

# Fragments Of A Broken Soul: Child Sexual Abuse And Its Psychological Consequences In Anita Nair's Cut-Like Wound.

K. Satya Savithri<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr. N. Solomon Benny<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1\*</sup>Research Scholar, Dept. of English, Andhra University – Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India. Ph: 7989015030, E-Mail: [satyasavithrienglish@gmail.com](mailto:satyasavithrienglish@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Asst. Professor & Head, Dept. of English, Andhra University – Visakhapatnam, 9948139333, [drbenny.au@gmail.com](mailto:drbenny.au@gmail.com)

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## ARTICLE INFO ABSTRACT

A comprehensive analysis of the portrayal of child abuse in Anita Nair's novel Cut-Like Wound is presented in this research. A critical analysis is used to investigate the complex representation of abuse, which includes both psychological and physical, as well as the devastating influence that abuse has on affected individuals. The story of Nair's Cut-Like Wound skilfully weaves the harsh reality of child abuse into the fabric of a criminal thriller, bringing to light the wounds that are frequently buried and the long-term ramifications that abuse has on the psyche of children. In this research, the complex dynamics that exist between the abuser and the victimized are investigated, with a particular focus on the behavioral changes that contribute to the continuation of such violence. In terms of child abuse, the treatment of girls is prioritized, while the physical abuse of boys is overlooked. The purpose of this research is to bring to the limelight of child abuse and its consequences irrespective of gender. The present study is to elucidate the consequences of physical abuse during childhood and its worse effects on the later life of a boy named Chikka. The study highlights the power of literature in terms of creating awareness and building empathy toward the problem of abused children through the analysis that is presented here.

**Keywords:** Child abuse, Psychological trauma, Physical abuse, Behavioural Change, Abuse dynamics

## Introduction:

The most creative writer of our times, Anita Nair, brilliantly showcased her talent in the new detective fiction genre. Her earlier writings have entertained readers worldwide and have been translated into more than 30 languages. The novels "Ladies Coupe," "Mistress," and "The Better Man" by Anita Nair eloquently depict the challenges and determination of women in a male-dominated culture, emphasizing their emotional, social, and economic difficulties. (Chauhan, 2023). Her past writings entertained the readers through poems, stories, and books, but this time, she determined to write something new. The freshness in her writings has been brought to the world by readers in the form of detective fiction. She proved successful in this genre through "Cut Like Wound." Anita Nair's exemplary writing prowess is apparent in her adept utilization of evocative language, descriptive narrative, and intricately crafted characters, all of which engross readers and effectively communicate the desired message. (Parveen, 2024). Nair's female characters encounter societal challenges and experience psychological distress, disintegrating their sense of self. The experiences of these characters exemplify the broader concerns around gender inequity and the influence of cultural expectations on women's mental well-being. (Rawat, 2023). Anitha Nair delineated the most notorious killer in her initiatory crime fiction, "Cut Like Wound," which became the most-read crime fiction by fiction lovers. Her augmented narration brought very sensitive issues into the limelight. Especially child abuse and its consequences.

Child sexual abuse has been a pervasive and profoundly concerning issue across societies, with far-reaching psychological consequences for its victims. (Goodman et al., 1993) Anita Nair's novel, "Cut-Like Wound," delves into this complex and often hidden aspect of human experience, weaving a captivating narrative that sheds light on the psychological impact of abuse. (Barth et al., 2012) . Through the lens of a criminal

investigation, Nair skillfully navigates the intricate web of trauma, power dynamics, and the long-term effects of abuse. The novel's protagonist, Chikka, a young boy, serves as a poignant representation of the enduring scars that physical abuse can leave on a child's psyche. (Briere, 1988)

### **The Prevalence and Dynamics of Child Abuse in India:**

Studies conducted in India have revealed the alarming prevalence of child abuse, with a 2007 report by the Ministry of Women and Child Development indicating that over 53% of children in the country have experienced some form of sexual abuse (Subramaniyan et al., 2017) (Study on Child Abuse 2007, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, 2007). Notably, the report highlighted that boys were just as vulnerable as girls, with 52.94% of the reported cases involving male victims (Choudhry et al., 2018). These findings underscore the universal nature of this issue, transcending gender boundaries. (Study on Child Abuse 2007, Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India, 2007) (Singh et al., 2014) Additionally, the report revealed that a significant portion of abusers were known to the victims and held positions of responsibility, further exacerbating the psychological trauma experienced by the children. (Subramaniyan et al., 2017)

### **The Psychological Consequences of Child Sexual Abuse:**

The psychological impact of child sexual abuse is multi-faceted and often long-lasting. Victims may struggle with a range of emotional and behavioral issues, including depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and difficulties in forming healthy relationships. (Choudhry et al., 2018) The betrayal of trust and the vulnerability experienced during the abuse can lead to a deep sense of self-blame, guilt, and mistrust of others, which can persist well into adulthood.

In the case of Chikka, the protagonist of "Cut-Like Wound," the physical abuse he endures has a profound impact on his psychological well-being. The novel explores his struggle to make sense of the trauma and his attempts to reconcile the conflicting emotions of love and fear toward his abuser.

### **Literature Review:**

Child sexual abuse has wide-ranging effects on various aspects, including legal, social, medical, and psychological domains. Although child sexual abuse involves physical acts, its most significant impact is on the child's psychological well-being. The significant risk factors for developing psychopathology are present not only during childhood and adolescence but also extend into adulthood. The prevalence of child sexual abuse in India is significantly underestimated, reaching epidemic levels. It is still widely regarded as a taboo, generating a feeling of unease where many societies attempt to conceal, disregard, or doubt the allegations. Therefore, it is crucial in the healthcare field to have a comprehensive understanding of the indicators, the probability of disclosure during interviews, and the interplay between family dynamics, cultural factors, and the potential consequences associated with abuse. One can effectively focus on ensuring safety by profoundly comprehending the various forms of abuse and being cognisant of the subsequent steps following the revelation. (T. S. Shwetha, 2023). The World Health Organisation defines child sexual abuse (CSA) as the practice of engaging a minor in sexual activities that are beyond their developmental stage when they do not have a complete understanding of the risks involved and when such behaviors frequently go against social norms and laws. According to research, there is a significant gender gap in the victimization of Childhood Sexual Abuse (CSA), with 8 to 31% of girls and 3 to 17% of males having suffered from CSA. This study emphasizes the dangerously high prevalence rates of CSA. (Arora). The significance of raising awareness regarding the distinct challenges faced by male victims highlights the necessity to reassess and question established norms of masculinity that can impede the disclosure process. (Smith, 2024). Usha Jain and Megha Singh Tomar in *Feral Quest of a Misshaped Identity: Nair's Chikka A Fractured Soul* quoted that "As Bhuvana and Kamakshi his niche was to pursue hordes of men to find true love. Whenever he found men like Ranganathan who only wanted to abuse him, the agony buried in his heart cascaded as his forte, and he used to kill them as an act of vengeance and self-defense. That childhood fracture in the personality of Chikka purloined away that innocent soul that once existed in his mortal body and left a broken, callous murderer who would kill to escape hurt, if not loved. In a way, no moral justification of his actions could redeem his character as a nobleman." (TOMAR, 2015).

### **Research Objectives:**

**1. Investigate the psychological consequences of Chikka's abuse:** Explore the short-term and long-term psychological impacts of physical abuse on Chikka, analyzing his emotional responses, coping mechanisms, and potential development of trauma-related disorders.

**2. Examine the societal factors contributing to the abuse:** Analyze how the novel portrays societal norms, cultural beliefs, or systemic issues that contribute to the normalization or acceptance of physical abuse against boys.

**3. Evaluate the novel's effectiveness in raising awareness:** Assess how effectively "Cut-Like Wound" utilizes literary devices and narrative strategies to raise awareness

**The present study addresses the research question**

1. How does Anita Nair's "Cut-Like Wound" portray the physical abuse experienced by Chikka and its impact on his psychological and emotional development, particularly within the context of societal attitudes towards the abuse of boys?

### Analysis of "Cut-Like Wound":

The novel begins with an enormous description of a man who wants to be a woman. He is busy shaping himself as a woman. He feels he was born as a man, but the goddess chose him to be a woman entitled Bhuvana. The care he takes to look ideally like a woman is the most notable thing to be mentioned. He puts on makeup with a free hand like a pro. The selection of garments and accessories is done very carefully to look like a unique woman to society. He adorns himself, looking at his reflection in the mirror as a woman, the most wanted of his inner self. He feels immensely grateful if a man tries to flirt with him just by looking at his outer appearance and believing him to be a beautiful woman. He often sees himself in the mirror, but he feels like the first time every time. His most wanted thing is to be recognized as a beautiful lady and loved by someone. For that, Bhuvana sets up everything and prepares to step out onto the busy roads of Shivaji Nagar, Bangalore.

She walks in the busy streets of Shivaji Nagar with her elderly eunuch Akka. Akka directs Bhuvana in a way that prevents people from recognizing their identity. She is on her mission to attract males. Her Akka encourages her not to face challenges but instead that she also merits some good times. They remained close to a glass bangle merchant when she felt someone addressing her midsection. She loved it. At that point, when Akka gives her a dubious look, she professes to be typical.

*"Akka thought she knew all her secrets. However, she kept the best secret close to her heart. No one knew. No one knew how powerful it made her feel."* (Nair, Cut Like Wound, 2012)

She escapes from Akka's looks and goes to the dim back streets. She realizes that someone is following her. She remains cheerful, yet when she sees the person, she is also stunned to see the other boy. He snickers at her and cautions the man to be careful with the lady since she is not a lady but a man in the appearance of a woman. Constantly snickering at her, he calls her eunuch and offers the man to himself if he needs other sorts of joy. The man, loaded up with desire a few moments before, is now appalled to know the truth and returns to the market from the dim back streets.

A teenage boy recognizes Bhuvana under the several layers of her makeup, which makes her furious; in a rage, she kills him with a Manza-coated thread that leaves a cut-like wound around his neck. Here, the actual story begins with the suspicious murder of a male prostitute named Liaquat, who was burnt alive. However, the fire was put out due to heavy rain so that the police officers could identify the ligature around his neck and the injury to his head. This is the only clue the police officers get from the crime scene. From this point of view, the cops think it is a murder of a typical case. When Inspector Gowda enters the crime scene with SI Santhosh, He investigates in his style, unveils the facts, and finds an expensive pearl earring. Liaquat is just 19 years old. His age is like Roshan, the one and only son of Inspector Gowda. He feels empathetic about the way Liaquat is killed and burned. How could he have been able to endure the pain during and after the atrocity?

*No, no, " he whispered, trying to snap the string, and felt a million glass particles pierce his hands. Flashes of light burnt his eyelids, and hissing serpents filled his ears. He felt unable to resist anymore".* (Nair, Cut Like Wound, 2012)

Meanwhile, a series of murders get reported in a short time. All the crimes have the exact identification of Liaquat. Inspector Gowda and SI Santhosh visited every crime scene instantly to collect more pieces of evidence; however, every time, they failed to discover anything new except the injury on the head and a cut-like wound around the neck. This makes them realize that there is a serial killer on the prowl. In every crime scene, it is obvious that only a male was killed after having intercourse. The series of murders have another identical thing: all the murders happened only on Friday.

At the point when Ravi Kumar is chosen as a corporator, numerous papers carry tales about him. One writes about his days when he was Caddie Ravi's companion, Jackie Kumar. Ravi used to work in a golf club as a caddie. One day, he sees a golf ball fly across the wall and break a man's head, and he comes to know the genuine force. He conceals a ball from the club and shows it to his companion, Jackie. They begin to cooperate.

At the point when the police explore, Ravi guides them to Jackie. He never pardoned Ravi, and their fellowship ended by then. Caddie Ravi joins the governmental issues while Jackie stays the man of the roads. All prints that recounted his story were scorched, and the writer had a mishap. Inspector Gowda and SI Santhosh go to the house of the city's corporation for an official purpose and notice some unusual scenes at the corporate house. An elderly eunuch called AKKA has taken control of all the household things. They found a large painting of a beautiful woman surrounded by several hijras.

The painting attracts their attention as the beautiful woman in the picture wore the same pearl earring identical to the evidence in Liaquat's murder. The corporator is extremely rich, as exhibited by his lifestyle. They offer something to drink in silver tumblers; the cooperator's dog is seen tied with a silver chain; his lavish lifestyle makes them astonished as Santhosh says how a corporator could make this much wealth. They infer that it is the illegal activities that made him extremely rich. Apart from all these things, some of the

house's silent features allowed them to suspect. The house has two doors, one for all and the other exclusively for the third gender. Some superstitious activities are held every Friday in his house, and the corporator transforms into a woman to offer his prayers to the goddess. A few knew all these things, but nobody dared to question him. If someone questions these things, their life will be at risk. This is not just for the commoner; even the high-ranking people, the police department, and everybody in the society have the same fear of confronting the things happening at the corporator's house. Chikka sees his Anna transforming into Angala Parameshwari, the goddess of fury each Friday. In his adolescence, the corporator had witnessed his drunk dad beating his mom. Each Friday evening, she used to take the kid to the sanctuary of goddess Angala Parameshwari, which was close to the incineration ground.

Inspector Gowda thinks corporator Ravikumar is the reason for all the murders. A rigorous practice makes them decipher the mystery of his house by inquiring about the elderly eunuch Akka. SI Santosh's investigation reveals that Akka is the lifesaver of Ravikumar. Once, when a mob of gangsters attacked him, nobody offered him help, but that time, a bevy of eunuchs saved his life with the instructions of the elderly Akka. That day, Akka became his family's prime member, and she looked after all the household things.

The lady with Akka emerges from their home and goes to the roads. While they stroll her, Akka attempts to cause her to comprehend that she is facing a challenge and should avoid it. However, she feels vulnerable before her cravings. At that point, she sees a man with great physical make-up and isolates herself from her Akka. She goes to his heading, and they start to talk. She revealed that her name is Bhuvana, and she is new to Bangalore. He says that his name was Sanjay.

Since it was late at night, he decided to drop her off at her house. She accepts and rides her bike to her hostel with him. They exchange phone numbers and agree to meet up again. He leaves when she pretends to enter the gate. She returns to the street and notices a man staring at her. She knew what she could offer to him and what she could get from him. He becomes a feast for her that night. The next day, Gowda and Santhosh have a meeting with the ACP. They come to know that another murder was reported late at night, with similarities to the case they started investigating. Santosh tells Gowda that another man had been killed in Dodda Banaswadi. When they arrived at the crime scene, they discovered a man named Kiran, who lived on the first floor of a building, dead in his locked bedroom.

*"There was a well-defined ligature mark on the neck at an oblique angle. Bruises and abrasions and a deep cut-like wound where the ligature had cut into the skin"* (Nair, Cut Like Wound, 2012)

Finally, Gowda reveals the truth that Chikka, Ravi Kumar's younger brother, is the reason behind the murders. Before Gowda confesses the truth, Ravi Kumar senses it from Chikka's behavior and keeps an eye on his movements with the help of his servants. When Ravikumar rushes to the old factory, what he finds there makes him astonished. It is his little Chikka, whom he did not even think of and suspect.

Ravi Kumar starts recollecting the past in the same old factory. It was years before when Chikka was too young. His family was struggling to survive and feed themselves twice a day. At that time, his father made the family shift to a nearby town to find some work. His father and mother were employed as workers in the construction work of a family-owned by an older man named Ranganathan. Here, the actual reality is hidden for the reason behind Chikka's transformation into an evil-minded person without his notice.

Ranganathan, being a rich person, took the responsibility of the young Chikka. The other family members felt the fondness and care as humanity. Since Ranganathan was a lonely man, he was fond of young Chikka to fill his loneliness. However, Chikka became prey to the cruelty of Ranganathan. Chikka was abused sexually to gratify the needs of the old Ranganathan. In turn, he gave clothes, books, and eatables to Chikka to hide the truth from the others. Accidentally, it comes to the sight of Ravi Kumar, which makes him furious.

*"He saw his little brother on the sofa, almost naked, and how his fingers were curled into a fist. Ranganathan fell to his knees. The sound of glass breaking. The tearing of the fabric. The clang of metal hitting the ground. Ranganathan groaned, and Anna screamed. 'You dirty old man. Is this what all your niceness was for? You bastard'."* (Nair, Cut Like Wound, 2012)

Ravi Kumar was furious to see Chikka being abused by the old Ranganathan. That rage made Ravikumar kill Ranganathan brutally. Chikka was afraid of the sight of his brother and realized that it was a sin in front of others. However, his innocence was taken away by the pain he endured during the abuse. Chikka's personality keeps on changing in different stages of abuse. He first endures the pain, and then his soul is filled with anger for the helplessness. In the later stage, he starts submitting himself to the abuse, which results in his willingness to be gratified by Ranganathan. In the final stage of his personality transformation, Chikka wanted it so badly that he got used to it. This stage is what we call addiction.

*Chikka blames Ravikumar. „Why do you always walk in when I begin to enjoy myself?"* (Nair, Cut Like Wound, 2012)

Ravikumar thinks he saved his young brother from Ranganathan's abuse. However, Chikka feels somewhat differently from Chikka's transformation in the final stage, and he has already started enjoying it. That transformation grows with his age. The way he transforms himself every night was portrayed realistically by Anita Nair as Chikka's transformation entitled Bhuvana in the beginning and as Kamakshi in the end. He wants a new one every time to satisfy his sexual needs. He wanted to be a complete woman in front of the men. Nair presents Nair's intense hard work to look exactly like a woman in the following lines.

*"He opened the kit and started working quickly with a practiced hand. The concealer covers the shadows on his chin and around his mouth. The foundation, the fine creamy talc, smoothes the complexion, eyes 65*



*enhanced with a kohl pencil, and a twirl of the mascara brush on the eyelashes for the wide-eyed look. He wet the tip of his finger with Vaseline and traced his eyebrows. A part of blush, he carefully outlined his lips with a lip pencil and filled it with deep pink lipstick. He pressed his lips together and applied a coat of gloss"* (Nair, Cut Like Wound, 2012)

Chikka wants to be teased by men and wants them to smile at him. However, he fails to manage his identity as a female, as men easily recognize her when the reality is revealed. She needs love from the men. They need only pleasure. Some men do not even want to take pleasure from her as she is not she. They realized the fact that she was a Transgender; a sarcastic giggle was there on their face that made her furious. Nair exemplified the situation of Chikka's subconscious behavior as

*"The interloper laughed. A high, shrill laugh. „He thinks you are a woman. " tears welled in her eyes. Then she pulled herself together and said through clenched teeth, „Why do you say that? I am a woman, can't you see? " The interloper giggled. „In which case, I am the prime minister of India."* (Nair, Cut Like Wound, 2012)

Whoever commented upon her identity was severely injured to death. This shows the mental and psychological transition of Chikka 's mind. The way he was abused by the older man at a tender age was interpreted as pleasure, and even after the years, when he became an adult also, the experiences recorded in his mind have not changed. Time has not healed the pain of his childhood, which was carried to his adulthood.

### Discussion:

Through the character Chikka, Nair wants to talk about the personality transformation and behavioral change of a child who endured sexual abuse. If a child is abused sexually, it is not only related to the physical damage. More than that, the child's psyche is affected a lot, resulting in anti-social elements. Chikka's sexual perversion led him to be a chikka. He enjoyed being the one who could seek and give pleasure.

*"They are everywhere, jaded men. Eager boys. I find them, or they find me. Our need is the same, you see. However, it is over; I see it again .... that disgust in your eye...it hurts me. The goddess said all I must do is erase that memory. So, I killed them...because, like you said that night, Anna, it is not my fault. They made me do it! Thus, they have to be punished for it".* (Nair, Cut Like Wound, 2012)

These lines illustrate Chikka's intense desire to go to any extent and get whatever he wants. Chikka 's personality disorder makes him believe he has a superpower to do anything and exhibits signs of power through killing. His brother looks after him as a son and prepares everything for him, but Chikka misunderstands his love for Ravikumar and shoots him.

Anita Nair deliberately succeeded in portraying the social evil called child sexual abuse through Chikka. After several trials, Gowda learns that Chikka is the reason behind these murders, whom he catches hold of in the crime at the end of the novel. He comes to know the reason behind Chikka 's involvement in the series of murders. What made him transform into a crossdresser? Moreover, what was the prime motto of his inner personality?

The Past of The Main Characters Are Important In The Novel. Chikka 's mother takes him to the Palace Road flats, where she worked as a cleaner when he was nine. Mr. Ranganathan, an elderly gentleman from 3B, mingled with Chikka, and the two quickly became friends. Chikka discovered the truth about himself when he was ten years old: he is a homosexual man who is misunderstood. Ranganathan became his benefactor, and the family became his as well. Ranganathan paid for Chikka 's school fees, books, and everything else she needed. Ranganathan gave his drunken father a job in his garment factory. Chikka 's mother received sporadic loans. Ranganathan took him to Madras when he was twelve, and he had a life he could never have imagined. Only they were aware of the close bond they shared. This Sexual Pleasure Incident, which Chikka had been experiencing since childhood, had a significant impact on his later life. Chikka 's behavioral pattern and the kind of relationship he had with Ranganathan were unknown to anyone else.

When Chikka 's brother, Ravi Kumar, also known as Anna, saw Chikka 's relationship with Ranganathan, it was seriously questioned. Chikka was forcibly separated from Ranganathan, and this separation harmed Chikka 's life. Chikka Attained Sexual Satisfaction, As Well As The Feeling Of Being Loved And The Concern He Received From His Parents. However, his forced separation from Ranganathan, as well as the fact that Anna harmed Ranganathan for their unwanted relationship, caused him mental illness. All the joy and pleasure that he had been enjoying abruptly ended. Understanding the various characteristics of criminals is crucial for enhancing the efficacy of sentencing and rehabilitation programs. The ultimate goal is to promote public safety and facilitate the successful rehabilitation of offenders. (Marta Sousa, 2024). Chikka, one of the central characters, along with Inspector Gowda and Ravi Kumar, captivates more than the other two men because of the mystery surrounding his existence. Chikka has a gay connection with Ranganathan, whose magnanimity is revered by Chikka's family in exchange for sexual favors as the storyline unfolds. His body was pampered, adored, and teased, and he relished the attention. His Anna, corporator Ravi Kumar, a man obsessed with his image and social status, feels differently. When he caught Ranganathan „abusing' Chikka on that fateful day, he burst Chikka 's bubble of happiness. Since then, he dressed as a 'protector,' handing out lists of dos and don'ts to Chikka and enlisting the help of Akka to look after him—the only one

acknowledged and accepted as Akka. Anna's efforts to 'normalize' Chikka's life had a more 'dangerous' impact than was visible to the naked eye. Anna's reluctance to accept that his little brother was "involved" in the sexual exploitation on that fateful day on the sofa in that office and his efforts to "lead and control" Chikka's life reflect society's attitude towards homosexuality. Chikka's quest for acceptance is reflected in the resultant "births" of Bhuvana and Kamakshi. The efforts made to appear beautiful, striving for perfection with each attempt. The rage that grows from the expression of 'disgust' that follows pleasure and attraction after realizing that the gorgeous woman (Chikka) is a man leads him to commit the heinous crimes. There are traces of disability and trauma in the incidents depicted in the novel.

### Conclusion:

Children who have mental diseases, intellectual difficulties, or physical limitations are more than twice as prone as their peers to encounter childhood sexual abuse. These physical ailments might also hinder the identification of mental health disorders associated with violence, such as post-traumatic stress disorder. A similar occurrence has transpired in Chikka's life as well. Ravi Kumar believes he rescued his younger brother from Ranganathan and is currently looking after him with Akka's assistance. However, he lacks comprehension of the repercussions of child sexual assault. There are no notable disparities in the extent of psychological consequences experienced by male and female victims. This suggests that sexual abuse has a substantial and lasting detrimental effect on the psychological growth of children, irrespective of their gender. (Pacheco, 2024). Childhood sexual exploitation can result in a diverse range of effects during maturity. Sure, adult survivors exhibit little mental health concerns, while others have a multitude of mental health disorders. Abuse constitutes a form of traumatic occurrence. Trauma is a highly alarming, profound, and upsetting state. Chikka became a Trans Gender as a result of a mix of circumstances that led to a complicated set of repercussions stemming from trauma. Subsequently, a serial murderer emerged. If Chikka had not encountered Ranganathan at 10, Chikka would have developed like other children in society. As he matured, he would abstain from committing acts of murder. The older man, Ranganathan's innate pursuit of pleasure, utterly devastated the life of young Chikka. Chikka's later life is marked by a noticeable shift in behavior as a result of the child abuse he experienced during his early years. Anita Nair adeptly depicted the correlation between psychological problems stemming from child abuse and subsequent behavioral alterations in children, as exemplified by the character Chikka. Childhood sexual abuse is linked to numerous adverse outcomes that might impact an individual's overall well-being throughout their life. Multiple research studies unequivocally demonstrate the correlation between sexual abuse of children and a wide range of detrimental mental, social, sexual, interpersonal, behavioral, and physical health outcomes. (Radmanović, 2020)

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