

The Other Side of Childhood

Male Child Prostitution at a Bus Stand in
Pakistan



A Research by Sahil

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A Research on Male Child Prostitution at a Bus Stand in Pakistan.

By

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Cover Photograph: Room of a hotel in Pir Vadai, courtesy Saima Agha.

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*This report is dedicated to the thousands of
tiny hearts who sink everyday in the mire of
Pakistan's many Pir Vadais.*

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Foreword

Sahil entered the world of research very much like the blind man who uses a lamppost not for light but for support. Established in 1995 Sahil found itself pitted against the collective blindness of a culture, which would not accept child sexual abuse as a reality. We began therefore, to look for systems and situations, which could not be pinned to our doorstep either for sensationalizing, or misrepresenting reality. We were exploring truths of many kinds and soon began to realize that many of the so-called truths, were just myths propped through repetition and consensus into widespread beliefs. The importance of a child within the family in South Asia was one such myth. We found that many children, both male and female, were living lives of silence, sexual exploitation, fear and confusion, where the adult world that they identified as family, fell somewhere between complicity and indifference.

Perhaps because theocracies, more so than other States rattle the staff of morality, purporting to run nations in the name of God. Moral orders are impenetrable and sex and sexuality are dark, dank spaces where silence reigns, absorbing every possible scream and horror committed in this world of ordained morality. Raising issues of sexual violence and sexuality in South Asia and more so in Pakistan, is perhaps an act of immorality itself and one, which can at any time invite the wrath of any right wing group or even the State. And Sahil wanted to talk about child sexual abuse.

The use of young males as sex workers was a fact one was constantly exposed to through cultural and colloquial references, which mapped this subterranean world of sexual pleasure, preference and orientation. However beyond the individual use of male children was the far more puzzling existence of the organised rings of child prostitution. Pir Vadai (PV) was one such center, contiguous to the nation's capital Islamabad. Everyone knew about PV, so neither the lawmakers nor the moral heads of the community could feign ignorance. And yet they maintained that children were alive and well in Pakistan and free from the horrors of child sexual abuse, an evil of decadent western cultures.

Sahil's research interest was purely to enter the world of PV to inquire and discover the actual truth. Sahil is the only NGO (non-governmental organisation), which focuses exclusively on the issue of child sexual abuse in Pakistan. Initially the Sahil team went in with the objective of investigating if in fact male child prostitution did exist at PV. We found proof at the bus stop. However, even as we approached different organisations working on children and human rights issues no one seemed to have any information on PV. Riddled with kingpins of the underworld and functioning under the patronage of the local police, PV was impenetrable. Not surprisingly Sahil's inquiry took us down a long path of learning and discovery, which came with unexpected costs and benefits.

Research brought along with it the varied complexities of constructing a scientific method to document complex social behaviour. Empirical study within the social sciences and feminist research per se has grown into a world of debate and discovery. Methodology, tools and ethics are being examined as part of what is being seen as a unique journey into studying trends in human behaviour. However the journey is so uncharted that very few models have been sanctioned as ideal. Qualitative and quantitative measures are being mixed and re-mixed for ideal measures. For Sahil this study brought together all methodological issues.

The sample of the study is limited to 15 interviews of male child sex workers, 7 local clinicians, 8 policemen, 70 members of the community (shop keepers, residents, religious leaders, bus drivers, cobblers etc.), 2 pimps and 5 clients. Of the total 20 interviews, conducted with the male child sex workers, five of the interviews were never collated because of various problems with the high turnover of the researchers. Since 15 was too small a number to record trends and collate statistical significance the study has instead been written up as a qualitative account of the experiences of the boys.

This study does not claim to offer information that may be extrapolated for male child prostitution all over Pakistan though it may serve as a valid comparison. What we hoped to do was to draw an outline of the scenario at PV. The importance of this study lies in

the fact that we gained access to the system at PV, the role players, experienced the problems and to some extent assessed the possible directions for research of this nature.

This research has therefore been a pilot effort for Sahil to pioneer into a volatile and critical area of child sexual abuse, helping bring the reality of these invisible children to the world. The study has helped provide invaluable insight into methodology, tools, strategy and the ground reality of PV.

Research Site



Introduction to the Pir Vadai (PV) Bus Stand

PV is situated between the cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The PV bus stand is a melee of buses, automobile repair workshops, restaurants, hotels and people. In the main shed are “*chai wallas*” pouring steaming hot tea for the customers who sit in the restaurants smoking and watching sensational dances or movies on video. The little boys waiting at the tables, lurk around to steal a glance at the lewd play. In the adjacent workshops, mechanics soiled in black grease can be seen bent under taxi bonnets or shouting from under the buses for their tools. There is always a haste and bustle in the scene. And through it all hundreds of people arriving and leaving for varied destinations. A cobbler hammering into a passenger’s worn out slipper sums it all:

“It is (PV) like a big river of passengers, where we draw canals and streams but the level of the water remains the same.”¹

Before the 1980’s, PV was a village with scant population that was widely scattered in the area. It was mainly an arid agricultural area, with small holdings of land. The terrain is undulating, with a stream called *Nallah Lehi* on one end and other smaller streams passing through the area. These streams are now mostly drainage outlets for the city of Islamabad. Previously this area was called Golra PV, an extension of the area of Golra Pir, who is a highly respected and prominent religious figure in Pakistan. After Islamabad was created, Golra became part of Islamabad and PV remained with Rawalpindi. PV stayed a rural settlement till the early 1980’s when the interstate bus terminal was shifted from Liaquat Bagh, Rawlapindi to a 50-acre land site in PV, transforming its culture as it grew into one of the busiest bus terminals in Pakistan. As semi-urban cultures mushroomed, small-scale commerce developed to meet the needs of passengers in transit. Male child prostitution is one such sub culture.

¹ Researchers Field Notes.

The Bus Stand

The size of the bus stand is approximately $8,971.56^2$ square metres, though the constant influx of vehicles and people shrinks its expanse for the onlooker.

According to the Rawalpindi Municipal Corporation (RMC), approximately 40,000 people transit through PV



on a daily basis. The RMC owns all the property, even the fittings and fixtures at the bus stand. No other government, semi-government, private institution or person share property rights with RMC.

Plots have been given to the present shop-holders on long-term lease. Once property is given on lease, it means that the RMC has entered into a long-term contract with a private party or individual. According to the RMC, the element of long-term lease encourages the private sector to invest in buildings and other fixed assets.

For the RMC the bus stand is a substantial source of income. The Corporation received Rupees 4.3 million as rent from its property during the year 1995-96. There is an approximate increase of 10% in rent collected every year. The RMC also charges tax from every vehicle (bus, wagon, carry van etc.) when it enters into the stand. During the year 1995-96, the RMC earned Rs 4.5 million from vehicle tax alone. Another source of income is through fining and penalties for violations of any rules in the area. Despite the substantial revenue generated by the area, not even a fraction of it seems to be spent on the maintenance of the bus stand.

² Statistics Provided by the Rawalpindi Municipal Corporation.

Business at the Bus Stand

PV is a market for two main services and attracts a lot of labor. Firstly, the maintenance and repair of buses and other transport vehicles and secondly, hotels, restaurants and tea stalls which cater to the needs of the passengers. Both these service industries use children as labor because they are easily available, can be paid lower wages and are easy to control.

Besides denting and painting shops, auto construction shops, tyre repair stations and auto electricians, one also comes across multiple entrepreneurs and self-sufficient one-man ventures. There are, barbers, hawkers for buses and hotels, cobblers, vegetable vendors and even those selling smuggled goods such as watches, calculators and even items like air conditioners.

There are also second hand books, magazines and digests laid out on the sidewalks, ranging from booklets on lyrics from popular songs to those related to sex and magic. Skimming through the booklets one comes across crude sketches of naked women with erotic captions, which serve as pornography for the reader and also give tips on how to enhance virility and potency. The subject of all this material is heterosexual.

Hotels and Inns



The large hotels are situated mostly in the northeastern corner of the bus stand. The hotel business is continually expanding and they have been slowly merging into the peripheral colonies of PV like Mohallah Loharan. The business is lucrative and more and more property,

annually, falls into the clutches of hotels and inns. The hotels in the outskirts are usually the personal property of the owners. Whereas, the land of the hotels situated in the bus stand area is the property of the RMC and has been leased or rented to the hotels. Only a few of the hotels and inns carry valid licenses from the Department of Tourist Services, Islamabad. The rest are either not licensed at all, or their licenses expired many years ago. Regardless, business carries on as usual.

The inns and hotels that are engaged in prostitution usually appear in a cluster. This acts as their support system. As the potential customer meanders through the paved narrow streets, there are several vacant plots that have been turned into garbage dumps. This not only adds to the sordid picture, but also pollutes and contaminates the air. The walls of the hotels are often pasted with religious pictures or verses from the *Quran*³. A stilted effort to curry moral credibility.

At the hotels the guests are offered a room and bed with bedding that is usually soiled and smells. However, the facilities offered here are much better than the conditions at the inns or sarrahs. The inns are much smaller units with verandahs and sometimes a few adjacent rooms. The cots or *munjis* are closely placed and there is a shared toilet in

³ Holy book of the Muslims.

neglected, unhygienic conditions. A bed for a night can be rented here for as little as Rs.10/= (15 cents).

Out of the 49 shops in the main shed 18 shops were being run as restaurants and 16 of these had television and video facilities with round the clock movie shows⁴, providing entertainment for their customers. Most of the hotels and inns do not offer food or tea, therefore it is these restaurants and teashops that cater to their clientele.

A Hotel Association was formulated in PV in 1990 to protect the interests of the local hotels. This was a result of excessive interference from the police and frequent surprise raids. Another issue on the agenda was to raise a collective voice against the heavy taxes levied upon the hotels by the government. Due to a strike organised by the hotel owners through the association (1990's), the District Administration had to review their policy of indiscriminately raiding hotels and according to the Chairman of the Hotel Association, raids have since then, been less frequent.

⁴ Area Map by Sahil Researchers, 1999.

Criminal Profile of PV

PV has a history of criminal activities. The explanation offered by a taxi driver was, ***“part of this area was a cemetery and now they have built upon it and the place has become cursed with many different evils.”***⁵ PV has maintained a reputation of being a den of criminal activities before and after the RMC developed the area. An old resident of the area proudly told us: ***“I used to be a highway robber and used to rob people passing through PV”.***⁶

Even today the crime rate in the area is high. There are numerous stories of people being robbed in the hotels. Many customers report being taken to hotels and robbed. ***“Phrad Marrad”*** (a local term used for fraud) is rampant in the area. Besides the selling of smuggled goods, gambling, drinking and drug use are also part of the PV culture. Alcohol and drugs are freely and cheaply available. Incidents of knifing and shootouts are also not uncommon as reported by some community members: one of them even related his personal experience of cutting into the thigh of a man. Bomb blasts occur frequently in the area and are regularly reported by both the electronic and print media.

⁵ Researchers Field Notes.

⁶ Ibid.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THE MATRIX OF DILEMMAS

Introduction

Sahil initiated its work in 1995, the first NGO in Pakistan, to focus exclusively on the issue of child sexual abuse. These were difficult times. There were high levels of disbelief at a social and State level and even the media - besides scant reporting of incidents of child sexual abuse- was resistant to commenting on the issue. No substantive research was available on child sexual abuse in Pakistan and since everyone we came across wanted the proof of '***numbers***', strategically, research became one of the first programs set up in Sahil.

When we heard about child prostitution in Pir Vadai (PV) - of it being one of the largest bus stands in Punjab, central, visible and with a heavy flow of interstate traffic - we wondered how, if it were true, that such an organised and structured form of sexual exploitation of children was possible in an Islamic nation. We needed to know how and why and so did the people of a nation who, in denial of such horrendous truths, basked in some pseudo Islamic immunity from the baser truths of human perversion.

Initial discussions of researching in this area stunned us at the number of people who knew of boys being prostituted at PV. These included senior policemen and even a senior official of the National Council for Child Welfare and Development (NCCWD), Social Welfare Ministry, Islamabad who said "***what to do, this is a part of our culture.***" Our drive and desire for the project intensified. It was no longer about searching the '***truth***' but more about revealing the true nature of denial, silence and dereliction of all duty, responsibility and concern for even the most innocent and powerless of the nation's citizens- children. Why? Was sodomy, especially that which involved children, not the most heinous of crimes in Islam? What was a theocratic State in place for if it could not even contain ills like child prostitution on its religious might? Sahil had faced enough resistance at raising '***sexual***' issues in public because it was not the Islamic thing to do. We are all growing up in a so called modern nation where we know that we cannot engage in any modern debate on sexuality, rights, sexual health or even exploitation

openly because some fundamentalist wing of the State will tell us we are violating the tenets of Islam. That Muslims are not homosexuals and sodomy is against the law. Then who is using children for this very same crime? That too in an organized mafia, where the State is aware but looking the other way. Because no one will know! For children will never, can never speak out.

And Sahil decided, that the children would and can speak out. We would give them the voice and the platform to unmask the filth that festers beneath the surface of a nation, so fixated with its outdated morality, that it cannot hear the cries of its own children.

NGOs & Research

For NGOs, research is still an un-chartered terrain. A stronghold of academia, NGOs tread this ground with trepidation and diffidence. A trend that is changing but not fast enough. Despite making bold and courageous forays into areas of psycho-social issues which academics can hardly get access to, NGOs lack the confidence of asserting their largely qualitative methods as being the most scientific and rigorous tools for understanding ground reality. The dichotomy and tensions, between the proponents of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, plague NGOs on a number of counts. Their *'personal'* stake in a research project immediately arouses suspicions about the veracity of methods and results. NGO research is rarely seen as *'real or objective'* because the NGO has an activist approach towards social change and that intrinsic desire to *'improve'* the reality of the subjects under study earns them the academic label of *'not objective research'*. Often not planned and executed by academics with research experience, it rarely receives scholarly repute.

Studying social trends and practices, in third world countries where the target group has rarely opened itself to any scrutiny, is in itself a challenge. Everything depends on the art of dialogue, the levels of trust established and the ability to contextualise and be sensitive to the information presented. The approach can only be qualitative and one which requires constant crafting and modification. Since research has traditionally been an academic tool, *'statistical significance'* is the reigning force. NGO data is therefore always disregarded as *'unconvincing'* because dominant measures of *'validity'*, *'reliability'* and *'representativeness'* are understood within numerical, rather than in-depth process methods (Edwards and Ribbens, 1998).

Research by and within NGOs comes with an element of emotional content and the very nature of Sahil's work reflects this. NGO research and methodologies are linked to a work ethos, which is still fighting for recognition of difference, that such structurally and functionally different workspaces exist and that their mandate is to incorporate personal

and professional growth. So the *'personal'* and *'emotional'* element is a strong guiding principle in NGO work.

Feminist and post-structuralist movements in research complement NGO perspectives. Such perspectives inform and guide NGO research. It is action-oriented, or participatory, or ethnographic and many research studies by NGOs could incorporate some or all aspects of these three broad areas; it is this reflexivity with methodology that distinguishes NGO research from others. While some may see it as *'ad-hoc'*, the main aim is to place subjects within their own contexts centrally. Such research methodology must use flexible and open-ended research tools that give the subject as much latitude as possible to express the many complexities and paradoxes in their lives. At the same time NGOs have also to recognise their limitations and the exploration and modification of more mainstream methodologies might address some research issues.

An academic approach requires a researcher be *'objective'* at all times with a clear distancing of all emotional responses to the subject. Although the more recent positions on research admit that there is very little value-free research, teaching and writing. As Martin Schwartz points out, *"...from this perspective research can be used to achieve social goods, to right wrongs, and to make things better for the oppressed and repressed. This does not mean that advocacy replaces careful science... but it does mean that research topics and methods may be chosen for personal and political reasons.... Being a [feminist researcher] does not excuse one from being a good and careful researcher, but it certainly can inform one's research in a great many ways."*⁷

NGO work neither depends on nor expects *'trained'* professionals with academic degrees; most of this work is learnt on the job and through experience. Sahil's experiences show that good, competent researchers have left in search of better paying jobs with greater financial security and benefits. Individual responsibility and commitment are therefore essential ingredients for NGO work.

⁷ Researching Sexual Violence Against Women, Martin D. Schwartz (ed.), pages 70-71; Sage Publications 1997.

In the PV project there were numerous risks that Sahil took to ensure that the project was both ethical and representative. Sahil's research in PV is a sensitive issue for the administration, the community of the area and dominant socio-cultural attitudes in Pakistan. In conducting this research Sahil had to disguise its real mandate in order to gain an entry point. In PV the mafia controls narcotics, alcohol, gambling rings and connected criminal activities; but the trade in boys, though known to all in the area, is still kept under wraps.

Multiple factors which influence sample, an erratic population of researchers, the complexity of entering closed communities, researching issues which by definition bring you into variance and often opposition with the sample community; are all variables which finally decide the quality and content of the research.

In a theocratic State, NGOs are viewed with suspicion and are deemed to be anti-government or anti-Islam because of their openness in addressing the shortcomings of either or both. Therefore as an NGO that works on sexuality and violence, Sahil was suspect at the outset in Pir Vadai. Moreover, being an NGO both headed and staffed primarily by women, Sahil had to constantly face the specter of a hostile right-wing, which shadows all political realities within the nation and feminist perspectives can at any time be attacked for being anti-Islam and anti-State. Investigating male child prostitution by Sahil also meant that the women staff, including the Director of Sahil, could not enter PV as field researchers. *“I have never felt so handicapped by my gender as I had to oversee the fieldwork from the office. There was no way I could interact with the boys, pimps or clients simply because I was a woman and that would jeopardise our access to a sample. It therefore became more difficult to monitor the actions and progress of researchers in the field.”*⁸

⁸ Interview with Anusheh Hussain, Director Sahil 1995 - 2002

Objectives of the Study

Since our initial findings revealed that people in authority knew about children being prostituted at PV, our main interest lay in establishing the existence of male child prostitution at PV and documenting the structured form that it took, along with the key players. However the absence of any prior research on male child prostitution in Pakistan, left us with the Herculean task of creating the right methodology to access information on this very difficult subject, accessing the children and the reigning mafia and ensuring accurate and plausible data. We decided that the scientific approach would be a pilot study, a modest sample that would help create the framework for a larger study in the future.

The first set of questions that we were seeking answers to were therefore simple:

- Does Male Child Prostitution exist in PV?
- If yes, then how does the system function?
- Who are the children?
- Who are the clients?
- Who are the key players?

Research Design

The pilot could only be qualitative. Methods of approaching the children, dialoguing with them on such a sensitive and painful issue and finding the right mix of sensitivity and rational to document our findings, was going to be the main task. No questionnaires could be created or finalised until a number of children had been first spoken to, especially since both as adults and people who did not belong to their class we would have to find the language in which they could express both their truth and their pain. Numbers would have to take a back seat to establishing a credible system for access and documentation.

Not surprisingly such an activity thrives amidst high levels of suspicion and mistrust, making it impossible to conduct a statistical survey. More importantly, direct access to the children is impossible since they are controlled and guarded by pimps and hotel owners. On the few occasions, when we managed to access children directly, they would immediately report it to the pimp who would then warn the child to stay away from us. They spread the word quickly amongst other children, that there were some men *‘snooping around’* and no one should speak with them. The children would also occasionally go underground, when for example the police conducted raids (a regular money-making feature), or during the month of Ramadan⁹ and Muharram¹⁰, when activity in the area would suddenly sharply decrease, because both the suppliers of children and the clients felt that it was too *‘holy’* a time to be engaged in such *‘sinful’* activity.

These were the primary factors, which led to us disengaging from the quantitative aspect of the research and focusing instead, on getting as much in depth information as we could on the lives and states of mind of the children, the people who bought and sold them, who interacted with them and also those who just lived in passive acceptance of them.

⁹ Islamic Calendar: Month of Fasting and Purification.

¹⁰ Islamic Calendar: Month during which the Martyrs of Islam are Remembered and Mourned.

The Sample

We felt that it was important to get as many aspects on the issue involved as possible. For this reason other than boys involved in the trade and key role players such as pimps, hotel owners and clients, we also interviewed local clinicians and members of the community. Although 20 children were interviewed, only 15 interviews were collated due to numerous problems related to the high turnover of researchers.

The final sample:

- 15 male child sex workers
- 5 clients
- 2 pimps
- 8 policemen
- 1 Bus Stand Administrator
- 7 local clinicians
- 4 political activists
- 8 hotels and inns personnel
- 70 members of the community (cobblers, drivers, hawkers, shop keepers, local religious leaders, patients at the local clinics and residents)

Methods and Tools Employed for Research

Research in Pir Vadai was a novel and bold foray into an area, not just for unearthing an institutionalised form of child sexual abuse, but for its creative attempts to develop a suitable research methodology. This report is a critical documentation of research tools and dilemmas of qualitative research in the specific area of male child prostitution.

Being a pioneering research we had no models of methodology to draw on. Western models were culturally inappropriate. In completely unfamiliar terrain, we decided to begin with a series of field observations, through which we hoped to ascertain the presence and the structure of male child prostitution in PV. We also initiated discussions with people living and working in PV, about the history of the area, their knowledge about the prevalence and structure of male child prostitution and their perception of it.

Two male researchers would go in as a team. They spent significant amounts of time in the local tea shops, bus repair workshops and restaurants, conversing with boys waiting at tables, restaurant owners, cobblers, shop keepers, mechanics etc. We were trying to establish relationships of trust and comfort so that we could identify and form a group of key informants for our study. Slowly, we began to identify hotels/inns that sold boy's sexual services, as well as pimps, boys who were involved in the trade and hawkers (who were in fact the pimps scouts for young runaway boys who disembarked from the buses at the terminal). We visited the local transport offices and the Rawalpindi Municipal Corporation (RMC) to understand the structure of the bus stop, the status of the local hotels and inns and to get estimates of the number of people traveling through the area on a daily basis. Location maps were made, which were regularly updated, as we discovered more about the area. These were very useful in monitoring inns, which would frequently change name and location after the police would conduct raids or when there was fear of one. Field notes were recorded after each visit and when possible tape recorders were used to record conversations that were later transcribed by the researchers.

This was a time of great learning. Suddenly, an entire complex network of relationships and emotions began to emerge. We came face to face with numerous myths regarding sex, sexuality, children, notions of sin and virtue and emotions such as anger, aggression, helplessness and despair. We realised that we could broadly divide the community members into three categories. There were a few who had tried to take action against this trade by protesting and complaining to the local authorities but gave up since no one paid heed. There were those who were aware of the existence of male child prostitution but absolved themselves of all responsibility by claiming themselves to be helpless victims of “*evil children*”, a morally bankrupt society and a corrupt State. And then there were those who participated actively in the trade, such as, the pimps, the boys, the hotel owners, the clients and the police.

Whereas the ‘*victims*’ and the activists were eager to share their plight with us, the group directly involved in the trade began to feel threatened by all the questions that we were asking. Levels of suspicion in communities that foster criminal activities are high. Strangers entering the community are identified quickly and treated with hostility. Soon we found ourselves to be at the receiving end of far more questions than we were asking. Despite the fact that in the first attempt we had not concealed our identity in any way, word began to spread quickly that we were probably intelligence agents wanting to crack down on illegal activities in the area (which there were plenty of other than just male child prostitution). The researchers began to experience increasing hesitation in information sharing, especially from hotel owners. We had no choice but to withdraw from the field for a couple of months. The first stumbling block was identified. We had to assume an identity that would ensure us access.

Several months later we returned, posing as university students, researching their PhD theses. Our initial attempt this time around was to interview the boys. Armed with questionnaires, we went into the field hoping that the boys might be eager to share their plight, trapped as they were in violent lives. We were so confident, that we decided to try to access the boys directly. By this time we had contacted several key informants, who helped us identify some male child sex workers (MCSW). However, despite visiting the

research site at all times of day and night to access the boys, we could not reach the boys. They slept most of the day (inside hotels/inns) and were with clients through the night. During the day, the pimps and hotel owners kept a close eye on them and during the night, the boys had no time to spare. The researchers, tried to access the boys during the day in the hotels where they slept, but the hotel owners and pimps were extremely hostile and even roughed up some researchers. It was only after a couple of months that we made what we thought was our first breakthrough. Two boys promised to make time to talk with us. But they never showed up again, neither did we ever see them again in the research site. Soon, it became impossible to even approach MCSWs. Word had spread and as soon as they sighted the researchers, they would disappear.

The only choice left now was for the researchers to pose as clients. This would, undeniably, give us access to a boy, after which we could perhaps arrange interviews with other MCSWs through him. Sahil had to contemplate this strategy long and hard. The risks both ethical and otherwise were tremendous. For example, the police could raid the hotel and the researcher if found with a child could get arrested and be charged for sodomy. The hotel owners could frame us so easily in complicity with their close friends the police. Not just Sahil but the individual researcher's reputation was at stake. Could we take such a great risk? Was it fair to ask Sahil employees to commit to such an individual risk? The issue was debated with care and effort. Some researchers left. New ones had to be hired. And the only deciding factor became personal commitment and a desire to risk all, to get to the children whose story needed to be told.

We decided that we would approach a pimp for a child during the day, a time when the police was least likely to conduct raids. Hiring a boy proved to be quite effortless but what followed was unimaginable. When the researcher informed the boy that he was not looking for sex but a conversation, the boy went into panic. There was general pandemonium and the researcher had to flee. Yet another disastrous strategy and needless to say we were forced to withdraw once again from the field. The failure of this strategy had effectively destroyed this particular researcher's chance, of ever going back into the area.

We had no choice but to wait once again. New researchers had to be hired and re-trained and the cost, the effort and the wait was making the entire project seem quite impossible

Nevertheless, return we did. This time with a new set of researchers, posing as correspondents from a foreign news agency wanting to research male child prostitution in PV. We started with interviewing the surrounding health clinics, the police, the clients and conducting focus groups with community members, local religious leaders and the youth wings of political parties in the area. Our strategy, for interviewing the MCSWs, now involved developing contact with a pimp in the area who could help arrange interviews with the boys.

Surprisingly the interviews with community members, political activists and local religious leaders were quite effortless. They were eager to speak and discussions were candid and revealing. The health clinics were difficult to access and most of the doctors were hostile to the idea of being interviewed. Firstly because many clinics in the area were run by quacks, and secondly because our questions on whether they were treating MCSWs for STDs made them uncomfortable about their awareness of male child prostitution in PV. They did not want to be perceived to be sanctioning child prostitution and the nature of the treatment that they provided made it clear that they knew. So many lied about treating STDs. But interviews with the MCSWs, revealed that some boys had been treated by the very same '*quacks*'. After nearly two months of persuasion, we eventually succeed in interviewing 7 clinicians.

The local police, because some of them were involved in the prostitution trade as clients and informants, had mixed responses to the researchers. Those involved in the trade, were suspicious of our purpose, defensive about their role and responsibility and hostile towards us. And then there were others who acknowledged that male child prostitution existed and that they (police) were involved in protecting the trade, as well as using the boys sexually for their own pleasure. The group involved in male child prostitution was obviously influential because none of the other officers would dare to speak in front of

them. Once the researchers had identified the '*good cops*' from the '*bad cops*', they had to make sure that their visits to the police station took place when those involved in the trade were away on duty or leave. These interviews therefore took a substantial amount of time and coordination. Though we tried to keep our visits to the police station as low profile as possible, we would find that the networking in the area was such that each of our visits would be reported to the hotel owners and pimps and quite possibly the other policemen as well. (By this time the researchers had been successful in establishing contact with a pimp who would happily inform them everyday of where they had been and who they had visited).

Around this time one of our key informants in the area, who was a shop keeper, informed us that he had been able to convince a client (a friend of his) for an interview. Our questionnaires were already prepared and so the interview was set up almost immediately. The first encounter was disastrous. Our questions, regarding his feelings towards indulging in sex with young boys, enraged him to the point of pulling out a revolver at the researcher and threatening to shoot him. The shop keeper, who was present, managed to intervene and calm the respondent. Needless to say the interaction left us shaken. The second interview, with another client, also turned sour when he realised that we were taping the conversation. The researcher had failed to ask for his permission to do so. Resultantly, he smashed the tape recorder, took the cassette and stormed out. After these incidents, we re-structured the questionnaires to tone them down further, without compromising on the information we wanted and set norms for conversing and handling this highly sensitive group of respondents. We eventually succeeded in interviewing five clients. We wanted a larger sample size but our informant was unable to convince more clients and we had no direct access.

Having befriended a pimp, access to the MCSWs finally became a real possibility. He agreed to help arrange interviews with the boys but at a price. Realising that time was money in this trade and desperate for access to the boys, we agreed. After much financial negotiation, the pimp agreed to the rate of Rs.1000 (\$16) per interview. This was an amount that we could ill afford. Sahil's initial program funding had been extremely low

and the budget for this research had been close to negligible. Given that it had already extended its projected time frame- originally estimated to be six months- we were functioning on minimal funds. Paying for interviews was going to limit our sample size further. Yet another ethical dilemma for Sahil! Now we would make the dreaded pimp richer yet again and he would wield power over us. The pimp also insisted that he would be present in all interviews, which would bias the boy's responses. We had no choice.

With a section of the police, hotel owners and other pimps clearly hostile towards us, we were keen to hold the interviews away from the research site. However, the pimp threatened to double his charges if we held the interviews outside PV. That decided the matter. We rented a room in a local hotel and the interviews began in PV.

In the very first interview, the questionnaire we had designed for interviewing the boys, failed. Language was the next block. Though the questionnaire was in Urdu (spoken fluently by the boys) we found that the terms that we were using for sexual health, the trade, body, emotions etc. were too technical and *'proper'*. All they understood was *'street language'*, which we had found too crude and derogatory to use in the questionnaires. However, we had no choice but to reframe the entire language of the questionnaire. After this interviews proceeded smoothly and the first thirteen interviews took place without any mishaps. All conversations with the boys were taped and notes were taken.

“For members of a stigmatized group like prostitutes, suddenly to be taken seriously and be placed in a position to educate others is rare and alien” (Miller 1997). Researchers had to appear to want to know more about life on the streets of PV, an idea that the boys and pimps warmed to; it is therefore not surprising that the pimp would be present at all interviews with boys and even help during interviews. He was aware of how much the researchers needed him to introduce them to other significant actors in PV. There were points at which he interpreted what the researchers said and his presence sometimes acted as a deterrent to the child's honesty. But he could not be asked to leave.

The researchers established a relationship of friendship and (partial) trust with the boys. They shared cigarettes together, confabulated stories of being abused themselves in order to help the boys open up, chatted about movies, film songs etc.

Things started to go wrong again when we discovered that the pimp had been talking in the area about providing us with boys for interviews. He had, in fact, begun to use us to settle his scores with other key players, of how he could '*fix*' them with his powerful contacts (foreign news agency). Despite us warning him, he continued to flex his muscles and before we knew it we became part of a local gang war. One day as the researchers were returning from the field, after having completed an interview with a MCSW, they were shot at. A final warning to stay away. We never discovered who was behind the shooting but had good reason to believe that it was the local police. Though the researchers were lucky to escape unhurt –the bullet bounced off the car- we were badly shaken by the incident and had no choice but to withdraw yet again. The sheer courage and commitment of the researchers took us back within a few weeks. This time around the pimp was extremely hesitant to arrange more interviews. After much persuasion and promising to raise the money, from Rs.1000 to Rs.2000 per interview, we succeeded in convincing him. This brought to completion the most difficult and most important part of the research.

In the face of such grave threat to the researchers lives it was impossible for Sahil to continue research in PV. The project was brought to a close. We spent the next six months transcribing interviews, updating field notes, integrating and analysing our experiences and the information that we had procured, in order to begin to develop an understanding of the system of male child prostitution.

Over the course of the research the following tools were used for data collection:

- **Area Mapping:** Maps were made of the Bus Stand and its surrounding colonies. Shops, restaurants and hotels/inns engaged in male child prostitution were located on it and the map was regularly updated.

- **Participant observation:** Field observations were conducted to identify possible key informants and to observe behaviour patterns of the MCSWs, their clients, pimps, hotels and inns.
- **In-depth interviews:** Semi structured interview schedules were designed for the boys, the clients, the police, the pimps and the clinicians.
- **Key informants:** These were influential and/or well connected people, living or working in the research area. They kept us regularly informed about what was happening in the area, helped us identify respondents, provided information on the system of male child prostitution and assisted in arranging interviews and focus group discussions in the area.
- **Informal discussions:** These were informal conversations that we held with shop keepers in the area, mechanics, bus drivers, restaurant owners, waiters, cobblers, wagon drivers etc. These were recorded as part of field notes.
- **Focus group discussions:** Several focus group discussions were organised with groups of community members, political party workers, and religious leaders in the area.
- **Field Notes:** All field observations and informal conversations with community members were documented on a regular basis. Notes were also taken before and during in-depth interviews, to cover aspects such as body language of the respondents etc.
- **Mechanical assistance:** Tape recorders were used to record focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. These conversations were later transcribed.

Time Frame

The study was initiated in 1996. As a result of all the complex and persistent obstacles, the fieldwork was finally completed in the year 2000. Sahil was then faced with the rather difficult decision of publishing our findings. There were several factors to be considered, the most important one being the safety of the children who were involved in this study. Our experience showed that any publicity regarding the prostitution trade in PV would only lead to the MCSWs being harassed and/or arrested by the police. Our intention was not to create more trauma in these children's lives, nor did we consider their arrest to be a just or viable solution to the problem. The second issue was Sahil's own safety, which had come under threat several times during the course of this study. It was therefore decided, that whereas the research findings would be incorporated with immediate effect into Sahil's own strategic plan, we would take the following precautions for the safety of our informants and our staff:

- a) We would present our findings at extremely select forums without disclosing the exact location of our study. Over the last four years this study was presented at only two forums; The Johns Hopkins University in the USA and at a research conference organised by Aahung (a Karachi based NGO) in Islamabad, Pakistan.
- b) We would change informant's names and remove all such identifying information from our presentations and the final report.
- c) Prior to publishing the report we would not submit our findings in any form to the print or electronic media.
- d) To ensure the safety of our informants and our staff members, we would not publish the report until a period of four years had elapsed

Researching Children

Counselling techniques and research techniques advocate, “*entering the world of the subject*” (Alldred 1998) as much as possible in order to understand him/her better. In research, the role of participant-observer is important to gain such access to the world of the subject (here child), which has for so long been alien territory to adults. This shows that children and adults “*occupy different social spheres*”¹¹ and that the meanings of their lives have to be constructed in adult terminology. Children’s worlds have been understood in terms of what adults can respond to, rather than what children really feel and experience. “[*adults*] *construct children as little aliens to the dominant culture, the exotic objects of some other culture...that is, to the presumed norm or centrality of adult culture.*”¹² Such a condition in researchers (as adults) is common, and may be applied to any marginalized group whose issues have been vocalized by a member(s) of the majority group (e.g. women being interviewed and represented by men, coloured people by white ones).

Language and the Deconstruction of Children

Especially in the context of sexuality, language can deconstruct the entire definition of what constitutes a child. Despite pervasive proof to the contrary, all organised cultures believe that children are not sexual beings and are safely oblivious to adult understanding of sexuality. Comprehensive scientific data on child sexual abuse, child prostitution and adolescent sexual behaviour, have done little to change that widespread notion. Perhaps because sexuality is seen as that proverbial boundary, which separates children from adults. Language thus became a major challenge as the researchers suddenly found

¹¹ P. Alldred, *Dilemmas in Representing the Voices of Children*, in *Feminist Dilemmas in Qualitative Research*, Ribbens, J. and Edwards, R. (Eds.), p. 151; Sage Publications 1998.

¹² *Ibid.* p. 151

themselves drawn into a world of sexual innuendo and vocabulary (largely profane) used easily and graphically by the children.

The research site, in this case, has a bordello culture where street language rules sexual expression. The technical and *‘proper’* use of language by the researchers isolated the boys completely. This language, which in any psychosocial study would be seen as abusive, violent and objectifying of children, was the self-expression of these boys. In the ugly, crude reality of their abuse, what use would the boys have for sophisticated language? The starkness of it all totally threw the researchers. Any attempt to comment on their language or trying to shape it would only humiliate and isolate the boys further.

This was a tough block. Embarrassment, shame and sheepishness began to affect the debriefing sessions at Sahil and many researchers were loathe to document the *words*, which was beginning to affect the authenticity of the collation. Others observed that just the use of the language made them feel like the aggressors and began to experience a new kind of emotional stress and crisis. They would not know when to stop using this language and would sometimes get carried away. For example, whilst interviewing a pimp who told him about his gonorrhea which the doctor had not cured despite several visits, a researcher found himself saying *“Next time you should have sex with the doctor, then he will cure it.”*

Deconstructing the child for the researchers therefore became a long and unexpected process. They had to address the children first as sex workers, with an understanding of how their harsh lives had made them sexually precocious and seemingly adult. And yet they had to remember at every point that they were talking to children who were victims and not aggressors. Judgement was a demon that the researchers battled, with long and hard persistence.

Researcher’s field notes illustrate this attitude:

*“The boy’s age was about 12 years and his complexion was dark. His name was ____.
His body seemed to be soft and tender...”*

After this, when they read their field notes, the image of the child re-emerged and began to push up issues of ethics of the researcher himself. Were they objectifying a boy even more and perhaps re-abusing him through such recordings? And yet those who analysed and collated data, felt drawn into the raw world of child prostitution, where with their use of this language they somehow became part of a tacit approval of organised child abuse.

Part of the dilemma is summed up as: *“Since the whole frame of reference is adult-centered, it is difficult to what extent children could...present ‘their own’ account of their worlds....it can be argued that children are having to render themselves meaningful in adult-centered terms, and explain themselves convincingly to those in power over them. Seen in this light, children’s interviews, because they entail the requirement to make sense for adults, might not be necessarily empowering occasions for children. The idea that any...subjects are free to present their own meanings....neglects the ways in which the dominant culture provides...meanings.”*¹³

And partly the dilemma was about accepting that beyond just language, the children were living a dangerous and perverse sexual reality, where the rules and rationale were not theirs, but they were players nevertheless. Where were we to place these children who were negotiating and surviving in a self-destructive adult space, playing adult games? This was a question, which reverberated through both the methodology and the data, forcing us to reconstruct our concept of a child all over again.

¹³ *ibid.* p. 154a

Researching Sexuality

The Emotional Impact of Research

“ As [sociologists] we can examine emotions, feelings for the people we study. Second, reflecting inward as well as observing outward, we can view our own emotional experience as a legitimate sociological object of study and focus on how we feel as researchers as a way of understanding and coping with what is going on emotionally in our research...”¹⁴

Carrying the identity of an NGO, which is conditioned to respond to crisis and not just ‘study’ them, proved to be emotionally taxing for the Sahil team. Initially when we did manage to make contact with some boys, the research team was overwhelmed by how a little bit of money (boys were initiated into the trade by the pimp etc. by putting a loan on them) could possibly help release them from their plight. For several weeks this became an issue of debate and discussion in the organisation. Most of us agreed that being an NGO it was our responsibility to intervene as and when required. However, even though we did attempt an intervention (we raised money within the office to help some boys pay off their loans) we were naïve to think that it would be so simple to extricate the boys from their lives in PV. The boys we had promised to help never turned up. But more importantly, emotions such as these could have jeopardised the project. If we had been successful in helping these boys escape, our entry into the research site again would have been impossible. Restraining ourselves from our ‘*natural*’ role of intervenor remained a challenge throughout the research study. As emotionally draining as it was, as researchers, we had no option but to watch helplessly, as life in PV went on.

Addressing the emotional impact of the subject on the research team is a critical component of any study of this nature. Researchers must be given space and time to

¹⁴ Ellis, C. *Emotional Sociology* (1991) quoted by Mattley, C. in Schwartz, 1997, p. 102.

resolve their feelings if we are to ensure that there is no spill over in the field. A fact which could destroy the research. Researchers are the critical link with the site and their nature, competence and emotional stability must be addressed continually if the project is to succeed.

Anger was another persistent emotion. Hearing the community, the clients, the police and the pimps, absolve themselves of all responsibility and blame. Listening to ridiculous myths and the aggression with which they were expressed and finally the violence and ruthlessness of the trade. All of this and more took its toll on the team. The researchers would have to be debriefed for hours sometimes, to help them release pent up emotions.

Sorrow and helplessness were our constant companions. One particularly tragic boy came to be interviewed with full-blown AIDS. He had open sores all over his body and he insisted on being interviewed in the bathroom because he did not want to stain the sheets on the bed. Our distress reached an all time peak and it was with great difficulty that the researchers completed the interview. Needless to say the image of this boy haunted us for many months to come.

Sexual Dilemmas of Separating the Personal from the Professional

Often '*activists*' are motivated to work on issues like child sexual abuse etc. because they may have had similar experiences in their lives. In Pakistan there are few spaces to heal such trauma. A researcher carrying his unresolved traumatic memories can display a number of different problems. The work may act as a trigger and bring back anger, powerlessness or shame with an intensity which could lead to a breakdown. Alternatively, the researcher may forget all professional boundaries and decide to resolve his past by making one of the aggressors of the children his target. He may start a personal '*war*' at the site outside his professional ambit and jeopardise the work. Or worse, he may end up abusing a child as one of the ways to settle his rage. For example, a particular researcher who had personal experience of sexual abuse, found it difficult to

keep his anger towards the client under control. Understandable as this was, if it hadn't been for timely intervention on the part of his team member, not only was he nearly physically assaulted by the client but he also jeopardised our chances of eliciting any information from him.

There are always power dynamics that operate in the relationship between researcher and subjects. *“Although we are not dispassionate researchers who distance ourselves from our values and emotions, we continue to objectify our research subjects through the very power we employ as researchers.”*¹⁵ These dynamics take on greater significance when issues of sexualisation enter the picture. The male researchers were involved in an extremely intense and time-consuming project and needed time and space to vent their feelings of hopelessness, anger, helplessness, empathy etc. One particular researcher known to be very open with his sexuality began to use the training space to vent his sexual fantasies. Gradually he started talking about how the boys were sexually attractive and finally he reported that the boys had begun to appear in his sexual fantasies. His field notes reflected his confusion as well, where he documented unnecessary details about their appearance etc. Such situations were extremely complex not to mention that the gender of the Director constantly became an obstacle for her to address sexual issues frontally with her team. His boundaries were clearly vulnerable and there was little choice but to remove him from the project

The Director, therefore, was constantly involved in a regular and subtle monitoring system through questions and discussions. She was looking for any effects of visible sexualisation or voyeuristic interest that the researchers may display. And when she did find a researcher on vulnerable ground, then despite his competence and the time and resources spent in training him, he was asked to leave. This burdened, an already difficult research in unimaginable ways.

¹⁵ Miller, J., *Researching Violence Against Street Prostitutes*, in *Researching Sexual Violence Against Women* by M. Schwartz (Ed.), 149; Sage Publications, 1997.

This violation of boundaries shows the complexity of researching sexual issues. Especially, when the target group is children, vulnerable by definition and location in this case. The head of the team must be extremely vigilant and ruthless with any straying that he/she observes. Despite the fact that all the male researchers came with research degrees and qualifications in anthropology, sociology, social work etc., some from institutions in the US, we realised degrees are insufficient if they do not manage to resolve our personal sexual prejudices, biases, unresolved desires and conditioned responses. The need for rigorous, *personalized* training and orientation on sexual issues and perspectives for researchers is an important recommendation that can be made from this experience.

It needs to be clearly understood that when we research prostitution, sexual abuse or any related subject, we are entering directly into the realm of sex and sexuality. In the repressed, judgemental and guilt ridden society of Pakistan, most of us have never had the space to address our own sexual fears and demons openly. Researching such areas will invariably bring into focus our own confusions, struggles and dilemmas. For instance how can we ensure that the researcher has never experienced child sexual abuse himself/herself and doesn't still carries the scars, anger and judgements born thereof? And when his/her own personal healing has not taken place, can we ensure that in a sexually charged atmosphere like PV the researcher will be able to manage the residue of emotions that begin stirring in him/her? Can we ensure that the researcher himself has never used child pornography, may be gay and because of the religious fears and suppression, may be carrying confused notions of what is sexually ethical? At every step this research was a land mine. It was like constantly standing at the center of a maelstrom with everything potentially explosive.

Most importantly, the training of the researchers must carry within it a personalized process to assess as far as is possible, the sexual notions, fears, beliefs and comfort levels of the researcher. Sahil was equipped, because of its counselling work on child sexual abuse, to ask and address many sensitive issues in the training. However we still found, that entering the area of male child prostitution meant addressing sexual orientation and issues like pornography etc. to an extent which placed us on difficult ground.

The sexuality of the researcher and how the work sexualises him further is a critical area of concern. If this reality is not placed centrally within any effort to study such issues, the results will not only be biased and inaccurate, but the process could wreak havoc for both the researcher and the target group. In the case of children in prostitution, this is an eventuality we must disallow at any cost. Even if it means dropping the project.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Defining Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)

Before we enter into the findings at PV, a perspective on child sexual abuse (CSA) is critical. Only because in Pakistan, as in many traditional societies, the denial has left the area fogged over with confusion and a minimalist understanding. And to really understand the depth of what the children experience at a place like PV and the long-term effects on their lives, getting a complete picture on CSA is the only starting point.

For Sahil the focus on CSA has been our *raison d'être*. It has therefore been more like an intense study of the prevalence, nature, effects on the victim and healing systems for this sadly prevalent and yet silenced crime in our modern world. It is important, therefore, at the outset to disengage ourselves from any illusions that being a Muslim State or otherwise rules on man's social behaviour, especially the perversions. Only an honest admission that we in Pakistan are facing all and more of the social '*ills*' that characterise modern man can help us see what we need to see and then, and only then, can we help change it.

Firstly one of Sahil's major discoveries was that CSA numbers in both our villages and cities broadly matched global percentages. Other countries in South Asia, like India where numerous statistical studies now exist, also report that between 60-70 per cent of both boys and girls experience CSA at some stage of their lives. If all those reading this report were to stop and truthfully re-visit their growing up years, they will tend to agree with these numbers. The problem usually is not just our refusal to admit to ourselves that it happened but we tend to paper over the experience by giving it different names. And largely because a standard definition still needs to be evolved on what constitutes CSA and how to separate it from a child's exploratory experiences.

Defining CSA today is easy. Most progressive nations have developed a socio-legal definition which also clearly demarcates the areas of criminalisation thereby providing legal protection for children. Sahil has, interestingly over the years, tested this definition in counselling to see if the effects are as broad based as the definition allows for. And

empirically we have discovered that it is the only definition that can be used if we are to protect our young and give them any chance to grow up as healthy sexually functional adults.

CSA is defined as: Adults have authority and power over children. When an adult abuses a child's trust and misuses his or her authority to engage the child in *any* sexual activity, it is termed child sexual abuse.

CSA involves:

Sexual Comments

An adult making suggestive comments to the child that are sexual in nature. Commenting to a child about his/her body and inducing or trapping the child to share his/her body.

Voyeurism

An adult gaining sexual satisfaction through watching naked children.

Exhibitionism

An adult revealing his/her sexual parts to a child.

Pornography

Encouraging or forcing a child to read/watch pornography, giving pornographic literature, pictures and movies to a child or using the child in pornographic material (photos, videos, etc).

Touching

Touching any part of the child's body in a sexual way.

Kissing

Kissing a child with sexual undertones/inclinations.

Fondling

Fondling a child's breasts or genitals. Also if the adult encourages or forces a child to fondle his/her genitals.

Masturbation

Encouraging or forcing a child to masturbate, with the child as either participant or observer.

Frottage

Rubbing genitals against a child's body or clothing or making the child do the same.

Oral Sex

Encouraging or forcing a child into oral sex (using the mouth to stimulate the child's genitals or making the child use its mouth to stimulate the adult's genitals.)

Intercourse

Inducing, trapping or forcing a child into anal or vaginal penetration by penis, finger or any other object.

Exploitation

Inducing, trapping or forcing a child into prostitution or using the child for pornography.

Effects of CSA

The abused child will have psychological and behavioral problems. These are often inter linked and have both immediate and long term effects. The child may experience anger, guilt, shame, hostility, fear and have low self-esteem. The child may also suffer from nightmares, eating disorders and may have suicidal tendencies. All or any of the behaviours outlined below could be found in varying degrees in an abused child.

A variety of factors influence how sexual abuse impacts on an individual. These factors include the age of the victim, the sex of the victim, the sex of the offender, the extent of the sexual abuse, and the frequency of the abuse, the relationship between offender and victim and the number of offenders involved. Therefore, in the case of male child prostitution, where there are multiple abusers, the abusers are of the same sex, the abuse occurs on a daily basis, sometimes several times a day, we can be certain that the abuse affects the boys in the most severe ways.

Effects on Behaviour of the Child:

- Unaccountable fear, for example, fear of the dark or of a particular person.
- Fear of separation or of being alone.
- Refusal to be left alone.
- Fear of people of a specific type or gender.
- Difficulty in sleeping or nightmares.
- Withdrawal or isolation
- Regression to infant-like behavior, e.g., bed-wetting.

- Sudden changes in mood or behaviour.
- Aggression.
- Self-destructive tendencies, drug or alcohol abuse, suicidal tendencies.
- Eating disorders.
- Unexplained or sudden drop in school performance.
- Pyromania (starting fires, more characteristic of male victims).
- Cruelty to animals (more characteristic of male victims).
- ***Self-blame*** occurs when victims of sexual abuse experience a negative sense of self and perception of their bodies. It includes the burden of feeling guilty and responsible for the abuse or the consequences of disclosure. These feelings are likely to be reflected in self-destructive behaviors such as risk taking acts, self-mutilation, suicidal gestures and acts and provocative behavior designed to elicit punishment.
- Perhaps the most fundamental damage from sexual abuse is its ***undermining of trust*** in those people who are supposed to be protectors and nurturers. Behavior related to feelings of betrayal includes manipulating others, involvement in damaging relationships and engaging in angry behavior.
- ***Powerlessness***: Due to the imbalanced power dynamics of sexual abuse tilted in favor of the abuser, the child experiences a sense of powerlessness. A sense of powerlessness induces both perceptions of vulnerability and a desire to control. Consequent behavior may involve aggression and exploitation of others. Similarly, the victim may also exhibit the effects of vulnerability by avoidant responses, such as running away, anxiety, sleeping and eating problems.

Physical Effects:

- Difficulty in walking or sitting.
- Unexplained pain in the genital area.
- Itching, soreness, discharge or unexplained bleeding in the genital area.
- Recurrent urinary tract infections.
- Sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS.
- Pregnancy.
- Bruises, bite marks or other injuries to breasts, buttocks, lower abdomen or thighs.

“Apart from these behavioral and physical indications there are some sexual indicators as well. If these are found in the child then there is a high-probability of the child being or having been sexually abused since these represent precocious sexual knowledge not ordinarily possessed by young children.”¹⁶

Impact on Sexuality:

Statements indicating precocious sexual knowledge, often made inadvertently:

A child makes a statement about the sexual act (penetration, ejaculation) according to his/her own limited manner of expression, beyond the normal level of knowledge for that age.

Sexually explicit drawings:

A child draws a picture of the sexual act or genitals.

Sexual interaction with other people:

Sexual aggression towards younger or more naïve children represents the child's identification with the abuser. In order to express control or prevail over the impact of the trauma of powerlessness that the child experiences in his *"relationship"* with the abuser, which includes a perception of both vulnerability and victimisation, he/she tries to overcome that by exhibiting aggressive behavior towards younger or more naïve children.

Traumatic Sexualisation:

Traumatic sexualisation creates an aversion to or an overvaluing of sex. This occurs when a child has been prematurely exposed or coerced into a sexual act.

¹⁶ Kathleen Coulborn Faller, *Child Sexual Abuse: Intervention and Treatment issues*, 1993, p.25

Male Child Prostitution

Sahil's ideological position on child prostitution needs to be seen through the lens of CSA rather than a moral debate on prostitution. The notion of moral, legal and religious sanction implicit in an organised sexual assault of children was a cause of great concern for Sahil. Tired of the moral righteousness, that we encountered every time we raised the issue of CSA, we decided to question first the existence of organised prostitution of children.

Over the past few years the mushrooming of academic interest in the sexual abuse of children has contributed to a number of concepts and theories about this subject. Largely CSA is recognized to mean the violation of girls by adult male figures. Male CSA victims have generally been an under-identified group. This research sought to break that myth and begin with an institutionalized form of male CSA. We hoped to understand the dynamics of a trade where children are routinely traded, attacked, appropriated and inducted into a space of complete sexual exploitation and powerlessness. Who were these children, how did the adults relate to them and where did they learn the skills to negotiate survival in this heinous adult game?

*In societies, where sexual violence as a generic abuse against women, does not find voice, the abuse of boys is an even greater 'secret'. An adult's discomfort with sexuality is all too evident in the spaces that are out of bounds for children to discuss their abuse. The existing patterns of male socialization and the underreporting of their experiences of abuse, can be seen as cyclical; each aspect influences and determines the other. Constructs of masculinity that support denial of abuse are outlined below:*¹⁷

- ❑ *Socialisation of men to be seen as powerful, active, competent, rather than passive, helpless and victimised.*
- ❑ *Male avoidance of recognizing weakness or helplessness in oneself.*
- ❑ *Male sexuality seen as indiscriminate and insatiable.*

¹⁷ Adapted from *The Male Survivor* by K. Coulborn, p. 17; Sage Publications (1995)

- ❑ *The stigma of homosexuality and fear that disclosure may signify that the victim is gay.*
- ❑ *Fear based denial or distortion of male victimisation by predominantly male disseminators of information.*
- ❑ *In an Islamic State, sodomy being one of the worst crimes possible against God and his edicts.*

All these factors contribute to the existing perspectives on male child prostitution in Pakistan and much of South Asia today. Boys are socialised to be strong, competent and rational rather than weak and victimised or they have no place in the world of *‘real men’*. The image of the *‘real man’* is also clearly heterosexual. Homosexuality is not accepted as a *‘norm’* and is seen as a passive and weak state, underscored by language, culture and religion. The idea of men being sexually insatiable allows them many sexual *‘indiscretions’* creating barriers to recognizing child prostitution as CSA. Therefore, the adults desire to see young boys as choosing to engage in prostitution and further labeling them sexually promiscuous. One member of the researched community clearly sees it as their perversion and undisciplined sexuality; *“If a man is free and has no work to do, he becomes a loafer and does all sorts of things. It is easy to fall into this habit here. If such men are sitting in the video house all day watching movies, these young boys make offers and take such men away. Men, who may not be used to male prostitutes, will be initiated by these boys. They have ruined so many men like this.”*¹⁸

“Such perceptions about the demonic sexual nature of male children, coupled with the politics and statistics around female victimisation thus makes it easier to recognise the male perpetrator than the male victim” (Coulborn, 1995). Male child prostitution is usually evaluated in comparison to female prostitution, which colours the image of the former. In many countries the underworld runs female prostitution rings and the financial connotations cannot be ignored. Male child/adolescent prostitution is seen more in terms of sexual activity rather than exploitation, where children are clearly seen as sexually

¹⁸ Focus Group Discussion with Members of the Community.

lewd little demons who are participating '*actively*' rather than being abused. Seen as more '*repulsive*', partly for the reasons mentioned above, and also because it is primarily '*sexually driven*' (Gonsiorek, Berr, LeTourneau, 1994). It is ironic and tragic that female prostitution is seen as the '*norm*' whereas male prostitution is seen as sexual '*deviance*'. And such categorisations further influence both the proliferation and the redressal of what in both cases is the abuse of children.

Profile of the Male Child Sex Worker

The age range of the boys interviewed lay between 8 to 18 years of age. 11 of the boys were between the age of 14 to 18 years, whereas the remaining 4 fell between the age of 8 to 12 years. The mother tongue of 7 of the boys was Pushto¹⁹. 8 boys spoke Punjabi²⁰ as their mother tongue. All the boys, except for one, spoke Urdu²¹. The boys came from villages in the Punjab, the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) and Azad Kashmir.

3 of the boys had received primary education, whereas 12 were illiterate. Nearly all the boys came from impoverished backgrounds, except for one, whose family belonged to the lower middle class with an income of approximately Rs. 9000 (\$150) per month.

Poverty lies at the very root of these children's terrible life story. In countries like Pakistan where the economics of life forces children to work at a young age, robbing them of childhood and pushing them into adult spaces where they have no power and are vulnerable to all kinds of exploitation, physical, sexual or emotional, how do we even begin to talk about protection?

Added to this, is the failure of the State to provide an education package for children which is attractive enough to lure such children into school and keep them there because it brings with it clear opportunities of a better life for both the child and his/her family. Research in Pakistan has shown over and over again that people have lost faith in the educational system. There are many who would rather send their children to religious schools, since there is more perceived value in being taught the ethics of life. Besides, such schools offer free food and clothes, which is of far more use to them than the promise of a distant '*better*' future that they know comes with no guarantee.

Families, which send their children to work, thereby exposing them to all kinds of exploitation are irresponsible. But when the State fails continuously to provide its people

¹⁹ Regional Language of the North West Frontier Province of Pakistan

²⁰ Regional Language of the Province of Punjab, Pakistan.

²¹ National Language of Pakistan.

with life's basic needs; food, shelter, education, awareness, health, then who is the real culprit?

Of the fifteen boys interviewed, 6 had been sent to the city by their families to earn money. 8 of the boys had left their village alone, 5 with a friend and 2 with a relative, who in these cases happened to be an older cousin. They arrived at the research site with hardly any money on them or clothes.

The majority of the boys (9 boys) however, had left home because of bad relations and constant quarreling with a parent, mostly the father. For any child, the home is a haven of comfort and security. To flee home at such a vulnerable age, must mean that an unknown world seemed a safer place. CSA cannot be looked at in isolation. When procreation is ruled by economic necessity, social demands and misinterpreted religious injunctions, rather than a desire to love, nurture and protect. When there is the stress of poverty, lack of education and complete unawareness of the responsibility of parenting; then instead of seeing CSA to be the unfortunate life story of a few children, perhaps we should begin to see it as an inevitable outcome for the majority of children in Pakistan.

Interestingly 10 boys reported having some sexual experience prior to their arrival in PV. This means some kind of violent or coercive sex had taken place in their villages. With little time to interview, we could not get enough details about their earlier experience. Sexualised at an early age because of their abuse, the impact of CSA left them particularly vulnerable for being engaged in PV. Only one boy spoke of being raped in his village by an adult male and another boy spoke of raping other children, both boys and girls, either from a lower caste, or due to family enmity. He also spoke of being involved in gang rapes.

The implication of these statistics underlines the 60-70 per cent statistic mentioned earlier. Randomly selected for this interview 10 out of the 15 boys reported sexual exploitation in their villages. How many children ran away because sexual assault at home or close to home was what finally caused them to flee? These questions remain unanswered in this report but are a critical enquiry for any further research.

Whatever the case, the statistics are horrific enough for us to realise that contrary to popular belief, adults are sexualizing children at extremely young ages in irresponsible, violent and aggressive ways leaving little chance for them to not replicate this behaviour in their adult lives. And this is happening even in villages, which are generally perceived to have more pristine environments than cities where there is thought to be much more exposure to sex and sexuality. Yet we continue to deny such behaviour, choosing to recognise it as the malady of a deviant few, using religion to justify the blinders that we wear and in doing so ignoring the vicious cycle of sexual aggression and irresponsibility that forms our society.

All the boys smoked '*hashish*'²² and drank alcohol, 5 also took opium, and only one boy reported the use of heroin occasionally. 13 of the 15 boys interviewed spoke of taking drugs on a regular basis. All the boys spoke extensively on how drugs helped them become '*numb*', thereby lessening the pain of penetration and made them feel '*good*'. All the boys accessed drugs through friends. 5 boys said that clients also provided them drugs and another 5 said that they purchased drugs directly, as their regular need for them made them abstain from relying on outside sources which were not always reliable.

Turning to drugs as a means of surviving violence and its resultant despair is a common symptom in victims of violence. The flood of confusion and emotions such as shame, guilt and despair, from living such violent lives, is so overwhelming for the children that they can do little else but attempt to escape their harsh reality by deadening mind and body. The boys are also introduced to drugs by pimps, clients and hotel owners as a means of making them dependant and therefore easily controllable. What future awaits these children? Emotionally numb, drugged out and repeatedly violated, they learn to be destructive towards themselves and also to those who they perceive to have less power than them. They will no doubt grow up to be men who will perpetuate the same violence, despair and darkness that they have had to live.

²² Processed Form of Marijuana

14 of the boys spoke of their monthly income from providing sexual services as being between Rs. 5000 to 7000 (\$83-116) whereas the remaining one respondent claimed to earn up to Rs. 15,000 (\$250) a month. 10 of the boys stated that approximately 40% of their income was sent home, whereas the rest was used for their own needs (food, drugs, cigarettes, entertainment). The remaining 5 said that they did not send any money home. All the boys claimed to save a small percentage of their income every month. Two of the boys had bank accounts, whereas the rest spoke of handing money over to friends for safe keeping.

The boys are given a portion of their earnings to ensure that they do not flee. Their monthly earnings are much more than any '*decent*' employment would offer them. Therefore the pecuniary benefits of a trade that violates them, also adds a certain economic power and lifestyle. Unfortunately, it only increases their access to alcohol and drugs.

2 boys had been in the prostitution trade in PV for over three years, 10 boys had been there for a year and 3 of the boys interviewed had been in PV for three to four months.

All the boys said that their family was unaware that they worked as sex workers and that if they discovered the truth they would undoubtedly be killed by them.

Initiation into the Trade

The boys arrived at the research site with no prior knowledge of the prostitution racket.



Most boys came here at an extremely tender age (7-14 years) in search of work, or escaping from problems with their family. All of them had worked previously in their respective villages as masons, barbers assistants, waiters etc. Their sojourn in PV began with work at a hotel; employment opportunities were made known by word of mouth, at times an acquaintance let them know that a certain hotel owner (Maalik) needed a boy to help out at the inn. At other times they were identified by hotel

personnel, or hawkers as needing employment and approached accordingly.

Initiation into prostitution happened almost immediately for the majority of boys (within the first week of employment). For 5 of the boys, initiation was before employment of any sort at the hotel and only one boy said that he had been initiated into the trade after two or three months of working in the hotel. It was also in this period that the boys were introduced to hashish and alcohol.

The first experience of abuse was painful. They recall those days with a sense of shame, embarrassment and horror. The use of drugs to aid dissociation and as *'pain-killers'* comes later. Most boys say that they bled when they were first penetrated, *"It hurt me*

and I bled” said Javed²³. Some boys are (physically) hurt so badly that they need to be hospitalised for wounds and infections in the anus. *“I got a wound and was hospitalised for fifteen days”* said Amir. A boy is paid his first salary after this initiation. Often the first abuser is the *‘friend’* who introduced him to the Maalik (hotel or inn owner), or the Maalik himself, but rarely the pimp. If the first client is a stranger then usually the memory of him is vague. Emotions such as anger, guilt, shame and helplessness colour those initial experiences as with any child victim of sexual abuse. *“I felt angry when the man raped me, I still get angry at customers but what to do, it’s my work”* said Tariq, recounting his initiation.

The boys reported three main forms of initiation into prostitution; financial incentives, blackmail and rape, with a majority of the boys reporting violent rape as a form of initiation (9 boys). Recounting how a hawker had offered him a job at a hotel Khalid said, *“ When I got there he just took off his trousers and forced himself upon me”* and then gave him Rs.100 (\$2) as *“baksheesh”* (tip). Another boy Javed, said that he had been given sleeping pills by an older friend (someone he had known from his village) and then raped. When he woke up he was bleeding. So he started crying. When Javed asked his friend why he had done that to him, his response was *“Just like that”*. The friend then gave him Rs.500/= (\$8). Tariq said, that a few days after he joined work at a hotel a drunken customer raped him because *“there wasn’t another boy available”*. Tariq was paid for his *“services.”* He cites this incident as the start of his entry into prostitution.

The other common form used was blackmail. *“I was eating and he came. He said do you want to work and I said yes. He took me to his hotel and asked if I smoked hash. I said yes so he told me to roll a joint and he left. Then the cops came and arrested me. He had me released. He said he paid them Rs.3000 (\$50) and wanted his money back immediately, what could I do I was helpless. He brought me a client.”* said Rasheed. Ghalib recounts a similar story. *“ First I said that I am not going to do this work...but then they got me stuck at the thana (police station) and then also got me out of the*

²³ All Names of MCSWs, Pimps and Clients Have Been Changed.

thana (police station) by telling me they have paid 1500 rupees...they put a loan on me.”

Only one boy Arshad, reported to have agreed to join the trade for money. However Arshad had been raped by an adult male in his village. The violent sexualisation was already part of his memory. When he arrived in PV, he met a boy he knew from his village who asked him if he wanted to have sex with him - - Arshad consented in return for some benefits. Some weeks later the boy suggested that he could earn good money through sex on a regular basis, Arshad agreed.

The Clients and the Boys

Young boys are conspicuous at PV after dusk. During the day, they largely remain indoors, watching movies, smoking, sleeping etc. Some boys do take clients during the day as well but the ***“business is slower”***²⁴. At night the boys are busy so they are not allowed to spend too much time with any one client. In the afternoon; ***“...you can keep the boy as long as you please but only till the evening. After that business hours start.”*** said a pimp, Latif, whilst offering a boy to the Sahil researcher. The chances of a police raid are fewer and according to Latif, ***“enjoy sex with boys with full 100% satisfaction because no one will come during noon or morning hours and the time is safest...”***.

In the evening, often dressed in clean clothes, some with reddened lips and kohl lined eyes, the boys scour the bus stand for passengers in search of board and lodging for the night, calling ***“Kamra, Bistra, Kamra, Munji”*** (Room, Bed). Ostensibly they are touts for various hotels in the area, but have to quickly size up passengers as potential clients. A regular traveler through PV is aware of the trade and knows how and where to procure a boy for sex. ***“All you have to do is go, stand there and show some money to any of the boys”*** said Bashir, a client. The researchers found that boys, pimps or hawkers approach you with sexual offers almost immediately.

Many boys work in smaller inns rather than a large hotel and the ***“service”*** is often a leading feature of the inn. Generally the pimps provide the clients but sometimes the boys pick them up directly which means they get to keep a larger share of the payment. Partly, because they may not tell the pimp the actual ***‘negotiated’*** sum and pocket a larger cut.

The going rates at PV for boys are between Rs. 50 to Rs.1000 (\$1-17). A range of factors determines the rate. Boys are cheaper during the day as the ***‘business hours’*** begin in the evening. ***“We have a boy who is famous for giving full satisfaction.... the boy is not so beautiful but has perfection in the art of sexual intercourse. Once you have had his***

²⁴ Interview with Pimp.

services you would insist for him.”²⁵ Similarly age and physical appearance also play an important part in determining the rate for a boy. If a boy is *‘pretty’* the rates would again be higher. A client wanting to take a boy out of the research site would have to pay between (Rs.500 to Rs.1000) as *“sometimes the boy is taken out and six to eight men use him, so we charge more as well.”*²⁶ Boys also say that they fix the rate by *“assessing the customer.”* If the customer looks like he can pay more then he is charged more. However very rarely are customers turned away. The rates are negotiable and kept low so that the majority can have access to a boy. In the words of a local shop keeper, *“a boy is a poor man’s pleasure.”*

The client’s preference for a certain type of boy is evident. The concept of *‘beauty’* in a boy prostitute is an asset, and this means that the boy looks more like a girl; he is often light skinned, slim and has a *‘soft’* (read hairless) body. Pimps and Maaliks encourage the boys to look more *“attractive and feminine.”*²⁷ The younger and more girlish the MCSW looks, the more appealing he is to clients. The construct of masculinity, as defined in our society, advocates a heterosexual preference and identification; sexual relationships with men are taboo. The preference for effeminate MCSWs is understandable.

This also links up to the penetration-centric sexual behaviour that is commonly advocated to men in their formative years, for it is not surprising that many middle and lower class men in heterosexual relationships engage in sexual behaviour with other men. The boys are used largely for penile-anal intercourse, with the client nearly always the active partner. Under Islamic law, anal penetration of a woman (wife) is prohibited.

Research by IFSHA (Interventions for Support Healing and Awareness) in New Delhi, India, on HIV/AIDS and men who have sex with men, also reveals, that a majority of the clients approaching (adult) male prostitutes are middle class men, often in marriages; the main act is anal penetration and they prefer to be the *“active”* partner. Therefore a man’s construction of his sexuality centers around his genitalia. The prostitution trade in PV

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

supports this impression. Research literature from the West also suggests that *“men, whose primary sexual interest are pubescent boys (pederasts) may not be gay in identification though they may represent themselves as such.”* (Gonsiorek, Berr and LeTourneau, 1994).

Most MCSWs are used for anal penetration, this forms the *‘main act’* and often lasts only a few minutes in a quick, emotionless act. The most pleasurable act for the client is the complete insertion of the penis into the boy’s anus; pimps advertise a boy who can receive the entire penis as the same as *“having the enjoyment of sex with a girl.”*²⁸ A MCSWs not-so-attractive looks are compensated for by his *“perfection in the art of sexual intercourse.”*²⁹ Few clients enjoy or demand foreplay though boys report that stroking and caressing the boy arouses some men, and fellatio is not a standard part of the routine. According to some boys, clients who *“are more into foreplay [are]...better than others.”*³⁰ A statement on how emotionally starved the boys are and how traumatic they find anal penetration. Others maintain that they hate clients who indulge in foreplay and wish *“it would just be over quickly.”* Some rare clients seek masturbation by the boys but the myths and superstitions around masturbation are a serious impediment. Masturbation is commonly thought to create *‘weakness’* in a man and possibly, even result in making him impotent. It is also thought to cause diseases such as gonorrhea. A client typically uses his saliva as a lubricant to ease intercourse, After a short while it is all over. The boys say that the maximum time they spend with any client is 10-15 minutes.

The client could be anyone. He could be a bus driver, a hotel owner, a soldier, a policeman, a shop keeper. He could be a regular visitor to the locale or someone who just passes through. He has no particular personality, profession, or reputation. As one of the boys said, *“some are namazi”*³¹, *some are haaji.”*³² They are married and unmarried, young and old. The only thing that runs common amongst them is the sense of sin that

²⁸ Interview with Pimp.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Interview with MCSW.

³¹ Those Who Pray Regularly.

³² Those Who Have Performed Haj- Religious Pilgrimage to the Kaaba in Mecca.

arises from indulging in this activity and the agreement that *“larkon ka apna hi maza hota hai”*³³ (boys have their own flavour).

All the clients believe that the *‘wrath’* of God shall fall on them sooner or later as God *‘condemns’* indulging in this activity. It needs to be made clear though that the *‘activity’* that they refer to is not using children for sex, but is a reference to the homosexual act. In fact, throughout the entire research, whereas everyone commented on the *‘sin’* of homosexuality, no one commented on the *‘sin’* of having sex with children. Since studies on CSA, conducted by Sahil and other NGOs in Pakistan, clearly show that communities tend to respond to CSA as being a particularly heinous crime (because children are involved) at PV no one seemed to be bothered that these were children. They were just seen as prostitutes.

Islam strongly condemns anal penetration and homosexuality. The Quran, recounts the incidence of Sodom and Gomorrah and derides it as the worst possible *‘sin’*. Obviously it does not manage to act as deterrent but instead interesting myths proliferate. For example one client stated how *“when I had no child for seven years I said tauba (never again) that if God will give me a son or a daughter I will never do this again.”* This client did have a child eventually and soon after began visiting MCSWs again. Another client said: *“This is bad work. If you put a knife in the ground and then have sex with a boy, the knife will be red hot and God will have fever for forty days.”* Yet another client expressing his sense of discomfort said, *“If I do it with a boy I will never be able to live with a woman. I won’t be worthy of a woman. And my wife will have sex with other men. This is true, I can give this to you in writing.”*

In fact to offset their own sense of guilt and shame clients accuse the boys of corrupting them. *“This boy I knew when I was in jail, got me into this activity”* said one client. Another talks of how *“these boys get sex for themselves by force”*, a third client told Sahil’s researchers that *“When a boy of this type has mustaches and beard (reference to puberty) then he has an insect born in his anus...then if he does not get sex, he cannot*

³³ Interview with Client.

stay at ease. He will get sex from anybody and when germs (semen) will enter into him only then will the insect calm down.” Yet another client commented “Children nowadays, the moment they come out of their mothers vaginas they start having sex with their own mother.”

The boys in turn try to protect their own sense of self by thinking that the client is a “dirty man”, and wonder why “*they don’t do it with women...don’t they have wives.*”³⁴

Researcher: *“Have you ever thought as to why these customers do it with boys?”*

MCSW: *“That’s what I’m saying...why the hell do they do it with boys? On the one hand one can understand that they don’t have a wife...but they know it is a big sin to do it with boys. So why not with girls?”*

Obvious victims to the myths related to male sexual desire and overwhelmed by their own sense of sin and helplessness, the boys are eager to assume that clients must either be unmarried or sexually frustrated to want to ‘sin’. Another example, that elucidates this point, is that when some of the boys were asked who the client was, without hesitation, the answer was “*most of them are army men...you can tell by their haircuts.*” On further probing the boys said that they thought this because “*soldiers are mostly on duty and get little leave, so when they do, they don’t manage to get home quickly, so they come here, have sex with boys and then go.*”

³⁴ Interview with MCSW.

The Pimps and the Boys

The pimps are the ones who scout for potential boys, get them to a particular inn/hotel and create the situation to control them. They also look for clients and are the liaison network for keeping the authorities *“bribed and happy.”*³⁵ They usually impersonate as inn or hotel staff and may be former sex workers. The pimps often have sex with their own boys, but rarely pay them.

Researcher: *“Does the maalik (in this case, the pimp) have sex with you as well?”*

MCSW: *“Yes...for free.”*

Even if payment is made, it is made in the form of a *‘tip’* and is not in accordance with the rate of the boy. *“Sometimes I give a tip to the boys if I am in a good mood.”* (Pimp)

There is a bond of affection that exists between the boy and the pimp and the pimp looks out for his *‘regular’* boys. During the course of interviews with boys the pimp would be present and they would be seated on the same bed/sofa with their arms around each other, smoking a reefer together. Out of the two pimps interviewed one clearly denied having sex with the boys. However the boys maintain that he does have sex with them.

Researcher: *Have you ever had sex with any of these boys?*

Pimp: *“No. Never...believe me...not a boy...Yes I have [had sex with] a lot of women...But till today I have never [had sex with] a [boy]...yes, I have made them sit with me, sucked their lips, and rubbed their body....(laughing)”*³⁶

³⁵ Interview with Pimp.

³⁶ Ibid.

Researchers asked the pimp mentioned above if this closeness arouses him, to which he replied that it is stimulating but his *“religious teaching and upbringing”*³⁷ prevent him from having sex with another male. *“Now if a male gets onto another male then heaven and earth shiver. I know that and therefore do not do this kind of work.”* (Pimp)

Pimps bail out the boys when they get arrested. The economic transactions are often equitable, especially if the pimp and his boys have a strong bond. They also ensure that the boys are *‘salaried’* and receive a steady source of income. Some hotels employ boys on a regular basis as well. This in effect means that the boys are not paid per client, but instead are paid Rs.1000 to Rs.2000 (\$16-33) a month. If this is not the case then earnings are split 50-50 or sometimes a larger share for the boy if he has found his own client. However if the pimp is not the owner of the hotel the money earned could be further divided. One of the pimps describes the distribution if this kind of a situation arises. *“Out of a hundred and twenty rupees I would give 60 rupees to the boy, keep twenty for myself and give forty to the Maalik.”* (Pimp)

The pimps agree that the boys are tender and young. They tend to perceive the boys as victims of circumstance. *“Who does it out of pleasure or habit. Now think like this. This is your honour. If a man does a wrong thing for money and then gets a well paying job then he will not do wrong work.”*³⁸ However at the same time the pimp also speaks about having beaten boys out of sheer hatred for the work they do. Perhaps this is one way to resolve the sense of sin he himself feels in doing this work. *“I have beaten them out of hatred...I hate them. I hate this bloody work.”*

The pimp agrees this is *‘bad work’* and refers to his earnings from it as *“Haraam Maal”* (money that is not kosher), and which resultantly *“goes as quickly as it comes.”*³⁹ One of the pimps recounted a story of how when he bought fruit from this *‘bad’* money for his family, his children fell ill, so now he spends whatever he earns on other illegal activities such as drugs and alcohol. Some pimps therefore maintain a brutal attitude. When asked

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

about his treatment of his boys one pimp said: ***“Well it is like this that you do your work or rent out the room and keep on your side. You don’t have to come near me...most of the time I don’t allow these ‘gandoos’⁴⁰ to even sit next to me.”***

The pimps, like the clients, justify their involvement in this trade. They too perceive themselves to be victims. One of the pimps talks of how he came to the area and took a hotel on lease. One of the boys who he hired for cleaning turned out to be indulging in prostitution. This pimp maintains that till the police caught that boy he had no idea of his involvement in this ***“bad work.”*** The pimp says he had the boy released from the police station after paying Rs.7000 (\$116) as bribe. He took this money from his friend as a loan. ***“Then a person told me that this way you will keep putting in money from your own pocket...your hotel won’t run unless you keep a few gandoos at the hotel...then I began to keep gandoos at the hotel.”*** (Pimp)

Another claims that his cashier handles the boys. He himself does not get involved. ***“He gives me the money later...I never ask how it is made.”*** (Pimp)

The pimps feel that this business can only stop if the police become more effective. ***“If the police arrests someone and charges them, instead of taking money and letting them go...then the offence will spread it won’t stop.”*** At the same time they also blame the ***“filthy”*** clients who demand such services. However, they do acknowledge that boys get trapped into the trade and can never run away because ***“...these boys fear that if they run away the pimps will come to my home and tell them everything. Most of the families don’t know what these boys are up to so out of this fear they don’t try to run.”***⁴¹ The Maalik is always well connected and has ***“special relations”*** with the police, ***“He can make a case against them (boys).”*** (Pimp)

When a newcomer enters the hotel business, MCSWs are planted in his hotel by other hotels that are already involved in child prostitution. This seems to serve two purposes.

⁴⁰ Derogatory Term Used for the Passive Partner in Homosexual Sex

Firstly, the owner of the new hotel will realise the profitability of keeping such boys and secondly, the older hotels will have made sure that they are safe from complaints against them. As a pimp says, *“These other hotel owners. When a new person comes to start a hotel, these old ones will give him one or two boys who are gandoos. Then he will gradually understand by himself that if these boys are there then the hotel will run.”*

Most boys are young and away from their homes and the need for love, friendship and affection also creates strange bonds. They have a love/hate relationship with their pimp and often consider him their protector. Very soon the pimp becomes both the father figure and the godfather of individual boys. *“Here is a boy who is like a brother to me. I have told him that even if I have to bring money from my home I will bring it and give it to you but please don’t do this work...I have also told him that I can talk to his Maalik.”*⁴² Crossing swords with the pimp could lead to great harm so it is only when the boys are older and of comparable physical strength with the pimp, that a chance to escape becomes a reality.

*“ Kept boys.... form complex relationships with the men who keep them. Their relationship can have a difficult mix of ‘trick’, lover, mentor, friend, and parent. There is a mutually manipulative quality to these relationships that can create hostile dependencies for both parties, adding to the complex nature of the relationship.”*⁴³

⁴¹ Interview with Pimp.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Gonsiorek, Berr and LeTourneau, Male Sexual Abuse, p. 242; Sage Publications 1994.

The Police and the Boys

According to the MCSWs, the police are the most corrupt and powerful part of the PV nexus. They protect and perpetuate the system with a control under which the entire nexus takes umbrage. According to one hotel owner: ***“The problem of child sexual engagement...is the result of collaboration between police and the inns...the only solution is a bloody revolution which would kill every corrupt...politician, bureaucrat...and police walla.”***

Police constables themselves admit that they get a regular cut from raids on inns and hotels, smuggling and narcotics trade, theft etc. The Chairman of the Hotels and Inns Welfare Association told the researchers that ***“Instead of checking and raiding the inns. Police officials come to this hotel and other established hotels for checking documents of the guests. The prime objective is not to insure***



public security but to extract money from the owners of the hotels.” Criminals are booked under various charges and the arrests are also made with the implicit understanding that the police will be paid off and the criminals released. A MCSW narrated how once, while he was having sex with another boy, he heard policemen approaching on a regular raid. He slipped Rs.500 (US\$8) under the door and they left.

The SHO of the police station admitted to police involvement in the trade. ***“my staff is responsible for the prostitution of boys. My staff plays the role of a pimp.”*** A local shop owner further clarifies this. ***“If a new boy comes to the stand for labour, these policemen arrest him and take him to the police station. There they beat him and when the boy is completely scared they tell him that okay we will let you go and also arrange***

work for you. Then they take him to some inn.” Though the police are heavily involved in the prostitution trade, sometimes orders from their higher ups force them to conduct raids in the area. Most of the hotels/inns are informed well in advance of the raid, so that they can protect their boys and the police can make some money. As a resident of one of the inns stated, *“Late evening a man came from the main road and asked the manager of the hotel to disperse the boys as the DSP was coming with the raiding party.”* However they do need to please their superiors so some arrests are made and it is always the boys who are arrested. In effect all they do is extort the earnings of the boys, or book them under the Vagabondary Act which is a bailable offence. And usually on the Islamic festival of Eid all such boys are released from jail. A receptionist at a hotel clarifies this: *“The police start arresting the boys around Eid because everyone knows that they will then be released on Eid.”*

When the researchers asked a policeman what they do with the boys once they arrest them his response was *“Depends on his owner. If he has no backing then we send him to the jail.”*

Some policemen claim that they are now tired of arresting these boys, as the owners get them released almost immediately. They cite this as a reason for taking bribes. As a constable told us *“Few days back I arrested two boys. Their Maaliks said to me: ‘what can you do to them? If you don’t let them go from here, we will get them released from there (courts)’. Therefore we negotiate with them over here. Better they pay us than pay them.”*

The policemen on the other hand insist that if prostitution is to be checked then it is the Maaliks who need to be arrested. *“The SHO should challaan (fine) the Maaliks. When they will be challaaned then the boys will leave.”*⁴⁴ However, they also feel that the boys too need to be arrested so that they learn the hard way. *“Only if they are arrested*

⁴⁴ Interview with Policeman.

*for three or four months will they learn a lesson and their families will find out as well.”*⁴⁵

The police are a large part of the clientele for the prostitution trade in PV. The boys, pimps and hotel/inn owners verify this. The boys report being beaten and sodomized by the police whenever they are taken to the station, and even some of the policemen do admit that “*most police [men] like the boys and they do it with them...*”⁴⁶

A MCSW says, “*the police has a room where they ask the boy to take off his clothes. After taking his clothes off the policeman asks him to lie down on the floor with his face to the ground for the sexual act. The boy cries but the people outside the room think that the boy is being interrogated.*”

The police are not required to pay for sex with the boys as in exchange they ‘*protect*’ the trade. However the policemen interviewed by us denied knowledge of the names or addresses of boys in the trade.

The police offer some justifications too. In the words of a police official, “*We are on duty 24 hours and cannot afford to live far from the police station. There is no facility provided in the police station. Even toilets are in a very bad shape. So we are forced to live in the neighbouring hotels and inns. Some of us have also rented rooms in the neighbouring colonies...if any police official stays at any hotel he becomes a friend of the management and then how can he take any action against them...police officials are also human beings and a part of the society. You cannot expect a high standard of morality from them when every sphere of societal life is corrupt and dishonest. How can a policeman fulfill his family’s needs in the pay given by the government?*” It was later verified, through researchers interviews with other policemen, that in fact a hotel has been allocated to the police station as the police’s official residence but the place has very few rooms and is overcrowded.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

A boy himself perhaps best describes the relationship between the MCSWs and the police: *“Police staff cannot live without the boys and the boys cannot live without the police.”*

The Community and the Boys

The community (other residents of PV) treats the boys as outcasts and the two groups prefer not to get in each others way. Most people in the area see this as ***'bad work'*** but are fatalistic about it and see it as a sort of necessary evil, a view that usually follows any discussion on prostitution. The myths and fallacies surrounding male prostitution and sex between men should act as a deterrent but it does not seem to do so. Almost all these myths are founded on religious beliefs; the most popular one refers to male prostitution as that of the followers of the prophet ***'Lut'*** who ruled over Sodom and Gomorrah (references in the Old Testament as well). ***"It is haraam and God has destroyed a whole nation because of it."***⁴⁷



Given the strong hold of the mafia and the involvement of the police in the trade, the community perceives itself to be helpless in bringing about any positive change for themselves or the children involved. ***"If***

we raise our voice we will be trapped in false cases or some other blame will be put on us".⁴⁸ One man in the area spoke extensively of his efforts to stop this activity. However he said that as a result he had been taken twice, by the police, to the police station and beaten severely. ***"I have been to the police station twice. Do you think I would want to go a third time...the people have been terrified mentally. Now no one dares to speak against this."***⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Focus Group Discussion with Members of the Community.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Some people interviewed felt that male child prostitution is more tolerable than female prostitution, as the latter brings more ‘*shame*’ to a community. A typically patriarchal response, where honour and modesty is centered on the purity of women. ***“One can ignore male child involvement in sex because one day the boy will fail to get customers. It is difficult to tolerate female prostitution in one’s neighbourhood.”***⁵⁰

The assumption, that when these children grow up there will no longer be a demand for them, stems from the beauty concepts that exist around male child prostitution (young, hairless boys). However they overlook the fact that new boys are continuously being inducted into prostitution, leaving little chance for the trade to die a natural death.

Like the clients, the pimps, the hotel owners and the boys, the ever prevalent feeling of ‘*sin*’ related to this trade, permeates the consciousness of the community as well and there are numerous myths that exist as a result of it. The people feel that because of the presence of male prostitution in the area ***“the wrath of God has fallen on the people of Pir Vadai and this is why the local economy is in depression.”***⁵¹ Other members of the community say ***“it is because of the presence of homosexuality in this area that whenever there is a storm in the region it begins from Pir Vadai.”***

There is a lot of confusion in the community about who they should blame for the existence of male prostitution in the area. Some choose to blame the boys ***“It is these boys...they are bastards”***. Others say ***“these hotel owners approach boys who have run away from home...they present such a beautiful picture to the child that his mind stops working and he loses all sense of good and bad. He cannot think that it is against Islam and also social norms. You see in a normal situation how can a man bear to let another man have sex with him.”***⁵² And some, like the local Qari⁵³ go so far as to think that it was actually eunuchs in the area who began this activity and because it went

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Focus Group Discussion with Political Activists.

⁵³ Man who Recites the Quran.

unchecked, it spread. Another member of the community takes this thought further *“when men saw that these eunuchs, who are neither complete men nor women, make so much money through prostitution, they thought that they can earn more than them since they are complete people.”*⁵⁴ Still others believe that it is in fact the *“vulgar films”* that are played in the area that promote this activity. According to the Qari, it really doesn’t matter who is guilty, what is important is *“...to terrorise these children so that other children don’t come here.”* He feels that a good beating to the boys would do the trick. According to him and others, the best punishment the MCSWs ever received was when a few years ago the SHO (since transferred out of PV) had put black shoe polish on the faces of MCSWs and paraded them around PV.

While the boys are seen as demonic and social vermin, strangely there is much tolerance for the other key players in the trade. The police are seen as incurably corrupt and therefore not worthy of focus. The hotel owners are also seen as victims and the explanation given is: *“The operational costs (staff salaries, water, electricity, maintenance, overheads etc) and rent of the building cannot be met alone by running the hotels and inns just for normal purposes.”*⁵⁵

Numerous sexual myths abound in the community regarding masturbation, STDs and homosexuality. One particularly dangerous myth heard repeatedly from members of the community is alarming because of the kind of violence that it threatens to generate against the boys. Most of the community believe: *“These boys have become habitual because due to excessive anal intercourse a worm takes birth in the anus of such boys. This worm eats male semen and when the supply is halted, it strikes on the inner walls of the anus and the boy craves sex. It is difficult to get rid of such a worm and normally it resides for a long time in the host. There is a cure though. If you take a hollow bone and insert it in the anus of a child, the worm will think that it is a penis and rush towards it. It will then get stuck in the bone and you can pull it out.”*⁵⁶ When

⁵⁴ Focus Group Discussion with Community Members.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Researchers Field Notes.

we questioned this particular respondent on the source of his information, he claimed that he had read about it in a research conducted in Germany!

Impact of Prostitution on the Psyche of the Boys

Prostitution of children is organized, structured CSA. In PV it is the life of the children. They breathe, sleep, dream and think only within the festering four walls of a criminal, mafia den called PV. And their role, activities and lifestyle have become their identity.

Heterosexual dominance of cultures everywhere is most evident through the derogatory terminology that homosexual sex takes on in every language of the world. In South Asian cultures too this terminology often attacks the core confidence and identity of a person. Notably the homosexual act further derogates the participant in terms of the one who penetrates and the one who is penetrated.

The term “***gaandoo***” (used by everyone in PV to refer to the MCSWs, including the boys themselves) in Urdu generally refers derogatorily to the one who is penetrated. The implicit message is that he is like a woman, therefore an inferior man and can be pushed around and used by any man. This sexual persona then affects his entire concept of masculinity and machismo, rendering him incapable of self-confidence and “***manly***” acts. As passive partners, boys being penetrated and the invectives used for them, has robbed these children of all positive self-perception, even that of being a ‘***man***’.

As stated in above sections, a male child sex worker is not happy with what he does but takes a fatalistic attitude because he knows that there is no way out. Once he has been branded a ‘***gaandoo***’ there is no escaping the epithet. Boys resist being called these names and even ask their friends and clients not to use them; “***it makes me feel bad....I am not really like that....sometimes I fight, sometimes I don’t, I can’t say anything***” said one MCSW. Their sense of self has been so weakened by a lifestyle that they know is not ‘***respectable***’: “ ***It’s not respectable work is it...if it was respectable work why would you be interviewing me right now?***” said one boy who was clearly uncomfortable in giving his situation words and meaning.

Violent sexual experiences have also coloured their idea of sexuality. These children have been sexualised to believe that sex is aggressive, violent and often painful. Adult males use sex to assert power and aggression and *'penetration'* is the only *'real'* masculine sexual expression. Tariq, for example, a MCSW, is not a stranger to anal intercourse with force or otherwise; as a young boy he used to visit other MCSWs, and had participated in gang rapes of the sons of his family's enemies. His past sexual experiences display a great deal of violence. At present he still visits male sex workers, almost as if his own pain and shame are deflected and re-directed onto other boys in similar conditions.

Most boys, who have been in the trade for a number of years, admit that they hate the sex but have simply learned to get used to it. The only thing they seem to think about during the sex is how much longer they'd have to wait before it ended. Their pent up fear and anger is often dissipated by a subsequent visit to a prostitute, either male or female, whoever is available. The purpose of such a visit is apparent from the following extract taken from an interview with a MCSW:

Researcher: *"So what do you think, when you pay and do it to these boys and girls, do they enjoy it?"*

MCSW: *"Yes"*

Researcher: *"They do?"*

MCSW: *"Of course they do, I give them money for it"*

Researcher: *"But when you do it for money, you don't enjoy it right? Then why would they?"*

MCSW: *(sullen) "How do I know how they feel?"*

Researcher: “*Who enjoys it, the one who is doing it or the one to whom it is being done?*”

MCSW: “*The one who is doing it.*”

Researcher: “*So these girls you did it to...did they enjoy it?*”

MCSW: “*No. I was the one who enjoyed it, not them.*”

The boys do not identify with a homosexual choice because they are scared of being labeled and discriminated against. When asked about sexual preferences for men and women, one boy replies “*each one gives a different kind of pleasure...I might be considered ‘queer’ if I said otherwise.*” Some boys admit that it feels “*right and good*”⁵⁷ to have sex with a girl, but if one is not available they seek out a male partner. Being labeled ‘*homosexual*’ within this culture would prove to be a man’s undoing; this work does not give them any opportunities and it robs them of honour, so an additional slur would be too much to bear. Sexual boundaries are therefore conspicuously absent. Orientation is a blurred issue, which seems to rule some disassociated sense of morality and ‘*normalcy*’ but the sexual reality at PV is a complex mass of need, power and necessity.

According to longitudinal studies from America, most boys in prostitution are confused about their sexuality. “*They have been introduced to a culture that robs them of a chance to develop their own sense of (sexual) identity. Therefore convenient demarcations of ‘homosexuality’, ‘heterosexuality’, and ‘bisexuality’ on the basis of sexual activity are not applicable in this context.*” (Gonsiorek, Berr, and LeTourneau, 1994). It appears, that in this context, the boys’ sexuality has to be understood in terms of CSA, rather than choice. PV is therefore a clear statement on how CSA sexualises a child and creates a pattern for his/her sexual behaviour, choices and desires.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

The pleasure and pain association takes on an interesting form. Sexual aggression becomes a learnt pattern and the boys themselves become part of the cycle of abuse, using their anger and frustration as an impetus to repeat similar acts on other girls and boys with impunity. There is also a sense of power that they experience when they buy sex from others, clearly identifying with their clients as those who are in control.

The boys realize that they can never return home to their families and most have had to lie to parents about the source of their income. In addition PV is a source of shame and guilt because it violates the religious and cultural code under which they have been raised. Paradoxically PV is also the only haven, as ghettos tend to become. This could also suggest why the boys don't leave. Like a victim of domestic violence, the shame and ignominy of leaving is often far greater than the cost of staying. Helplessness and fatalism rule their psyche and their plans for the future seem extremely bleak. Those that have made plans to move on and out of PV display overtones of insecurity and doubt.

The interplay of religion and sexuality as an integral part of male socialisation has created a number of contradictions for boys in this system; whereas religion draws very clear boundaries on sexual behaviour and relationships, a system such as this one involves boys and men who have had an Islamic upbringing. Somewhere in their lives, these boys have had to address the dissonance that comes from flouting social/cultural norms and the easiest way is to suppress and deflect emotions. As men they also have very little space to articulate these conflicting realities, so their perceptions of the trade are moulded by these paradoxical situations.

The life, of a victim of CSA, takes on a wholly new path. And when the CSA becomes protracted and organized, with a host of adults participating, we have begun to craft a young mind to believe the worst possible scenario about life, trust, violence, body, intimacy, love, protection and truth. This must be understood as the ultimate and most horrific outcome of child prostitution. This child is no longer like other children and can never be seen again as innocent, receptive, trusting or containing any joy. Childhood, constructs our basic parameters. Love, joy, trust, respect, values, morality, ethics and a

robust attitude to loving and living have all been handed to us by the kind of parenting, role models and childhood experiences we had. This is what we are giving the children of PV:

- *The body is something which can be used to earn money even though the act may feel painful, violative, dirty and unpleasant.*
- *Anal penetration, oral sex, ejaculation, using sex as a means to rid oneself of frustration and anger is coded into their mind, body and spirit as sexuality.*
- *Sex means anger and power, which is why the powerful 'penetrate' and the weak get 'penetrated'. The male penis is an important tool of power. This rule will now rule them repeatedly throughout their lives, whenever they need to assert power or anger.*
- *Sexuality is something ruled by lewd and vulgar language, signs and symbols and has little to do with beauty, joy, love and dignity.*
- *Children are not sexually protected because adults seek them for pleasure, so using other children to satisfy their anger and power needs is acceptable. Perhaps it will help them ease the anger of their own abuse to do the 'same to another child.' Meanwhile psychologists will wonder why they are pedophiles!*
- *Adults are not guardians, protectors or people to be trusted by children and do not follow any laws that they themselves expound. The only protection from adults is to be self-sufficient and invulnerable as quickly as possible.*
- *Religion and morality is just a myth since adults seems to have no problems breaking all the tenets and still living quite comfortably with themselves.*
- *Homosexuality is neither about choice or pleasure but convenience. A man can have a wife and use little boys because they are weak. Women must be chaste and pure but a man is 'insatiable' and can even pay for 'penetration' when and where he desires. The sanctity of marriage is not about sexual integrity because a man has more sexual 'needs' and therefore 'rights'.*
- *Society only degrades, uses and exploits the weak therefore I must find others who are weaker than me to violate. That will give me power. It is the only way to feel strong in this world.*

- *Since no one cares that I am a child and loves or protects me for being vulnerable why should I care about my body, being or health. Even if I die who cares?*

PV is in effect a giant school of learning where these young hearts and minds are being taught every one of the above lessons with care and repetition. There is not even one agency, individual or situation which gives them any different messages, hopes, dreams or self-perception. For the boys who survive to be adults and do not die of AIDS or other diseases, imagine what kind of adults they will be. Hate, violence, sexual aggression and crime will rule their lives. Can any of us doubt that?

Substance Abuse, STDs & AIDS

Most MCSWs indulge in substance abuse. Alcohol, snuff and charas (a form of marijuana) are easily available and routinely used. Those who have access to heroin smoke it occasionally. These drugs are not difficult to come by and pimps/clients/Maaliks often provide it to the boys. The boys also spend a substantial part of their earnings on these drugs. The use of drugs is tacitly encouraged and the boys were comfortable talking about it. During interviews the boys were usually inebriated or in a disoriented state from continual marijuana use. The boys say that the use of drugs such as marijuana deadens the senses and numbs the pain of such violent anal intercourse and the accompanying feelings of depression. As a boy says, “*one is not sad anymore, one becomes happy.*” They see marijuana, alcohol and heroin as their only escape routes from a world of shame and pain. “*If one doesn’t have it, it hurts – you lose your head.*”⁵⁸

Their knowledge of health problems such as STDs and AIDS is scant and half-baked; gonorrhea and boils and pustules on the genitalia afflict most boys. Attacks of gonorrhea and other STDs are common and the boys have to consult doctors for treatment. “*It (semen) comes out three to four times in a day. I don’t understand...It comes with the urine.*”⁵⁹ The majority of boys are aware of AIDS as a disease that they are particularly vulnerable to.

Researcher: “*Do you know about AIDS?*”

MCSW: “*It’s a fatal disease.*”

Researcher: “*How can you save yourself from AIDS?*”

MCSW: “*If you stop doing bad work.*”

⁵⁸ Interview with MCSW.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

They see AIDS as an STD for which a cure is not available. However, in their minds, AIDS is a result of '*sinning*'. This is true for all the boys who strongly feel that if they were not doing something '*bad*' they would never get sexual diseases. As another boy says "*the boy who is dirty gets it (sexual diseases)*." Furthermore, the symptoms of AIDS are vaguely reported as "*blood in the urine*" and "*a disease that [eats] you up from the inside.*"⁶⁰

Most of the boys know of condoms, either as a contraceptive or as something you use with women so as to prevent disease. Others know that condoms exist and that they are worn with girls but don't know why that is so.

Researcher: "*Has a customer ever used one (condom)?*"

MCSW: "*No. One uses them with girls.*"

Researcher: "*Why do they use them with girls?*"

MCSW: "*Who knows.*"

The link between AIDS or STDs prevention and condom use has not been made because they are unaware of the ways in which these diseases are transmitted. Condoms are never used during sex with clients; most boys believe that clients will not agree to condom use and that they will not be able to enforce it. "*I would ask a client to use a condom but they will say 'no'.*"⁶¹ Discussions with some boys, in the presence of their pimp, reveal that he (the pimp) does not give them enough information about STDs, AIDS and condom use. Some clients however apparently do tell the boys about diseases. "*There are some customers who tell me about these diseases before and after having intercourse.*"⁶² When the researchers asked the pimp whether he would talk to clients

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

about using condoms his response was ***“I say this whole work is bad but I can tell these boys that ‘you bastards, tell your clients to use condoms’.”***

Amongst the boys interviewed by the researchers, there was one who had full blown AIDS. His skin was covered with lesions and he had open sores on his entire body. On inquiring about his condition, we discovered that he was completely unaware of the disease he had. Clients were still accessing him for sex. Since he was visibly diseased his rate had been slashed considerably as incentive for the clients.

The PV area plays host to a number of small clinics, quacks and hakims (those who practices indigenous medicine). Most clinics are poorly maintained and are not hygienic and sanitary either in appearance or practice. Researchers record, ***“ within half an hour about 15 patients came in and almost all of them were treated in the same manner. They were given the same tablets and all were injected with the same medicine, using the same syringe.”*** Many self-professed doctors operating these clinics are primarily interested in making money, not treating patients. The people of the area are poor and cannot afford (or understand) complicated medical procedures, so quacks and doctors make them buy a number of drugs that might provide short-term relief but allow the problem to fester. ***“I have gone six times to the doctor for my disease (gonorrhea) but nothing has happened”.***⁶³

Patients report that doctors administer the simple ***‘green-yellow-red’*** formula, meaning that medicines and injections of these colours are given for all ailments. In effect patients have no idea either about the nature of their illness or the prescribed medication.

The doctors were hesitant to discuss the issue of child prostitution in this area and put it down to ***“bad activities”*** that ***“bad people”*** indulge in. Their response being, ***“obviously any person who is a vagabond...will indulge in sexual activities.”*** There is little interest or empathy for the MCSWs as well as discomfort with treating STDs. As one doctor put it ***“I don’t like people who have these problems and try to keep away from them.”*** They

⁶³ Interview with Pimp.

deny that a number of children come with sexually transmitted diseases, but report that they have treated adults with gonorrhea. However as a doctor said ***“We have never stressed upon the patient to tell us the truth or the full details when they come to us for STDs.”***

According to UNAIDS, over 5 million people in South Asia are living with HIV/AIDS. High-risk behaviors and infection rates are growing across the region and South Asian countries run the risk of experiencing the devastating social and economic impacts of the kind of full-blown AIDS epidemics seen elsewhere in the world. Pakistan is currently estimated to have a small percentage of the South Asian HIV/AIDS population, approximately 80,000 infected people. However within its HIV/AIDS population- and as substantiated by the situation in PV- prevalence has already been found to be higher among vulnerable groups, such as commercial sex workers and the men who visit them, thereby increasing the threat of a rapid spread of the disease. Given that the boys and their clients have insufficient access to information about HIV and STDs, that the boys lack the power to negotiate safe sex or seek treatment for STDs, facilitates the spread of HIV infection. Along with the damage to innocent children and the systematic degradation of their lives an indifferent State is directly responsible for the AIDS epidemic which is festering in dark holes such as PV.

Conclusion

Pir Vadai in essence became Sahil's pilgrimage. For, it contained all the toil and strife that is meant to pave the way of great faith. Whatever we managed to see, learn and record was possible only because of a tremendous faith that no adversity, however daunting, would stop us from accessing this tragic truth. Even though what we managed to cup in our hands, were just the whispers of a few brave voices, they were strong and clear enough to resonate, the echo of the thousands of tiny hearts who sink everyday in the mire of Pakistan's many Pir Vadais.

A pilgrimage, where in fact we looked right into the eye of how religions, theocracies and modern day man with his sprawling, intricate structures of governance manages to trample upon the innocence and helplessness of the most divine part of his world- the child. It was an act of absolution because it freed us of every illusion of morality, responsibility, accountability and purity that a religious State stands to expound. And it left us with only one clear question-every time a child is sodomised in the Pir Vadais of Pakistan, who is shamed?

The answers are so obvious and demeaning, that it should redefine all that we know to be good, pure and civilized. When the police itself is involved in violating children and ensuring protection to the trade, when the communities these boys live in are either indifferent or hostile towards them, when hotel owners and pimps run a structured mafia which thrives under the protection of the State and when the children themselves are so mistrusting and fearful, then where should an NGO really begin?

For Sahil, it was as if all its years of work on bringing child sexual abuse in Pakistan out of the dark corners of secrecy and silence, suddenly became a mockery. We, who started out to systematically inform, sensitise and tell the story of the possibility and prevalence of CSA were slapped on the face by the organized and structured reality of Pir Vadai. No! For many there is nothing wrong in prostituting little boys for sex, it is not even seen

as violence or abuse, at best when asked it was seen as the need of a '*demonic child*' who preyed on the vulnerability of adults and at worst there seems to be no variance either with practicing Islam or the strictures of the religion. When the police of area, the mullahs of the local masjid, the shop keepers, bus drivers and the numerous passengers who travel far and wide from the reality of Pir Vadai can weave this into an acceptable reality, who is Sahil trying to inform that CSA, is a crime, a violation and brutalisation of a child's rights? Are we just part of a giant game of untruths and denial? For what relevance can there be in seeking redressal in individual cases of CSA, protecting the girl child from being attacked or informing schools and parents of the vulnerability of their child? If a Pir Vadai exists with impunity then the rot is far deeper than we think. The questions that need to be asked are different and the truth far more frightening than we think.

At the outset of this research we did not fully understand the implications of going into a criminally programmed area to research an issue like prostitution- run and controlled by a mafia and protected by the police. No matter how much time and energy we spent planning for the research, it was like waking up every morning and going out to stand amidst a storm. There was no protection, no certainty and no control. From the key players to the police, we just did not know what could set off a reaction and how that reaction would manifest itself. Having to think and plan one step ahead of what may arise as a consequence of any move that we made in the field was not only exhausting, but also a constant source of stress and anxiety for Sahil.

Coupled with this, the emotional response that is a natural outcome of researching emotionally charged issues such as child prostitution, led to further exhaustion and frustration for the research team. Seeing the violence that the children lived with, the hopelessness in their eyes, hearing endless stories of the callous and brutal behaviour of clients, police and the community towards them, the diseases that ate at them, the self-hatred and the self blame. And in all of this, our own inability to provide these children with any hope, protection, or alternative, created an immense emotional burden on the organisation.

In countries like Pakistan, where issues of sex and sexuality are repressed, there is often an unhealthy curiosity that exists in people. We had to create systems and mechanisms with which to monitor the various responses that we observed in the researchers. Understandably, responses emanating from their own unresolved sexualities and often the resulting voyeurism regarding the lives of these boys. The team therefore came with its own share of complexities, which added to the emotional toll of the study. Resultantly, we saw a high turnover of researchers, which would set us back by several months, as new researchers would have to be hired, trained and oriented to PV before they could be sent into the field.

As overwhelming as the trials and tribulations of this research were, Sahil trudged on. At the end of the day a sample size of fifteen boys is far too small to make any generalizations, but given the difficulties that we had to face, for us the sample is nothing less than a miracle. The importance of this research lies in the fact that today we have small cameos of the lives of children who live these horrific lives. For those who will find this sample size insufficient, we hope this study will inspire them to research these issues in depth and bring more children and clients etc. into the fold of their study. If anything, this research is an attempt to emphasize the importance of conducting more detailed studies into the lives of children living in prostitution in Pakistan.

Before we can move any further with opinion, judgement or solutions, we must ask ourselves a fundamental question. ***Do we have the courage to address sexuality in Pakistan?*** As a modern society why do we have to first seek the sanction of religion and morality, for in Pakistan all efforts for modern debate are forever hung on these two pegs. We cannot debate sexual issues openly because we are an Islamic society and our ***‘pure’*** Muslim souls will be tainted forever if we mention the word sex in public. Without the debate there can be no mention of sexual practices, preferences, prostitution, abuse of little children or the traumas and consequences of CSA. While the world is engaged in wrestling a horrendous epidemic like HIV/AIDS we expect that it will quietly pass over our ***‘pure’*** nation. And the thousands of little children, being spawned literally as hosts

for this dreaded disease in the Pir Vadais of Pakistan, wait to add the final tragedy of AIDS to an already horrific existence.

Who is responsible for this gigantic travesty of truth? Is it a theocratic State, an insensitive government, or the apathy of all of us who allow the child in our times to be ravaged and cast away to rot in such utter violence and degradation? Child prostitution exists the world over, cyber space becoming the latest scandal to shock the world on the prevalence of this systematised abuse.

There is already a grave crisis. And a crisis needs strong, resolute action. We cannot wait and wonder, prevaricate and soft-pedal the issue anymore. And the issue is, that Islamic or not, Pakistan's society suffers from grave social sicknesses like any other society in the world. Religious texts berating sodomy or ruling on sexual behaviours do not expunge man's constant proclivity for depravity. Human behaviour must be analysed specifically in every time, era and social context for all its prevalent imbalances. These behaviours must be seen and addressed at their root as well as symptomatic levels, if we are to move a people towards well-being, health and equality. Using veils, whether they are of religious dogmas, spiritual texts or mullahs preaching, only manage to hide the truth. And in the dark, dank spaces of the lies they protect, the worst kind of pain, anguish and evil thrive.

PV is one such dank, dark truth. It is both a root and a symptom of a society which is using outmoded edicts to address modern day crises. Children trapped in the well of sexual abuse by callous and violent adults, are further pushed into the hell of religious damnation. Every child in our research was filled with the guilt of being eternally damned for a sin that the Quran says is inexcusable. This moral incarceration has broken their spirit irrevocably in addition to a body already shattered in its young life. Where and how will they find the will to escape this terror?

Is morality's role only to weaken and trample upon a spirit, which has not yet even learnt how to fly? When a spiritual mode cannot protect its young, what right does it have to damn them?

These are the crucial questions unanswered by this report and have fallen into the legacy of Sahil's endeavour. It is ironic that this report is being published after such a long interval because we were constantly warned against the backlash for the children, the threat to Sahil's existence and the general outrage if published in Pakistan.

We have decided to take this risk after waiting for a safe interval for the children. No one in PV will remember now, which children were interviewed. As for the rest of the threats, it is a risk Sahil must take. Sahil owes at least this much to the children who looked at us with even the slightest glimmer of hope and faith.

Healing the Child

Since all of us - whether we belong to institutions such as the State, or NGOs etc.- have been raised on notions of morality, which are similar to the ones we found in Pir Vadai. We must acknowledge the influence that they have had on our own responses to, and understanding of, issues related to childhood, sexuality, sin and virtue etc. Only after challenging these notions within ourselves, will we be able to develop the right kind of strategy for these children. One that can address reality shorn of moral judgements. Without this we cannot hope to provide any healing opportunities to the children.

The first hurdle to be cleared is accessing the children. Clearly a feat that cannot be accomplished without the commitment and involvement of the State. Once this is done, we are then left with the larger question of what kind of intervention is required for these children.

Any intervention can only be successful if the personality of the male child sex worker is taken into consideration in its entirety, with all of its paradoxes. Whereas childhood

claims innocence, this innocence is fragile and easily tainted. Children learn what they live. They are neither born demonic, nor deviant. They are simply born with an innocence that allows adults to mould them into whatever they feel fit. For those who fail to understand this simple truth, it will be all too easy to fall into patterns of blaming the child and seek simplistic interventions such as forcing them into remand homes, jailing them etc.

Like most victims of CSA, the children of PV have learnt mistrust. Their experience tells them, that all adults want from them is sex. That, they are not worthy of any love, compassion, or gentleness. Made to feel '*sinful*', they believe that they are responsible for the crimes that are committed against them. They clearly hate the trade for the violence, shame and guilt that it imposes on them, but are also dependant on it for a sense of worth, for they have been made to believe that their value lies in little else. The result is a sexualized, depressed, emotionally numb, aggressive, fatalistic and mistrusting child plagued by disease and low self-esteem. All the adult world seems to have gifted them is distorted notions of sexuality, power, religion and masculinity. Yet despite all these selves they carry, born of the violence and the shame that they are forced to live, they are children; confused, lost and battered. And that innocence never fails to shine through in interactions with the MCSWs.

Interventions for these children that will aim to be symptomatic in their approach, without addressing root issues, will undoubtedly fail. There are no quick fixes. The children of PV cannot be forcibly extricated from the trade, as this is not a viable long-term solution. It will neither put an end to the trade nor will such action help the boys transform or heal their sense of self. On the other hand jailing the boys or punishing them is simply an outrage because we will criminalise a child for what is clearly someone else's crime. A message no different from the one given to him by the pimp, the client or the community he lives in.

For any intervention to have a meaningful impact on the lives of these children we must first focus on fulfilling their immediate needs, not as we perceive them but as they

articulate them. This will perhaps, begin the essential process of establishing trust with the children. For if our goal is to bring about change in their behaviour, an atmosphere of love, trust and understanding will be crucial. Behaviour never changes if it involves force, or morality, religion, guilt or shame. If these factors could change people's actions then PV would never exist.

Winning the trust of these children is no simple feat, given that all relationships are perceived by them to be violative and in the pursuit of sex. The children will have to be slowly lifted out of shame, guilt and depression. Their notions of power, masculinity, sexuality, morality etc. will have to be transformed if we want to save them from the cycle of violence. Otherwise all these children will grow up as abusers, possibly pimps for other children and spread the hate, anger and violation that was their legacy from life.

Health needs to be addressed as a priority. However, a healthy body is the natural outcome of a healthy mind. Without a comprehensive healing package, that addresses the mind, body and spirit of these children, no positive changes can be brought about in attitude or behaviour. They need to be infused with hope that will help them create an alternative vision for themselves. And all of this requires great patience, compassion, creativity and understanding.

The children need for someone to reach out with love. An emotion they have never known and now feel totally unworthy of. Relationships have to be taught anew. New role models have to be created. Adults need to appear as caring, protecting, supporting and who can offer the healing touch of unconditional love. To unlearn and forget the horror of their lives, they must *experience life as loving, beautiful, joyous and resting on dreams and hope. Then and only then can we even hope to slowly replace the seamy, darkness of what they live today: a curse called Pir Vadai.*