cry

In the same village compound lived Shumi aged eight years and her paternal cousin. Shumi often went to him to ask for various things because she saw him as the same as her father.

Her sister recounted that one day Shumi would not talk to anyone, would not come out of the house and would not even go to school. The family decided she must have been possessed by a bad spirit and took her to a kabiraj (spiritual healer). Despite many efforts, she made no change. Eventually her sister took time to talk to her. Shumi then revealed that their cousin asked her to hold his penis whenever she went to him. He frequently pestered her to do this and she could not decide what to do. Once they knew the real cause, Shumi's family became very cautious in their dealings with him.

#### The child may

- ▶ defy the abuser and speak of the abuse
- ▶ show a change in behaviour
- ▶ have physical complaints that raise the suspicion of abuse.

## The Strident Cry

Komola's mother was very busy with all the work of an extra good harvest. She left eighteen months old Komola with her father-in-law. She left a bottle of milk for the baby to drink but found that the child was often crying. If she asked Komola's grandfather what was wrong with the baby, he always said she was hungry. Komola's crying was unusual and her mother suspected that the grandfather was the cause, either he was drinking the milk himself or else beating her daughter. So she hid herself and watched what happened. To her amazement, she saw the grandfather drink the milk and then insert his penis in her baby's mouth. Her father-in-law was obviously getting great enjoyment out of this. Komola's mother shouted to attract the help of her neighbours to confront him.



### The abuser may

- ▶ pay inappropriate attention to the child even in public
- ▶ ensure privacy whenever in contact with the child.

The behaviour changes of the children in a number of the cases prevented thus far have met with rebuke. Even when the parent asks the child if something is wrong, the child has refused to speak of the offensive behaviour. In the case of Shumi, she refused to speak about anything and her muteness was her loud cry for help even though her family did not at first know how to interpret it. Hena's sitting outside was unusual and attracted the women's attention where her cries had gone unheeded in the night.

## Turning a Blind Eye

Putul's mother was busy all day with running the household for her husband, her husband's brother and little Putul. So she often left four years old Putul to the care of her uncle. One day the servant in the house told Putul's mother not to let the uncle take care of the little girl or if she did, to keep a strict eye on what he did. For saying such a thing, the maidservant received a scolding from her mistress. However, she told a neighbour that the uncle was doing obscene things to the little girl. When the mother continued to deny what was said, the neighbours laughed at her. However, the laugh turned to grief when the maidservant discovered Putul bleeding from where the uncle had raped her before fleeing from the house. The parents took the little girl to hospital and the very next day they left the area.

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Physical complaints are more often related to rape and attempted rape. The twins, Liton and Latif, described to their mother the symptoms they experienced, difficulty in passing urine and stool and trouble in sitting on a chair. Sadly, sometimes the physical symptoms are in the last degree or for very small children, the only clue.

One of the barriers to recognising sexual abuse is that it strikes at the root of relationships that are central to family life. Then, even if faced with a warning of what was going on, the family may choose to blame the messenger. This was the case for little Putul with tragic effect.

The perpetrator looks for an opportunity as seen in the case of the tutor teaching Quddeza the clue that alerted her sister-in-law to possible misconduct was the closing of the door to the study room. Zia's mother had also noted the tutor closed the door and that suspicious act helped her to believe her son's accusations against the tutor.

## **Response: What to do if a child reveals sexual abuse**

### **1. Be aware of your reaction and be calm.**

If a child tells you that she/he is being abused, the first thing to do is to check your own instinctive response. Your first reaction may be to be angry or unable to believe it or annoyed or any combination of these and other strong feelings. Take time to be aware of your inner reaction and to calm yourself so that your psychological reactions do not influence the child. Otherwise, once the child senses your reactions, the child will not want to tell you what happened, instead the child will feel ashamed and guilty for what happened.

### **2. Comfort and reassure the child.**

In doing so, do not make any promise that you will not be able to keep. It is vital to keep aware of this. Someone has already destroyed this child's trust so do not set yourself up to betray the child's trust again.

### **3. Give the child some very important messages**

- i. You believe her / him.
- ii. She/he is not responsible for what was done.
- iii. She/he did a very good and wise thing by telling you.
- iv. It is not true that elders always behave well. Elders can also be improper and do bad things.

**When you know that a child has been sexually abused, it is your moral duty to help the child. If you yourself are not sure what to do, must look for the agencies where appropriate advice and care are available.**

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## Some of the effects of trauma

Extent and depth of trauma suffered by the child is related to both the type of abuse and the existing mental state of the child. Some of the effects of such trauma include:-

- ▶ intense pain
- ▶ suicidal tendencies
- ▶ deep depressions
- ▶ aggressive behaviour
- ▶ hatred of the opposite sex
- ▶ visible lack of trust of another human being

### An Off-putting Encounter

Her father was taking eleven years old Rima to school by crossing Farmgate bridge but she could not keep up with him. Suddenly a young man in the crowd grabbed her breast. At the time, she could say nothing to her father but after going home from school, she tearfully told her mother of her shocking experience.

At first, Rima's mother was angry with her husband for not taking better care of Rima. Then she calmly told Rima that there are some people like that who just look for an opportunity to harass others. So she encouraged Rima to be careful when out walking and to tell her father immediately if something did happen.

Rima's mother had previous contact with Breaking the Silence and so she understood the origin of some changes she noted in Rima's behaviour. For instance, she noted that Rima would disappear when male relatives came and would no longer talk to them. Her mother did not insist on her presence when male visitors came but discussed with the social counsellor the possibility of counselling for Rima. First she gave Rima the brochure from Breaking the Silence and repeatedly stressed that Rima was in no way at fault for what the wicked young man had done.

The social and psychological effects of child sexual abuse extend far beyond the victim and her family. It affects the whole society and in some cases can have a devastating effect on the perpetrator's family as well. Majeda, the wife of a perpetrator, described the effects on a whole gamut of people who were caught up in a web woven by her husband. In the end, he got what he wanted unhindered but his children are also having to pay a high price.

## Unto the Next Generation

The abuser of Nasima was her maternal uncle. He was married to Majeda Begum and had three children with her. However, according to Majeda, although he always showed great affection to his sister's daughter, Nasima, she never suspected anything untoward. At the age of thirteen, Nasima was married off by her poor parents but her uncle insisted she divorce her husband. He then took her into his home. Again her parents forced her to marry despite the objections of her uncle and again he insisted she divorce her second husband. By then, Majeda's children were old enough to notice the type of relationship her husband had with their cousin sister. Majeda could not believe their allegations. Before long, Majeda's husband and Nasima left for Dhaka where they married. Majeda tried to get her husband to return to her and their children but with no success. Looking back, she realises that her husband's affair with his niece began when she was very young. Majeda rues the fact that she had not heard of child sexual abuse in those days or she may have been able to intervene. Now the major problem she is facing is not financial or social but how to cope with her son. He maintains that if his father can marry his sister, then he can marry his aunt.

### POINTS TO PONDER:

1. Why does it seem to take a long time before an abused child like Shumi will reveal the real cause of their pain?
2. What should be the next step for Komola's mother? What might stop her doing it?
3. Why did Putul's mother ignore the warning by the maidservant?
4. How can Majeda help her son cope with his father's behaviour?



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## **Prevention:**

### How to make children aware of child sexual abuse

It is important to remember that sexual abuse of children can occur at any time and any place. Wahida's parents discovered this to their cost.

#### **Walk to Devastation**

Two and a half years old Wahida lived in Mirpur with her parents. Her father worked as a carpenter at a school near their house. Wahida often went off alone to visit him at work. One day she gaily announced that she was going to see her father. Her mother got on with her household tasks unworried. It was only when her husband came home for lunch that she discovered that Wahida had never arrived at the school. The parents began to search the area but to no avail. That afternoon some boys playing games found Wahida, unconscious and bleeding under a bush. Her parents rushed her to a doctor. He told them that she had been raped and he was not sure she would survive and if she did, she would not be able to lead a normal life in the future. Once she recovered, her parents left the area. No one could identify the culprits but everyone in that area has learnt that small children can be abused and so must be carefully supervised.

It is not possible for parents and guardians to ensure the safety of their children. So, children must learn how to save themselves from perpetrators of sexual abuse.

### **Determined Resistance**

Seven years old Champa is in class 2 and is cared for by her grandmother as her mother is a garment worker and her father a bus driver. Next door lives Kamal, a 20 years old degree student who tutors Champa. He seemed a gentle boy with affection for Champa, such that she called him brother.

One day her grandmother gave Champa two Taka to buy plums but Kamal bought ten Takas worth of plums and suggested that they eat the plums together. Champa happily went with him to the fourth storey of a nearby nine-storey building under construction. No work was going on at that time and she enjoyed both the plums and the breeze. That is, until Kamal suddenly pulled her close and began to kiss her. At first she did not resist but when he forced her to lie down, she began to shout. He then threatened to throw her off the building but she only shouted louder and began to run towards the steps. Her shouting attracted the attention of the people nearby and some ran up the stairs to see what had happened. The people caught Kamal and handed him over to the police.

Champa's family had a good opinion of Kamal and so she did not hesitate to go with him. This emphasises the need for parents to educate their children on where, when and for how long they should go with someone so as to be safe.

### **For children to be able to protect themselves they need to learn how to ignore the tricks that abusers use.**

- ▶ Teach children about their bodies.
- ▶ Teach them that if anyone touches them in a way that is suspicious or frightening, they should tell the person to stop, and then and there tell a trusted older person what happened.
- ▶ Tell the children if anyone gives them money or sweets or any other treat, they must not keep it a secret, nor are they obliged to do anything for that person in return for the gift.
- ▶ Tell them that if anyone touches them, kisses them or embraces them and then insists they keep it a secret, they must not do so. They must immediately tell an older person what happened. (Most perpetrators intimidate children and so they keep it a secret.)
- ▶ Tell children that if anyone does sexually assault them or rape them, they are not at fault. and are not to blame themselves.

### **Prevention: Prosecution**

One of the notable features of the case histories presented thus far is the relative lack of punishment to the perpetrators. The affected children and their families seem to suffer more than the perpetrators. While the tutor may be dismissed there is often little done to ensure that this abuser cannot affect another child. Another instance of this is the treatment meted out to the teacher who abused Urma.

### Keeping it in the family

Sufia's parents arranged for her to learn Arabic from a distantly related great uncle. He came every day but one day when he came, Sufia told her mother that she had a tummy ache and would not study with him. Next day, she simply refused to learn Arabic at all. Her mother beat her for refusing to do so. Eventually she told her mother the real reason for her refusal. She said her teacher hurt her by squeezing her breasts. When she objected, he said that he was only showing his affection in the same way as he did to his wife. He also threatened her that it would be a sin if she told anyone about it.

After hearing all this, Sufia's mother called all her relatives to her home and warned them about her distant uncle's bad habits. She then told him never to come to their house again.



However, trying the formal mechanisms for trial and punishment can be fraught with frustration. Bringing a court case can put the life of the victim under greater threat and involves a great deal of running around which poor people find too expensive.

### Callousness Multiplied

Both her parents were working. Her mother was working in a garment factory and her father was driving a tempo. Tania was seven years old and watching TV on a Friday when a neighbour, Liton came in to watch. He raped little Tania and fled. About noon, a relative found her there, covered in blood. They immediately informed her mother who took her to one doctor, then to a clinic and later to Dhaka Medical College Hospital. She got no assistance for her daughter from anywhere. Then she went to the Kafrul police station and filed a case against Liton. Only then did the authorities at Dhaka Medical College Hospital treat her. She is now well but will never be able to conceive. She must live in the village for her own security.



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The women who gathered for the awareness raising seminars were convinced that the prevention of sexual abuse is related to the punishment of the perpetrator. They cited the example of the son of a regional leader. Due to enmity with the parents, he raped and killed a six year old girl. No action was taken against him. A few years later, that same man raped and killed his previous victim's paternal cousin. This time the women of a local organisation took legal steps against the man in protest against his heinous crime. The general feeling was that the women's action acted as a deterrent to other young men thinking of acting like the leader's son. The women's efforts point to the need for a movement from society so that this oppression of children is absolutely not tolerated.

### **Compromise is No Solution**

Two men named Moslem lived in the same village, one was rich and the other was poor. They developed a friendship based on their shared name and the poor Moslem often took financial help from his rich friend. Poor Moslem had a daughter, Asma, who was 12 years old and in class 5. She did no longer want to go to the rich Moslem's house when her mother sent her. Sadly, her mother never asked why.

Rich Moslem forced his wife and son to go to her parent's house, despite her reluctance to go there. He then asked his friend to get Asma to bring him food while his wife was away. When Asma protested against this arrangement, her mother scolded her and sent her anyway.

On the third day of taking the food, Asma did not return home. Her parents were anxious and when eventually at midnight they went to rich Moslem's house, they found neither Asma nor Moslem. Joygoon, a neighbour of rich Moslem told other women of her suspicion about Moslem. She told them of the immoral suggestion he had made to her and observed that Moslem had been acting very strangely around his granary for the past two to three days. These women told Asma's parents but they refused to believe them. After a further two days, some women investigated the granary and found Asma nearly dead. It was too late. Asma died.

Rich Moslem tried to save himself by offering Asma's family five bighas of land. Her family were tempted but members of local organisations did not argue strongly against it. They reasoned that accepting this compromise would endanger other girls at the hands of the wealthy. The village people took legal action against Moslem.

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## What can we do to **stop** Child Sexual Abuse

Everyone must become aware and active against this issue so that no more children become victims of sexual assault and suffer its painful psychological distress. Through such awareness you can help a sexually abused child. Raise your voice against this crime so that it is stopped and not repeated over and over.

Some suggestions as to what you might do to stamp out child sexual abuse are given below.

- ▶ Increase your knowledge about this issue. Learn about organisations such as Breaking the Silence which are working to stop child sexual abuse. Give some of your time to help one of these organisations or to attend a seminar on the issue.
- ▶ Discuss this issue with your family and friends and give them the correct information.
- ▶ Make children aware of child sexual abuse. To do so, you must be seen as a person who is trustworthy and dependable.
- ▶ Never look at child pornography.
- ▶ Write to newspapers and magazines about the issue.
- ▶ **If you are a sexual abuser of children, stop your abuse.**

**The abused children are our children.  
We must take action against child sexual abuse  
immediately, if not sooner.**

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## **POINTS TO PONDER:**

Why have our cities become so unsafe for children like Wahida?

2. What would you have done if you had noticed Champa going into that empty building?
  3. Why was Urma's great uncle's abuse kept within the family?
  4. What must be done so that children like Tina get immediate care and not sent on a wild goose chase?
  5. Was poor Moslem cheated by both the other villagers since he lost his daughter and received no compensation from rich Moslem?
  6. **WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO TO STOP CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE?**
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## **Breaking the Silence's vision**

To create a positive environment and protective behavior in the society on child abuse with particular focus on non-commercial sexual exploitation of children.

## **Its mission**

To raise awareness for prevention of non-commercial sexual abuse of children among children, caregivers, (parents, teachers, family member) community & policy makers as well as all stakeholders.