

# Awaaz

Quarterly Newsletter of Tulir - Centre for the Prevention & Healing of Child Sexual Abuse

Volume 1, Jan-Mar, 2005



*Tulir, in Tamil - the first leaves of a plant; leaves following a period of adversity, symbolising children, and the belief in the resilience and resurgence of life.*

The **Tsunami** of Dec '04, besides causing large-scale damage to property and livelihoods, traumatised the lives of thousands of people as well. It was heartening to see help and support pouring in from all corners of the world. With immediate relief activities already in place, the need was to provide psycho-social support to re-establish normalcy among those affected by the calamity, especially children. Drawing from experience of working with children in distress, and from some international documents based on experiential learnings from such disasters (thanks to ISPCAN listserv!!), we prepared a 5-session module for working with children in Tsunami affected areas. Joining us in this effort was **Satyam Foundation (Social Responsibility unit of Satyam Computers)** and its volunteers whom we oriented. We worked with children of Sulerikadu village to help reaffirm their feelings and provide safe space to express and address their anxieties, through folk tales, role plays, art, group activities and drama. The program was a fulfilling and learning experience, and we hope it was helpful and enjoyed by the children as well.



Often the only sound a child being sexually abused makes is silence. Silence for a whole host of reasons. Because of the manipulation, ignorance, fear, shame, guilt. ....

And while it is the moral obligation for adults and the larger community to ensure children are protected, we also remain silent. Again. But this time more often that not for plain selfish reasons.

The discomfort caused if acknowledged and then addressed, the denial that our children – yours and mine can be sexually abused, family reputation at stake, sheer naiveté. ....

A silenced vulnerable child and a silent non-protective environment. Silence working to the abusers' advantage. And unlike other criminals, child sex abusers (with the exception of organized pedophiles) also remain silent. No bragging and no swaggering. Because most times they need to. Considering secrecy and trickery are the hallmarks of their criminality. Considering most times their victims are nephews, nieces, children of friends, students, daughters and sons, grandchildren, wards...

"Awaaz" (voice in Urdu) is just one more platform of Tulir-CPHCSA's efforts to break the silence. We hope that besides being a way of linking and networking with individuals and organizations and informing of Tulir-CPHCSA's activities over the past quarter, this newsletter will help readers understand and subscribe to an integral belief of ours, that it takes a village to protect a child, and give them the impetus to initiate their own efforts in this direction.

After all society's integrity and worth is not based on whether cases of abuse exist. Instead, a society's integrity is based on the acceptance of the problem and proactive steps taken to respond in a timely and appropriate way ensuring that its children may benefit from its caring and foresight, and truly have the right to feel safe all the time.

While in India we are just beginning to acknowledge the existence of CSA, Tulir has the belief and audacity of hope that it will not be before long that the larger community realizes the prevalence with the subsequent significant impact (and accompanying physical, social and health costs) for it to be considered a serious public health concern which needs to be prevented and addressed.

As the able stewardship of our mentor-trustees, Mrs. Andal Damodaran and Ms. Geetha Ramaseshan has provided us the support and guidance to maintain an incessant drumbeat, we in turn encourage you to be a part of this journey, this gathering of voices, to help make the world a safer place for all children.

*All of us at Tulir-CPHCSA*

## National Level Social Impact Award



SP Jain Institute of Management and Research, Mumbai has instituted National Level Social Impact Awards, to be given each year to innovative voluntary sector projects. Tulir-CPHCSA was one of the three NGOs shortlisted for this year's award. At the event held in February, we presented a paper "Partnerships for Protection: Experiences of Tulir-CPHCSA" describing how the organisation has forged partnerships at various levels to combat child sexual abuse.

An excerpt:

'Partnership' is both the philosophy and the quintessence of Tulir-CPHCSA's work - Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) being an issue that does not recognize any physical or social categories, geographic boundaries, socio-economic class, caste, gender, culture, and encompassing the entire social spectrum. The duty to prevent CSA therefore does not rest with a few individuals, organizations or groups. Also, there is a moral obligation on adult society towards care and concern for all children. Thus, the organization firmly believes that a proactive response towards effectively dealing with the problem can only arise out of various sectors and groups in the society understanding each of their roles in perpetuating CSA and joining hands to form a collective front against the crime. Also, the organization believes that every citizen, group, organization and community can and must contribute their strengths and resources for the aforementioned purpose. Within this context, Tulir-CPHCSA views its role as that of a facilitator and coordinator in terms of approaching the stakeholders, exploring the skills and resources they can contribute towards the cause, bringing those resources on a common platform and finally coordinating them to develop a strengthened response towards CSA prevention.

## Web of Secrecy

Strangled and ensnared in this horrid web of shadowed secrecy,  
it sometimes seems I cannot find the strength to stay alive.  
As I spin to free myself, the complicated mesh winds tighter  
round my isolated efforts to untangle and survive.

Fitfully, I bump the slight remains of another frightened child  
whose mute cocoon is motionless, and fragile spirit broken;  
I struggle to escape the same doomed silent plight  
that descends from all the evil secrets  
hiding quiet and unspoken.

Why is it others do not see the convoluted clinging web  
when they chance upon my failing frail existence?  
Why don't they see the mask I wear to guise the pain inside,  
or feel the desperation spun from harm's  
continual persistence?

As sunlight hits the window just beyond the wicked web,  
my reflection emanates, fractured through the shattered light;  
A distorted splintered image emerging from the fleeting rays  
casts shadows on my soul and drives the secret  
deeper in the night.

Ashamed, I turn my eyes away; am I afraid that I might see myself  
and feel again that I have caused this ceaseless wicked scene?  
If they knew about the unseen secrets lurking in the dark,  
would they see me as the one who instigates,  
the one who is obscene?

Should I not be blameless, as the butterfly enticed into a lacy veil,  
whose flawless colors nevermore will waltz and play so peacefully?  
Unwitting and naive, could the carefree innocent have known  
that a cunning predator had cast the evil web deceitfully?

Can you lift your eyes and be not blinded by the captivating filigree?  
Do you hear my muffled plea for rescue  
from this spinning snare of secrecy?

Will you eradicate the clever dark tarantula who subjugates my life,  
and, extend your hand to save me from this unjust, vile indecency?

- Nancy Faulkner

Courtesy: [www.prevent-abuse-now.com](http://www.prevent-abuse-now.com)

## What is Personal Safety Education

The concept of Personal Safety Education works to allow every child the right to feel safe all the time, using a methodology that promotes the safety of self against abuse. The program is an extension of the safety rules we teach our children, that is, don't play with fire, look both sides before and while crossing the road etc. Besides empowering children to take part in their own protection, it strengthens the ability of those morally, socially and professionally responsible for the protection of children, that is, the State, parents, educators, and the larger community.

- Personal Safety is curriculum designed to protect children from abuse, specifically sexual abuse.
- Personal Safety empowers children to take part in their own protection by giving them age-appropriate information, skills, and self-esteem.
- Personal Safety teaches children that their body belongs only to them and nobody has the right to touch them in a way they don't like or understand.
- Personal Safety teaches children to understand their emotions to help keep them safe, using fear and anger in positive ways.
- Personal Safety teaches assertiveness skills, helping children to stand up for their won rights without violating the rights of others.
- Personal Safety builds the support system of each child, including the family, school, community, and friends.
- Personal Safety builds the self-esteem of each child to empower them to practice assertiveness skills for their own protection.
- Personal Safety builds empathy for one another.
- Personal Safety teaches children that only the offender is to blame for any inappropriate sexual touch.

*Tulir-CPHCSA conducts Personal Safety classes for children of all age-groups, beginning pre-school. An integral part of the programme is partnering with parents and teachers.*



Tulir-CPHCSA, in collaboration with ICCW-TN, commemorated the **World Day for Prevention of Child Abuse** on Nov 19, 2004. A poster exposition was organised at Spencer Plaza, a major shopping mall in Chennai. Students from Women's Christian College sang & mimed a story on prevention of child sexual abuse for the occasion.



**'Child Protection and Schools: Strategies and Interventions'** was the subject of the talk organised jointly by Tulir-CPHCSA and **Office of Public Affairs, U.S. Consulate General for South India**, in November 2004. Dr. Dennis Larkin, Superintendent, American International School, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (AIS-R) was the resource person for the event that received a heartening response from principals, teachers, academicians, and social workers of over 80 educational institutions and voluntary sector organizations. Speaking on the importance of the involvement of education sector in protection of children from violence and abuse, Dr. Larkin emphasized that this issue had to be dealt with at all levels of school administration. Sharing his experiences from AIS-R, Dr. Larkin discussed that every school must have a child protection policy that would establish protocols to be followed by the school staff in cases of child abuse (either happening in school premises or of behaviour indicative of abuse), and make child protection integral to all aspects and activities of the school. He also stressed that schools needed to involve parents in this process by providing them information and training regarding child abuse and the school's child protection policy. Active participation of children was essential, and children should be empowered against abuse by providing them proper information, skills and confidence, he said.

*(Photo: Dr. Larkin interacting with the audience)*

### News from Tulir-CPHCSA

A solo performance play by Lushin Dubey of Pinki Virani's book **Bitter Chocolate** was co-organised by Tulir-CPHCSA in Aug 2004 at Chennai. Interest evinced by the audience during the panel discussion that followed the play was very encouraging.

At the **1<sup>st</sup> International & 5<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference of Indian Society of Victimology** held between 18-20 Nov 2004 at Tirunelveli, Alankaar, Tulir-CPHCSA presented a paper titled **"Restoring Justice to Child Victims of Abuse: Drawing Interlinkages between the Macro and the Micro"**, analyzing links between social norms and justice-delivery processes vis-à-vis child victims and suggesting changes.

In Feb 2005, Tulir-CPHCSA was invited to conduct a **2-day workshop on "Awareness and Response to Child Sexual Abuse"** in Pune, by **Action for Rights of the Child (ARC)**. ARC has shown great interest in taking forward Personal Safety Education in Pune.

In an effort to expand its outreach to semi-urban and rural areas also, Tulir-CPHCSA conducted a **2-day training on responding to CSA** for **World Vision India** at Gudiyattam (a small town near Vellore). The participants were grassroots level workers from their child labour and microfinance projects.

**Association for Advocacy & Legal Consultations (aali)**, Lucknow, organised a national consultation on "Combating Child Sexual Abuse - Changing Realities" in Mar 2005, in which Tulir-CPHCSA participated and presented its experiences.

*Continued on page 4...*

## Case Study

Mani (not his real name), a 13-year old boy, was referred to Tulir-CPHCSA by a doctor, following an orientation session on CSA by Tulir which she had attended. According to his mother, Mani had been sexually abused by his 12-year old neighbour, who made Mani masturbate him and perform oral sex on him. The mother had noticed Mani washing his mouth out very often and masturbating openly. Besides stopping him from visiting the neighbour's house, she did not know how to address the situation. Since Mani was a differently able child, the Tulir-CPHCSA social worker requested Vidyasagar for a professional assessment, upon which he was found to have the cognitive abilities of a 8-year old. Working with Mani over five one-hour sessions spread over an equal number of weeks, the social worker introduced to him the concept of personal safety and body integrity. As part of the healing and to prevent revictimisation, the social worker used the Personal Safety Workbook\*. Mani enjoyed the sessions, and though he was initially hesitant to talk about his abusive experience, felt comfortable enough to discuss it by the last session. It was very gratifying to hear him acknowledge the experience to be abusive, that he now knew what had happened wasn't his fault. He felt confident about handling such a situation, should it ever arise in future. Through casework, his mother's anxieties were also addressed.

\*Aimed at CSA prevention, "My Personal Safety Workbook" is a resource developed by Tulir-CPHCSA for primary school children. It also has diagnostic & therapeutic value, as illustrated in Mani's case. The book is currently awaiting printing.

To raise awareness on Child Sexual Abuse, Tulir-CPHCSA looks forward to presenting at various fora . In December last year, Sangati, a volunteer-driven organisation promoting social action, invited Tulir-CPHCSA for a presentation. Feedback from a participant: *"The session was very informative and helped clarify some misconceptions that I had about child sexual abuse. The session also helped to clarify many points like the difference between child molester and a peadophile, between abuse and harrassment etc. I feel I can now talk to people with more confidence about this crime than before."*



## A "special" challenge

Research at the international level has shown that children with disabilities are 3.4 times more likely to be abused compared with non-disabled children. Other research studies have concluded that the risk of sexual abuse is doubled when a child is disabled (Child Abuse & Neglect, Feb 2005 & Mar 2004). Considering that almost 12 million children in India are disabled (differently able), it is alarming to consider the possible prevalence of sexual abuse among disabled children in India. The issue assumes greater significance considering societal denial of child sexual abuse, compounded by the fact that children, especially those with disabilities, are viewed as "asexual" and hence kept away from any information on sexuality. The myth that disabled children cannot be abused, since abusers find them sexually unattractive or feel pity for them, is also widely held.

Recognising these factors, **Vidyasagar (Formerly known as Spastics Society of India)**, requested Tulir-CPHCSA to conduct a series of workshops for its students of different age-groups and intellectual-abilities based on specially designed Personal Safety Education modules. Workshops were also conducted with parents, teachers and caregivers, to orient them on CSA, and address the special protection needs concerning these children.

## News from Tulir-CPHCSA...

Tulir-CPHCSA was invited by **Dept. of Psychology, Women's Christian College**, Chennai, to assist with and conduct a series of lectures for a one-semester course 'Child Sexual Abuse - Nature, Management & Prevention' for their postgraduate students from June-October 2004.

Continuing its work on CSA prevention through school-based **Personal Safety Education**, Tulir-CPHCSA worked with **Lady Andal Mat. Hr. Sec. School, The School KFI, Sherwood Hall, Krishnaswamy Mat. Hr. Sec. School** and **Bala Vidya Mandir** through workshops and presentations, besides facilitating orientation programmes with the teachers of various Government (Corporation) schools.

Tulir-CPHCSA periodically organizes **public training workshops on Awareness & Responding to CSA, Personal Safety Education, and Therapeutic Interventions** for professionals and community stakeholders. Held in Nov 2004 and Feb 2005, the workshops were lead by **Lois Engelbrecht** (MSW, Consultant Tulir-CPHCSA, and Founder of Centres on CSA in Phillippines, Malaysia & Vietnam).

**Cholai, a network of child rights NGOs in Tamil Nadu**, organized a workshop in Chennai in Dec 2004 for its members, with Tulir-CPHCSA social workers as resource faculty.

To create awareness on CSA among the student community, a poster exhibition was arranged at **Saarang** (cultural festival of **IIT-Madras**) in Jan 2005 by Tulir-CPHCSA.

Tulir-CPHCSA also works with organizations involved in allied issues such as public health, sexuality, child rights etc. A 2-day training programme on awareness and responding to CSA was conducted by Tulir-CPHCSA for the counselors and outreach workers **YRG Care** working on issues of HIV/AIDS in Feb 2005.

In Feb 2005, Positive Parenting Workshops approached Tulir-CPHCSA to address a group of parents on child sexual abuse, and to know what they could do as parents to protect their children. Addressing their concern and need, Tulir-CPHCSA made a presentation followed by an interactive session.

At the launch of the **Kerala chapter of Indian Academy of Paediatrics (IAP)**'s Child Friendly Schools Initiative, Tulir-CPHCSA was invited to make a presentation on Child Sexual Abuse, at Thrissur in Feb 2005.

A **UGC refresher course** was held in Mar 2005 by Social Work Dept., **Loyola College**, in association with Academic Staff College, University of Madras. Tulir-CPHCSA was invited to conduct a session on child abuse.

The participants belonged to a range of academic fields and various colleges across the country. A model outline to include Child Abuse in University Curriculum was prepared and distributed by Tulir-CPHCSA as part of the session.

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[www.childsexualabuseinindia.blogspot.com](http://www.childsexualabuseinindia.blogspot.com)



### Our Publications:

- A Parent's Practical Response to Child Sexual Abuse
- Schools and Child Sexual Abuse: Role, Responsibility, Response

In case you are interested in putting faces to the names...



The Tulir-CPHCSA team (from right to left): Lois, Nancy, Alankaar, Vidya, Vipin.

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