



Myths & Facts about Child Sexual Abuse

- **"Only girls are vulnerable to abuse"**

Fact: Statistics show otherwise. The 2007 survey by the Ministry of Women and Child Welfare, GOI, reported that 53.22% of the children in the study had been sexually abused. Of this, the number of boys abused was more than half (52.94%).

- **"The abuser is usually a stranger"**

Fact: Sexual Abuse is most often committed by someone the child knows, and who the family trusts. Intra-familial abuse is more common than abuse by a stranger or an outsider.

- **"People who abuse look sleazy or like criminals"**

Fact: People who sexually abuse children do not appear any different to any of us. They live dual lives and hide behind such crimes because they look and act like everyone else.

They may be relatives, family friends, neighbours, coaches, teachers, house help, drivers or an older friend and in fact, can be anyone, irrespective of their roles or profession

You can better protect the child from sexual abuse by observing how the child behaves and responds to certain people/adults, rather than by what the offender looks like.

- **"Only men abuse"**

Fact: Women can be abusers too, although less commonly than men. Perpetrators of abuse can also be children themselves.

- **"This only happens in Western countries, or slums/low-income families"**

Fact: Reports suggest that there has been an **11% rise** in crimes against children in 2015-2016.

Only a small percentage of abuse cases get reported. Statistics suggest about 55 children are raped everyday in India. West Bengal is one of the top five states for child abuse. Family sexual abuse crosses all classes of society. There is no race, social or economic class that is immune to intra-familial sexual abuse.

- **Most children who have been sexually abused will tell someone.**

Fact: According to a study by Dr. David Finkelhor, an International expert on Child Abuse, about 2/3 of all child victims may not tell anyone because they fear they will be blamed, punished or not believed. Power dynamics and 'grooming' by the perpetrator plays a large role in maintaining the silence around abuse. Do remember that sometimes there may be no signs of abuse.

- **"The child could be lying." OR "S/he asked for it. S/he likes attracting attention"**

Fact: It is very, very rare that children lie about abuse. If they do, on most occasions, adults are involved in creating the false allegations. Child Protective Service (CPS) records in the USA estimated the extent of false reporting. They found intentionally false reports comprised **less than 1%** of all unsubstantiated reports of child abuse.

We need to remember: that the **first time** a child talks about his /her abuse could be the **only time**. Research suggests appropriate and sensitive handling of disclosures is crucial in improving treatment outcomes.

This document has been created by Mental Health Foundation, Kolkata for RACSHA