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*Hearing the voices of the silent: Alternative to the  
problem of blaming mothers for the occurrence of incest*

By  
Josephine Sui-fun Fong  
B.A., University of Waterloo, 1983

*Thesis*  
*Submitted to the Department of Psychology*  
*in partial fulfillment of the requirements*  
*for the Master of Arts degree*  
*Wilfrid Laurier University*  
*1993*



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## ABSTRACT

The problem of intra-familial child sexual abuse has been studied over the past few decades, but the problem of blaming mothers for the occurrence of incest has not been adequately recognized. This study is a documentation of the experiences of mothers of incest survivors. Six women whose daughters were sexually abused by their fathers or step fathers were interviewed for approximately 60 to 120 minutes. Results demonstrated that in their process of dealing with the problem of child sexual abuse, mothers experienced a great deal of pain and hardship. While they were indeed also victims of the incestuous relationship, they were held responsible for the abuse and expected to live with minimal and inadequate services.

The difficulties these women experienced include: having no or minimal support from friends and/or relatives, having no understanding and respect from child protection workers and police officers, and being silenced and degraded by the judicial system. In addition, for women who wanted to restrain their ex-husbands' access to their daughters, they were threatened to be charged for contempt of court; for women who tried to help their husbands deal with their abusive behaviour, they felt that they were rejected by society in general. In terms of personal gains, these mothers found that after the disclosure of incest, their relationships with their daughters became closer.

The findings of this study will be presented in a workshop sponsored by Community Justice Initiatives in October 1993. Summaries regarding these mothers' experiences will be sent to relevant professions to re-evaluate their services and help incestuous families deal with the problem in a more effective, non-judgemental way.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

No human research could be done without its participants. Therefore, the first group of people I want to express my heartfelt thanks to is the six women who participated in this study. I appreciate their courage in sharing their heart-breaking experiences with me. I certainly learned a lot from hearing their voices. I also want to thank Dr. Richard Walsh-Bowers for his empowering guidance throughout the entire process of this study. Under his supervision, I have learned to trust my own judgement in designing this study and analysing the data, to be creative and open-minded, and, more importantly, to be responsible to my study participants. I found that his impact on me was not only reflected in my academic work, but in the way I interact with others, including the language students whom I teach as well. My sincere thanks goes to Dr. Juanne Clarke, Dr. Bob Basso, and Mr. Paul Davock who gave me valuable feedback regarding my approach to the problem, the methodology, analysis, and uses of this study. Special thanks goes to my advisory committee who volunteered their time to help me develop interview questions and organize the group meeting. Finally, I would like to thank my husband, Andrew, for support and sharing my struggles throughout the past years. I recognized that without him I would have forgotten other aspects of my life (Andrew was the one who reminded me to take breaks, to play and get rest). Thus, as I looked back, I can say my memory of the entire process of this study not only involved anxiety and pain, it was full of fun and challenges on the side.

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## INTRODUCTION

In this study I attempt to document the lived experience of mothers who have a daughter who was sexually abused by her father or her mother's partner. My interest in doing research in this area has sprung from my practicum experience. During the practicum period, I worked with a group of consumers that was affiliated with Community Justice Initiatives (CJI). Working with these individuals, I had a chance to learn about how they have been struggling with the problem of intra-familial child sexual abuse.

When considering the specific focus of my research, I skimmed through the existing literature that relates to the issue of intra-familial child sexual abuse. From this preliminary work, I found that most literature and research studies only focus on the victim and offender populations. Little attention has been given to the mother population. In the tiny portion of this literature concerning mothers, they have been portrayed as inadequate women who have failed to perform their wifely roles and/or protect their daughters from being sexually abused in their own homes.

By comparing what I read with what I heard and observed from my practicum, I realized that there is an apparent gap. I did not find mothers of incest survivors inadequate. Conversely, I found that they were willing to learn how to deal with the incestuous relationship between their husbands and daughters. I admire the tremendous energy and effort that they expended in helping themselves as well as others (i. e. their husbands, daughters, and other women who are in the same boat). When I found that the description in literature does not match with the reality I

experienced, I began to question why there is so little written and said that we can learn much more about these mothers' experiences. I also wondered if there are any appropriate forms of help available for them, since only limited information regarding this mother population exists. So, I dug deeper into the literature. Unfortunately, I found that most of the existing theories or counselling approaches (Gutheil & Avery, 1977; Meiselman, 1978; Monte, 1980; Hoorwitz, 1983; Mayer, 1983) are based on postulated, theoretical frameworks. These theories may provide a distorted picture of this mother group. At this point, I began to query how these mothers are being treated by helping professionals and began to have doubts about the effectiveness of their help.

Through persistence in searching for different interpretations of the subject matter, I found that there is a thin body of literature, such as feminist studies, that has singled out the mother population and tried to raise people's awareness of the unfair treatment given to these mothers. Feminist research studies offer us alternative explanations of the mothers' behaviour. A few empirical studies (Morgan, 1983; Myer, 1985; Hagood, 1991) have suggested some useful strategies for professionals to help mothers work through the family crisis. Nevertheless, the researchers' implicit intention to help mothers to deal with their emotions and experiences is central to the recovery of victims. I found that few researchers are dedicated to attend to the needs of mothers. Therefore, I feel that there is a pressing need to provide this population with a chance to share their experiences and to voice their needs. After receiving positive feedback from my thesis advisor and the staff members of

Community Justice Initiatives, I decided to dedicate my thesis to this mother population and work with them to uncover their experiences and make their voices heard.

Statistics (Finkelhor, 1986; Rogers, 1990) indicate that in North America, 95% of incest is perpetrated by men, and the majority of victims is female. Therefore, for the purpose of this document, incest is defined as the sexual abuse of a female child by a father, step-father or father-figure (mother's boyfriend). This proposal will begin with a review of literature, followed by a description of the feasible methodology for this proposed research. In the literature review, I will discuss how mothers of incest survivors are portrayed by conventional psychology, provide feminist explanations of mothers' behaviour, describe mothers' experiences as reported by helping professionals, and present mothers' experiences in their own perspectives. Sections that follow include: a community psychology response to the victimization of mothers of incest survivors, my response to the problem of blaming mothers for incest, the purposes of this research, methodology, results, discussion, and conclusion.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

### A portrait of mothers of the incest survivor

In our society, people have a tendency to divide men and women into separate categories. Williams (1985) stated in the beginning of her book that since Aristotle, philosophers have believed man to be the prototype of a human being and woman to be a special case, the "other". Instead of viewing men and women as different genders who possess different qualities or talents, women are viewed as inferior and deviant. Aristotle wrote, "The female, in fact, is female on account of inability of a sort...We should look upon the female state as being it were a deformity, though one which occurs in the ordinary course of nature" (Bell, 1973, p.18). From this vantage point, women are continuously described by our society in a way that contrasts their differences from men. One corollary of such practice is that they are thought to be subordinate to men.

According to Freud, women's psychological development is somehow defective due to the lack of a penis. Because of this defect, women are generally passive, narcissistic, and masochistic (Monte, 1980). In other words, Freud believed that due to the lack of a penis, development of women's superegos or consciences is inhibited. They are morally inferior to men. Although I do not agree with the above arbitrary thinking, this brief summary of how women have been viewed in the history of psychology will help us to better understand why mothers of incest survivors are portrayed in the negative way described below.

The problem of incest has existed for a long time, but it was not until the late

1970s that our society started to examine its seriousness and causes. While some researchers focused their studies on the penis reactions or sexual preferences of offenders (Travin, Cullen, & Melella, 1988), other researchers (Gutheil & Avery, 1977; Meiselman, 1978; Hoorwitz, 1983; Mayer, 1983) focused on analyzing the mother's role in an incestuous family. The shifting of focus from offenders to mothers may well reflect the values that are at work in our society's opinions about women. As alluded to above, women are considered to be morally inferior. They are held responsible for the faults of men. Social scientists may assume that if a man makes a mistake, he must be influenced by the woman/women around him. Therefore, if a father has a sexual relationship with a daughter, the mother must have played an important role in facilitating the event.

It is a common phenomenon that our society is inclined to blame mothers for undesirable events that happen in the family. A study by Caplan and Hall-McCorquodale (1983) substantiates the existence of the problem of mother-blaming. By reviewing 125 journal articles, these authors found that "mothers were seen as causing a total of 72 kinds of psychopathology in their children" (Orr, 1991, p.4). In regards to the problem of incest, Orr says, "what is apparent in the majority of literature and research is references to the mother's role, often seen as causing incest to occur" (p.4).

Family systems theory has also been used to blame mothers. Taggart (1985) points out that at the heart of the early work of systems theory, there was a problem of incorporating the dominant culture's biases in the interpretation of family systems.

Systems theory believes that incest is a typical behaviour pattern employed by dysfunctional families to defend against separation and loss (Lustig et al., 1966). In other words, systems theory hypothesizes that in order to maintain the integrity of the family, all family members conspire together in the abuse of a female member. Instead of holding men who abuse their daughters responsible for their coercive and abusive behaviour, systems theory minimized men's responsibility by suggesting mothers as well as the victims shared the responsibility. No wonder Lamb (1991) points out that the explanation of incest provided by systems theory only serves the purpose of diffusing the responsibility for male violence.

Gutheil and Avery (1977) stress that, although incest is a collective psychopathology of family members, the mother plays a significant role that increases the possibilities of incest. Hoorwitz (1983) portrays mothers of incest survivors as helpless dependents who are powerless to protect themselves and their children. Although the mother does not play an active role in facilitating the incest relationship, her incompetence in performing her wifely role contributes to the occurrence of incest. A wifely role usually refers to a woman's ability to please her husband sexually, doing all the housework, looking after the entire family, and tending to both her husband's physical and emotional needs. Hoorwitz believes that having a dependent wife will frustrate the husband, which in turn increases the risk of incest. He states:

In one variant of the classic situation, the father is a dominant powerful man, keeping his wife in a dependent helpless role. She may suffer from a disabling condition such as depression or physical infirmity. Although this may have been a reciprocal role relationship

which satisfied both partners in the first years of marriage, the strain on the husband of his wife's dependency tends to anger the husband, who eventually distances his wife. He turns to a daughter, thereby obtaining emotional gratification. (p.515)

Another analysis of the mother's personality which allegedly contributes to incest is provided by Meiselman (1978). According to her, women who are subjected to oppression, such as having an overcontrolling, emotionally cold, and/or abusive husband, would show characteristics of passivity, dependency, and masochism. Meiselman found from her clinical data that mothers who exhibit the above characteristics may contribute subtly to incest through a role reversal relationship with their daughter. In other words, the daughter is encouraged to take up the mother's role in the family. She has to look after the physical and emotional needs of other family members, including the father's. While the father depends on his daughter to meet his emotional needs, the possibility of incest becomes greater.

Tinling (1990) supports the view that the mother plays a significant role in the incestuous relationship. However, she argues that it is essentially wrong to perceive the mother as "a powerless individual, victimized herself, incapacitated by her fears and by her overburdened plight" (p.281). Tinling asserts that the mother is a significant other who vigorously perpetuates the incest within her family. Relying on an Adlerian position, the author believes that the mother's behaviour is one that "serves a purpose, supports a pre-conceived goal, and helps in the attaining of a superior position however destructive it may be" (p.281). In other words, the behaviour of mothers who have a daughter who was sexually abused by the father is dysfunctional. These mothers, in order to overcome their feelings of inferiority, will

strive for a sense of superiority at the expense of their daughters.

Another variation that blames mothers is proposed by the family dysfunction approach. This approach portrays the mother as an impaired woman who is unable or unwilling to carry out her functions as caretaker for her children and sexual provider for her husband (Rosenfeld, 1979). Mayer (1983) supports this approach and says:

Silent partners tend to abdicate the responsibilities of wife, mother, homemaker and sexual partner. It is not uncommon to find the silent partner working evenings or nights...She is unavailable to her family to perform the responsibilities of homemaker and mother. The silent partner often subtly forces her daughter into those roles. The result is that the victim performs all of the chores, cares for the younger children and gradually begins to meet her father's emotional and physical needs. (p.141-142)

It is apparent that both Rosenfeld and Mayer were insinuating that by withdrawing herself from having an intimate relationship with her husband or by ignoring her husband's sexual needs, the mother sets up the incestuous relationship for her husband and daughter. That is to say, the mother is consciously or unconsciously fostering an environment in which incest may develop.

According to the literature reviewed above, then, the real perpetrator in an incestuous family is the mother. She is the one who should take more responsibility for the incest, because she intended to frustrate her husband sexually, failed to meet both his physical and emotional needs, imposed her maternal duties upon her daughter, and masterminded the incest between her husband and daughter. What a devil-woman she is!

### Feminist explanations



The following paragraphs present alternatives to explain the mother's role in the family and her reaction to the discovery of the incest. In order to better understand the full picture of mothers of incest survivors, it is important for us to consider other interpretations that have been provided mostly by feminist researchers.

One aspect in the mother's life that has been constantly neglected is that she may have been a victim of child sexual abuse too (Wells, 1981; Graham, 1984). Some mothers who are described as passive, dependent, and masochistic are indeed those women whose personal childhood sexual abuse experiences have not been resolved. Drawing from her professional experience working with mothers of sexually abused children, Hagood (1991) says, "Most of these mothers carry around a good deal of pain from their own past, as well as difficulty managing their lives in the present...Her child's victimization frequently brings up issues previously unaddressed or repressed by herself" (p.17).

Perhaps because their victimization experiences in the past have not been properly dealt with, these women have low self-esteem, poor self-identity, and have never learned how to take care of their own needs, let alone the needs of others and their children. As mothers are victimized by the problem of child sexual abuse, Hagood (1991) believes that to place responsibility on the mother for the actual molestation is nonproductive. She argues that "As with an alcoholic, the full responsibility for the molester's behaviour belongs to him. To blame the mother takes the heat off the offender and is not productive to his treatment" (p.17).

Because the mother is the least studied and least well understood person in the triad of victim/offender/non-offending spouse, people often attribute her slow reaction to the discovery of incest as a sign of her irresponsibility. Instead of blaming the mother for not reporting the incest right away after knowing of its existence, Strand (1990) pointed out that even if mothers have not been sexually victimized, the reactions they have may parallel those of the victims in many ways. The author states:

A mother typically experiences her partner's sexual abuse of her child as an assault on her own sexuality. She may exhibit many of the same responses as the victim--negative association to sexual arousal, sexual dysfunction, and confusion about sexual identity. The mother also feels stigmatized, and often isolates herself from extended family and friends, and may even want to move out of the community where she is known, in order to avoid "exposure". (p.356)

In other words, mothers who are temporarily unable to accept the fact that incest has happened between her partner and daughter or report the matter to the authorities (i.e., police or child protection worker) may not necessarily collude with the offender. She is just confused and has not sorted out what actions to take.

Another explanation of the mother's reaction to incest is given by Dadds, Smith, and Webber (1991) and Sirles and Franke (1989). These authors found that whether a mother could react to incest depends on the age of the victim, the nature of the abuse, the presence of the mother in the home during the abuse, the relationship of the victim to the offender, and the relationship between the mother and the victim. Results found by Sirles and Franke (1989) indicate that mothers tended to believe the occurrence of incest (95%) if their victimized children were

younger. It is possible that younger children are considered powerless whereas teens are considered to be more rebellious and revengeful. Thus, a mother who has a problem with accepting the existence of incest in her family may not necessarily be a collaborator with the offender. Whether a mother believes her daughter or not depends upon how she perceives and interprets her daughter's personality development and power status in the family.

Regarding the nature of the abuse, Sirles and Franke (1989) found that mothers were comparatively less likely to believe the sexual abuse when it involved genital-genital contact. This is probably because the mother thinks that genital-genital contact is a very serious violation of her child's body which goes far beyond the society's norms on human sexuality. In addition, she may also have a problem with understanding how a father or her partner could inflict such enormous harm to a daughter who is supposed to be cared for and protected.

With regard to the presence of the mother in the home during the abuse, Sirles and Franke's (1989) study shows that "mothers were more likely to believe their child when the report indicated they were not in the home when the abuse occurred" (p.134). There are two reasons why mothers have difficulty accepting that the abuse has happened while they were present in the home. First, accepting the fact that the sexual abuse could have occurred with their presence challenges mothers' awareness of the situation and their ability to protect their children. Second, it is difficult for mothers to believe that their husbands would be so absurd and impulsive as to sexually abuse their daughters and risk their wives' finding out.

Concerning the relationship of the victim to the offender, evidence shows that mothers tend to believe the incest if the offender is the biological father of the victim (Dadds et al., 1991; Sirles & Franke, 1989). One reason that enabled mothers to believe the abuse was perpetuated by the biological father is that the father was present in the home when the child was young and relatively powerless. Another reason is that a child usually has a better relationship with the biological father than with a step father or a boyfriend of the mother. On the one hand, it may be rare for a daughter to lie about having been sexually abused by her own father. On the other hand, a daughter's poor relationship with a step-father may reinforce the mother's disbelief. The mother may perceive her daughter's accusation of the step-father as one way of vengeance.

The relationship between a mother and her daughter plays a significant role in the mother's belief of the incest. Dadds et al. (1991) found that if a daughter is perceived by her mother as a rebellious teenager who constantly misbehaves, then her revelation of incest will not be easily accepted. The mother may think that a rebellious daughter had not complied with the father or step-father as usual. Perhaps the mother would misperceive her daughter's complaint as another way to challenge the authority or status of the step-father.

Two other studies (Martin, 1977; Mitchell, 1985) explain the mother's passive behaviour as the result of the oppression of women in our society. These authors point out that it is not difficult to find physical and psychological abuse mingled with child sexual abuse in the family. Some mothers themselves also suffer multiple forms

of abuse from the husbands who are molesting their daughters. If mothers are also subjected to wife abuse, they may need additional help for themselves before they can help their children. Mothers who suffer the "battered wife syndrome" (Martin, 1977) must learn to overcome their feelings of hopelessness and helplessness, and learn how to protect themselves before they can protect their daughters. Mothers who are still living in the shadow of their husbands and fear of violence certainly have problems with confronting their husbands with the incest.

#### Mothers' behaviours as reported by helping professionals

As I have mentioned before, in the existing body of literature little has been heard from the perspective of women who are mothers of incest survivors. Therefore, instead of learning about the mothers' experiences directly from them, we can only learn about the experiences of mothers of incest survivors from helping professionals.

Through working with mothers of victims of sexual abuse in an art therapy group, Hagood (1991) found that some of her group members were excessively overweight. These women told her that they had been sexually abused themselves and used their overweight condition as a defense against unwanted sexual advances. The mothers reported that when they first learned that their husbands or boyfriends had been molesting their daughter(s), they experienced feelings of shock, numbness, anger, horror, fear of losing their minds, and so on. Hagood also found that the women in the art therapy group were generally inept at acknowledging and expressing their anger verbally. However, when these women realized the seriousness of the sexual abuse and its impact on their daughters' psychological health, they

expressed considerable guilt over not having sensibly understood that the incest was going on in the home.

Hagood (1991) interpreted these mothers' experiences as representing iatrogenesis. Iatrogenesis refers to "those incidents where the cure is worse than the disease, where (often) well-intentioned helpers create substantial problems for themselves or others through helping" (Morgan, 1983, p.3). Hagood says:

The constant intrusion of professionals from within the legal and mental health systems, such as district attorneys, probation officers, social workers, child protection workers, detectives, parole officers, and welfare workers, gave these women an extreme sense of helplessness and reinforced their feelings of being victimized. (p.20)

No wonder Hagood concluded that, because of their early life experiences and learned helplessness, these women often expressed a feeling of having little control over their lives.

Myer (1985) studied 43 mothers of incest victims. She reported that more than half of the mothers eventually protected their children, and fewer mothers fit the portrait described by the literature as passive and dependent. This sample was divided into three categories: 1) mothers who protected their daughters and rejected their mates; 2) mothers who did nothing; and 3) mothers who rejected their daughters and protected their mates.

According to Myer's (1985) report, 24 out of the 43 women were able to make decisions and take actions after knowing of the sexual abuse that occurred in the home. All these protecting mothers "showed empathy for their children and did not blame them for what had happened. They were angry about the sexual abuse and

angry toward the offenders" (p.50). All the women were willing to join a treatment program. Although some women did express empathic feelings for their partners, they decided to side with their daughters and separated from their husbands upon whom they had depended emotionally and economically.

The four mothers who did nothing to intervene after hearing about the incest were all classified as having Borderline Personality Disorders. As Myer (1985) noted, "this disorder is characterized by impulsiveness, unstable interpersonal relationships, inappropriate anger, identity disturbance, affective instability, physically self damaging behaviour, and chronic feelings of emptiness" (p.52). Some women expressed rather strong anger towards their husbands, others were just indifferent. Although these immobilized mothers were only moderately concerned about their children, they were not at all hostile towards their children. They did not want their children to be removed from the home.

Fifteen women who rejected their daughters fell into the rejecting mothers category. However, five of them were ambivalent. They suspected their partners, but chose to side with their husbands or boyfriends. These mothers were all fearful of and dominated by their mates. Myer (1985) explained that "they showed little anger toward the offender and were slightly concerned about the well being of their children...They all were classified as Narcissistic Personality Disorders" (p.53). People with such disorders are described as interpersonally explosive, over-idealized or devalued, and lacking in empathy. That is to say, suffering from this disorder, these mothers were unable to properly assess the reality of the incestuous situation and

were inept at expressing their feelings of concern for their daughters.

Faller's (1988b) study on intra-familial sexual abuse reported that in about 300 hundred cases, the mother usually did not know that incest had occurred. When she found out, she usually reported it to the appropriate authority and took steps to stop it. When she did not report it, she was often afraid of her husband's threats to harm her and her daughter further if she told. Some women in Faller's (1988b) study reported that because they have been taught that a good woman's first task was to keep the family together, they were afraid that the report of incest would in turn tear the family apart and left their children fatherless.

#### Self-reports of mothers's experiences

In order to obtain a thorough understanding of what mothers experienced in an incestuous family, Orr (1991) interviewed four mothers of incest victims and provided a "thick" description of these mothers' experiences. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss the experiences of mothers of incest victims by comparing the voices of mothers in Orr's study to the work of others. From such comparisons, we will be able to see the discrepancies in how the experiences of mothers are misunderstood and/or mis-interpreted.

Tinling (1990) suggests that mothers who were not aware of the occurrence of incest indeed pretended not knowing in order to protect themselves from losing face. Tinling believes that these mothers would have detected the incestuous relationship if they wanted to. However, a mother interviewed by Orr (1991) says:

They, my husband and daughter, seemed to have a good relationship.  
Like he spent time with all the kids doing his pursuits that they also



like to do. ...I've read all those symptoms that say look for what is happening, my daughter had none of those at all. (p.18)

When this mother started to suspect that her daughter had been sexually abused by someone, she says, "I never once thought of my husband..." (p.20). The logic behind this conclusion was quite simple, because "it's not just that he's unfaithful to you, he has been unfaithful to you with the last person in the world he should" (p.23).

Another way to accuse mothers of insensitivity to incest is to blame them for spending time (for work or activity) outside the home and leaving their daughters with their fathers (Spencer, 1978; Mayer, 1983). I will discuss later why mothers work outside the home, but at this point we can hear what mothers would say about leaving their daughters at home. One mother says:

Well, if you can't leave your kids with their father, who the hell can you leave them with? So a normal mother has to keep the kid tied to her side till the kid's off and married. (Orr, 1991, p.64)

I wonder if a mother who does not trust her kids with anyone, even her spouse, and always keeps the kids around her, would be considered either an over-protective mother or a pathological woman. In other words, there is no one type of mother who will be completely sanctioned or approved of by our society.

Whereas conventional research believes mothers of incest victims are generally compromising and incapable of showing their anger to the perpetrator (Myer, 1985; Hagood, 1991), Orr (1991) indicates that the inability of mothers to express their anger is due to their up-bringing and socialization as women. Orr's (1991) respondents were all angry at their spouses for what was done to their daughters, but these women thought that they should be understanding. One mother says, "I get so

angry at him. How could he wreck her life! You know, his own daughter. ...I keep thinking I should be more understanding" (p.23 & 24). Since our society believes that women are supposed to be nice and understanding to children and husbands, women are somehow inhibited from expressing their anger fully. On the one hand, our society expects mothers to be nice, understanding and supportive; on the other hand, mothers would be questioned if they had not expressed great anger toward their husbands' incestuous actions. Thus, there is a dilemma in our society if we expect women to be extremely angry at their husbands after the discovery of incest. It seems that women are put in a no-win situation anyway.

Regarding how mothers felt about the child protection and justice systems, some mothers reported that they had been excluded from the process of accusing their spouses. They also felt that they were left to do a difficult job with inadequate support. One mother reports:

When the disclosure came about, I had gone over to the Children's and Family Services and the detective that was there asked me to go home and confront Rick, ME, as if I was the police or the lawyer, ...That's not my job. ...I just really didn't have the support I needed.  
(Orr, 1991, p.58)

Another mother who was excluded from the accusing process felt that the court had been too lenient on her husband. She explains, "I think he should've gone to jail. I think he didn't learn anything, ...I don't know how he [the judge] could make his decision..." (Orr, 1991, p.50).

Orr (1991) has also reported a few things which mothers disliked about helping professionals, which resulted in their declining to receive help from them. A

mother complained that both her daughters and husband had been asked to see counsellors, but she was not invited to go. Another mother expressed that she did not like her daughter's psychiatrist because she was not given the right to make a decision on whether or not she should accept her husband back into the house. The third mother, who had read books that provide a negative portrait of mothers, reacted to it by not trusting the professionals. This mother related:

I've read a fair bit and a lot of stuff I've read they don't have facts on, you know, like they really don't know. And quite often the mother is to blame. And it's the mother that's in the middle. ...I just feel like everything's put on me that I'm carrying a load of bricks around.  
(Orr, 1991, p.48)

Orr (1991) reports that sometimes when a counsellor takes on a parental role to assist the incest victim in planning her life, the mother's role as a mother is effectively usurped. One mother who had this experience states, "I can't necessarily say I approve of it, you know, but anyway, that's what her counsellor says and I have no right to interfere" (p.30). Therefore, Orr concludes that this mother's part "in her daughter's and, to some extent, her husband's decision-making now belongs to the counsellor" (p.31). No wonder the mothers interviewed by Orr (1991) felt that the services that they or their daughters and husbands received were inadequate.

#### Mother-blaming in mother-child relationships

No one would deny that the bond between a mother and her child begins at the moment of conception. As a cultural practice deeply rooted in many different nations, mothers are considered the primary caretakers of babies and children. Because of this care-taking nature, mother-child relationships tend to be closer than

father-child relationships (Williams, 1987). As a result of having a closer relationship with their children, mothers are held responsible for their children's development.

Traditionally, when studying mother-child relationships, researchers (Cadwell, 1964; Blurton, 1972) tended to focus on examining how mothers prompt, influence, and/or reinforce their children. The underlying presumptions of this approach convey a message that mothers are always in the giving and manipulating end while children are always in the receiving and accommodating end. That is to say, children are born helpless and dependent; their personality development as well as their concept of self are determined by the way their caretakers (i.e., mothers) treat them from birth. At first glance, these theories sound quite acceptable because babies are dependent on their caretakers to have their basic needs met; but, on second thought, the validity of these presumptions is questionable.

Believing in the assumptions that mothers are primarily responsible for their children's social development and behaviour only serves to perpetuate the problem of mother-blaming. In light of some later studies (Schaffer, 1977; Dorr & Friedenberg, 1984, Schaffer & Crook, 1985), findings of previous research were proved quite wrong and misleading. According to Schaffer (1977), the mother-child relationship is a dyadic system in which both partners play an important part in shaping each other's behaviour. This is to say that from birth onwards, a child participates actively in interpersonal activities with his or her caretaker. The child is not only influenced by the mother, s/he is also influencing the way his/her mother interacts with him or her. After reviewing a wide range of mother-child relationships

studies, Dorr and Friedenberg (1984) conclude:

If we adopt a systemic view of the mother-child interaction, we may then remove unnecessary value judgements from our assessment of the mothering process. Thus, the interaction can then be viewed in a broader social perspective. The social interactive aspect of the cradle of the development of object relations is clearly ecological or interactive. Though mother and child are unequal partners in a social field of constantly shifting forces, the relationship may also be viewed as complementary. (p. 49)

In addition, by studying some early social interactions between mothers and infants, Schaffer and Crook (1985) observed that the mutually shaping interaction between a mother and a child indeed begins in the child. These authors explain:

The interaction starts with the infant's spontaneous behaviour and that the mother, by virtue of her sensitivity to the temporal patterning of her baby's responses, then incorporates these into a mutual exchange in which she acts as if his behaviour had truly communicational significance. (p.406)

In other words, under most circumstances, it was the infant who evoked a strong need on the part of the mother to approach her child. Thus, when examining the relationship problems between mothers and daughters, we should not overlook the mutuality of influence that exists in mother-child relationships.

Williams (1987) pointed out that because of our cultural expectations, at one point in the child's developmental process, a son is supposed to break away from his mother while the daughter is expected to remain in a closer relationship with her mother. Caplan (1989) indicated that because mother-daughter relationships tend to be very close, they often blend with both joy and pain, or serenity and conflict. Caplan stated that "the joy comes because most women have been taught to develop their interpersonal sensitivity and skills, so mother and daughter have a good chance

of making their relationship flower beautifully" (p. 10). However, the pain between mothers and daughters comes mainly because of society's expectations on womanhood.

According to Caplan (1989), there are many mother-daughter barriers created by our society which are detrimental to a desirable mother-daughter relationship. Here I will only discuss a few of them for basic understanding. As Caplan indicated, "in scaling mother down, or up, to human proportions, we have to tear away the mythical material that cloaks what she is really like" (p. 148). One of the myths that has a negative effect on mother-daughter relationships is that women are born nurturers. When mothers are expected to nurture children, they are also supposed to train their daughters to be good nurturers for the next generation after them. Often, because mothers believe in the myth that a perfect daughter is the measure of a good mother, they will try by all means to help their daughters acquire and perform these nurturing qualities. If their daughters do not appreciate these qualities, they will resent their mothers for making them a nurturer. Therefore, a lot of conflicts arise between mothers and daughters due to the expectations of nurturance.

Secondly, from her clinical experience, Caplan (1989) found that daughters tend to resent their mothers as they see them as rule-enforcers. On the one hand, mothers are put in the situation where they are obliged to help their children to meet society's norms and expectations. Unfortunately, in our society, where there are more rules for daughters than for sons, mothers are forced into a situation where they seem to be more critical of their daughters' behaviour than their sons'. On the other

hand, seeing how women are confined in their expected roles and activities, daughters not only resent society's inequitable rules for men and women, they also resent their mothers for being so tough on them and trying to make them follow their footsteps. Consequently, a more stressful mother-daughter relationship is fostered.

Finally, corresponding to theories of mutuality suggested by Schaffer (1977), Dorr and Friedenberg (1984), and Schaffer and Crook (1985), Caplan (1989) pointed out that when the mother-daughter relationship becomes tense, it is unfair to focus only on the mother and claim it was because of her that problems arise. More precisely, we should recognize that there is a mutual relationship between mothers and daughters. In addition, we have to realize that the stressful relationships between mothers and daughters are largely a result of the historical expectations of our society on women. Caplan states:

Part of growing up female has meant that daughters, like mothers, are expected to take on the role of guardians of society's (largely man-made) rules. In other words, it is not just mothers who do the monitoring; daughters catch on early to society's expectations and begin to monitor their mothers' behaviour as well. In this way, mother and daughter come to fear each other as their harshest judges. (p.75)

In conclusion, the mutual relationships between mothers and their children have been overlooked in traditional research studies. Because children are perceived as more ignorant, when something bad happened, people tend to attribute the cause to the adults' faults. Even worse, people tend to hold mothers responsible for every aspect of their children's development. Unfortunately, these invalidated presumptions concerning mother-child relationships have been used by our society to perpetuate the problem of mother-blaming in many situations. For example, these presumptions

were adopted by helping professionals and lay-persons to mis-interpret mothers' roles in incestuous families.



## A COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY RESPONSE TO MOTHER-BLAMING

In the following paragraphs, I will discuss how community psychology should respond to the victimization of these mothers. However, prior to such a discussion, I should first define community psychology.

Community psychology developed in the late 1960s "as part of a paradigm shift away from an individually oriented psychology that was unresponsive to social needs" (Heller, 1989, p.1). The main concept of this relatively new field is grounded in the theory and practice of prevention and empowerment (Newbrough, 1992). Instead of studying the individual and social pathologies, community psychology focuses more on identifying people's competencies, encouraging them to develop their strengths to the fullest extent, and helping them to recognize their rights as well as exercise their power. In short, the psychological well-being of people is the central concern of community psychologists, and collective community action becomes a means to social change.

Three community psychology concepts central to the problem of blaming mothers for the occurrence of incest are worth mentioning here. The first one is oppression. Goldenberg (1978) defines oppression as:

A condition of being, a particular stance one is forced to assume with respect to oneself, the world, and the exigencies of change. It is a pattern of hopelessness and helplessness, in which one sees oneself as static, limited, and expandable. ...To be oppressed is to be rendered obsolete almost from the moment of birth, so that one's experience of oneself is always contingent on an awareness of just how poorly one approximates the images that currently dominate a society. (p.2-3)

Women are forced into a specific role in society from the moment of their

birth. Without their consent, women have been confined in the home as care-givers and house-workers. Even worse, the duties involved in these two roles are considered trivial and unimportant. Women who want to break away from their assigned roles are viewed as deviants. No wonder Goldenberg (1978) indicates that the oppressed cannot succeed or fail, s/he can only survive. Therefore, the oppression of women in this sense is the act of constantly putting women down. They are made to feel that their efforts to either fulfil their designated role, or escape the confines of that role are futile.

Blaming the victim is another concept to explain the oppression of women. Ryan (1976) says, "blaming the victim is an ideological process, which is to say that it is a set of ideas and concepts deriving from systematically motivated, but unintended, distortions of reality" (p. 11). Since the structure of our society is male-dominated, in order to maintain the malestream status quo, women are held responsible for the occurrence of incest. Instead of holding men responsible for the socially unacceptable behaviour, daughters are held responsible for incest, because they are seductive and mothers are held responsible for the incestuous relation in the home because they are inadequate wives and mothers. In short, the practice of blaming the victim, in this sense, acts as the defence mechanism for the dominant class (men) in justifying its misbehaviour. No wonder Ryan concludes that blaming the victim is an illogical departure from the reality.

The third concept to be discussed here is empowerment. Differing from the above two concepts which reinforce the problem of mother-blaming, empowerment

counteracts its effect. It is believed that empowerment is the key to help oppressed citizens to deal with their problems. Rappaport (1981) stated that empowerment is one of the convictions and ultimate goals of community psychology. Through empowerment, people are helped to develop and practice their existing potential and competence to a higher level of functioning. In our society, since women are considered secondary and inferior, compared with men, they have less power. Pernell (1986) defines power as "the ability to manage emotions, skills, knowledge and/or material resources in a way that effective performance of valued social roles will lead to personal gratification" (p.108). In order to help mothers of incest victims, community psychologists must empower them to gain control over their lives.

Bennett (1987) says that community psychology should confront the patriarchal structure of our society by pursuing second order change. According to him, second order change "requires a change of the assumptions, rules, or premises governing the system as a whole" (p.14). That is to say, in order to deal with the problem of blaming mothers for incest, it is essential to challenge our society's assumptions of women's roles and the rules it has designed for women in playing their roles.

However, community psychology has not developed its work in areas that concern the psychological well-being of women yet. Linney (1990) points out that over the last decade, community psychology has been focusing largely on economic development and mental health; thus, little attention has been paid to social and environmental issues. Mulvey (1988) believes that if community psychology means to grow in its defined paradigm, more effort should be made to deal with some of the

most pressing community problems facing citizens and to enhance the quality of life for those increasingly left out. The problems of women's oppression and blaming of mothers are issues that should concern community psychologists.

Feminism, in many ways, parallels community psychology (Mulvey, 1988). It is generally believed that the problem of women's oppression in our society is due to the power imbalance between men and women. Feminists argue that it is the defined male/female role relationship that reinforces the notion of male power and female dependency (Mulvey, 1988). It is the problematic beliefs of social institutions that victimize women and blame them for incest.

Comparing the ideology of feminism with community psychology, Mulvey (1988) comments that, when dealing with community issues, community psychology has always been focusing narrowly on academic settings. It has not been able to adequately include minorities and women in its constituency and agenda. She concludes that "given the commonalities of community psychology and feminism in theory and practice, it is reasonable to expect community psychology and its practitioners to reflect a feminist perspective and to support the work of the women's movement" (p.77).

### MY RESPONSE TO THE PROBLEM

Based on the rationale of community psychology and my personal convictions, I have a problem accepting the misleading portrait of mothers of incest victims that has been given by traditional social scientists and helping professionals. I agree with both Linney (1990) and Mulvey (1988) that the challenge for community psychologists today is the inclusion of minorities and women in our agenda. As I find that mothers of incest victims are a minority group who have been blamed for the problem and constantly neglected, I will not stand aside and watch our society continue to oppress women as a group and blame mothers for the occurrence of incest. In the following paragraphs, I would like to respond to some of the articles reviewed above.

When society made its effort to understand the causes and help stop child sexual abuse from occurring, it failed to recognize the suffering of mothers in these families; thus, it went in the wrong direction by arbitrarily forcing women to take the responsibility for incest. The tendency to blame mothers originated as a result of the inequality between genders. While the blaming of mothers is a form of oppression of women in our society, mothers' passive behaviour is the result of that oppression (Mitchell, 1985). As a critical thinker, when I hear women being described as passive and dependent creatures, I must ask what makes women behave or to be seen in such a passive and dependent way.

Traditionally, the place for women in our society has been in their fathers' or husbands' home. Our society believes that the most important chores for women

include nurturing young children and caring for the home (Contratto, 1984). According to this belief and social practice, women are made to rely on their husbands for protection and economic provision. They are led to define themselves in the context of a human relationship in which they are expected to be subordinate. Gilligan (1985) states:

Woman's place in man's life cycle has been that of nurturer, caretaker, and helpmate, the weaver of these networks of relationships on which she in turn relies. While women have thus taken care of men, however, men have in their theories of psychological development tended either to assume or devalue that care. (p.186)

In addition to the devaluation of women's caring virtue, women are blamed for their dependence when our society fails to find causes of incest.

In Mayer's (1983) article, the author has arbitrarily attributed the problem of incest to mothers' employment outside the home and their readiness to take up evening or shift work. This is an inaccurate assumption. Certainly, there are significant reasons (such as industrialization and economic situation) why women have to go outside the home to work and why they have to take up shift work. In the following paragraphs, I will explain why women's decisions to engage in employment is in no way connected to their participation in creating an incestuous opportunity.

The problem of incest has existed long before women's participation in paid work. However, evidence shows that women's participation in the labour force has only increased significantly since the late 1960s (Armstrong & Armstrong, 1988). According to Statistics Canada (1989), 75.5 % of married women between the ages of 25 and 44 years are in the labour force. Among women with children of pre-school

age, 69.6 % work outside their homes. Nieva and Gutek (1981) stated that whether or not an adult woman will work depends on a number of situational factors. One of the most common factors is economics, particularly during our present economic depression. Hyde (1991) says:

If the woman is single, she must usually work to support herself and possibly her children if she is a single parent. For some married women, the decision to work is influenced by how adequate the husband's income is as support for the family. (p.174)

Indeed, it is not uncommon to find that women work in order to help meet their family members' needs. However, when mothers of incest victims are taking care of their families, they are perceived as using their jobs outside the homes to distance themselves from their husbands and children.

Furthermore, it has long been known that women are discriminated against in the work force. They are usually bound by low status, low pay and odd hours of work (Armstrong & Armstrong, 1988). It is obvious that due to gender discrimination in the job market, women have to take whatever job or time-slot that is offered to them in order to compete in the work force. Nevertheless, when it comes to the problem of to whom the responsibility of incest should be assigned, mothers who work evening hours and shifts are held responsible for the incestuous relationship between their husbands and daughters. It is unfair to assume that a mother is knowingly leaving a daughter alone with a father who would molest her.

In response to Meiselman's (1978) notion of the role reversal between mothers and daughters, I would argue that this is a combined result of the misconception of women's role and the problem of unequal distribution of

housework. As alluded to earlier, women are expected to do all the housework in their homes. Luxton, Rosenberg, and Arat Koc (1990) say:

Many women in Canada today carry very heavy caregiving burdens. They are sometimes called the "sandwich generation" because they care for children and elders at the same time. Many in fact have four jobs: waged work, housework, childcare and eldercare. Thus women's work requires the juggling of paid employment and on-going domestic labour. (p.14)

Some studies show that when women take on paid jobs, their husbands did not significantly increase their involvement in domestic duties (Barrett & MacIntosh, 1983; Luxton, 1988). Therefore, Luxton (1988) says, "the gendered division of labour, and particularly women's responsibility for domestic labour, have been identified as central to women's oppression in the capitalist societies as a whole, and specifically to women's subordination to men within families" (p.39).

On the one hand, women have to work outside the home in order to support or improve their families' financial situation. Without their contributions, their families would live under the poverty line. On the other hand, women are still expected to do all the housework. That is to say, after a day of labour outside the home, if the husband fails to share the household responsibilities, the mother is not supposed to expect her daughter's assistance. When the husband fails to meet the wife's emotional needs such as listening to her frustrations and comforting her, the mother is not supposed to share her feelings and emotions with her daughter. Otherwise, she will be accused of masterminding the incestuous relationship between her husband and daughter through a role reversal relationship with her daughters.

Another thing to which I am urged to respond is the accusation of mothers'



slow reaction towards the incestuous relationship between their husbands and daughters. Tinling (1990) insinuates that mothers who took minimum action after discovering the incestuous relationship were incest colluders. She interprets the deferral of action as an indication of their collusion with incest. Strand (1990) defines mothers' temporary disbelief of the incestuous relationship as a state of confusion and a result of shock. Indeed, this is a reasonable interpretation of mothers' reactions. They really need some time to assimilate the unbelieving surprise before they make any substantial and proper gesture to help their daughters and confront their husbands. Ironically, on the one hand our society thinks that women are inferior to men, weak, and dependent, but on the other hand, it expects mothers of incest victims to be smart, precise and assertive in the way they react to the discovery of the incestuous relationship. This is a truly paradoxical situation. Since women have been oppressed through their socialization and/or childhood sexual abuse experiences, they are taught to be passive and helpless. However, when they have problems with protecting themselves, they are expected to stand firm and protect their daughters. It is very unrealistic and contradictory to general social expectation.

After reading all these contradictory assertions, I am convinced that the problem of blaming mothers for the incestuous relationship should be taken more seriously. Therefore, in spite of the difficulties I encountered (in the process of seeking formal collaboration with an established agency) and anticipated (in the process of recruiting participants through informal personal contact) , I decided to dedicate this research to uncovering the experience of this mother population. As

Elbow and Mayfield (1991) say, "although we have sometimes seen evidence that confirms the explanations offered in the literature, our observations for the most part have prompted us to question those paradigms" (p.79).

### THE PURPOSES OF THIS RESEARCH

Community psychology should always pertain to matters of inequality and social injustice. As a woman and community psychologist, when I found that what I read about the characteristics of mothers of incest victims differed from what I observed during my practicum, I questioned the accuracy of these research results and theoretical viewpoints and decided to collect first-hand information from mothers. One way to confront the oppression of mothers is to give them a voice and help them speak up.

This research was a response to the problem of blaming mothers for incest. I had multiple purposes for undertaking this research. First of all, this study aims to expand the narrow range of existing literature in the area of incest, especially regarding the mother population. Secondly, as an extension beyond studies completed by Myer (1985), Sirles and Franke (1989), and Elbow and Mayfield (1991), the documentation of the experiences of mothers of incest victims could provide a more reliable picture of these mothers from their own perspective. Thirdly, in this research project, I intended to empower mother-participants in a form of researcher-participant collaboration. Fourthly, by involving participants from the very beginning of the research process, I hoped that my sharing of knowledge and skills could provide them with confidence to take control of their lives. That is to say, these women do not have to passively accept their described roles as inadequate wives and mothers. They could take the ownership in searching for a solution to the problem of mother-blaming. Finally, this research project aimed to increase the awareness of

the community. Through a better understanding of these mothers' experiences, community members as well as service providers were encouraged to develop a wider network of support and services to help families deal with incest.

## METHODOLOGY

### Design

The design of this proposed study is a qualitative one. Kirk and Miller (1986) point out that "qualitative research is a particular tradition in social science that fundamentally depends on watching people in their own territory and interacting with them in their own language, on their own terms" (p.9). This is to say that in order to qualify as qualitative research, the study has to be naturalistic in that the researcher must not do anything to alter the reality which is under study.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) have stated five basic beliefs of the naturalistic paradigm: 1) realities are multiple, constructed, and holistic, 2) knower and known are interactive and inseparable; 3) only time-and context-bound working hypotheses are possible in research; 4) all entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping, so that it is impossible to distinguish causes from effects; and 5) inquiry is value-bound.

There are several reasons why I prefer qualitative methods to quantitative ones. First, I am attempting to bridge the gap in the existing literature regarding the portrait of mothers of incest survivors. Strauss and Corbin (1990) say, "qualitative methods can be used to uncover and understand what lies behind any phenomenon about which little is yet known" (p.19). For this chosen research topic, the use of quantitative methods can only provide me with limited and too condensed information on the experience of mothers of incest victims and the problem of blaming them for the incestuous relationship. However, through qualitative interviews

with individual mothers, I will be able to obtain detailed information on how they feel about the incestuous relationship in their families and what they experienced when dealing with the problem of incest.

Second, parallel to the above reason, I wish to present a self-descriptive picture of these mothers. While the design of quantitative methods is inclined to cast participants in certain modes of personality, behaviour, or attitude, the design of qualitative methods provides participants with an opportunity to present themselves in a personal way. Although quantitative methods may provide me with useful aggregate data on a sample from which to draw inferences about the population, the findings only pertain to abstract entities. With qualitative methods, I can obtain personalized data about individual women's experiences from which to make sense of the mothers' perspectives. In this sense, the findings pertain to real persons not abstractions.

Third, I am trying to raise people's awareness of the problems of women's oppression and mother-blaming with which mothers of incest victims are associated. In this kind of research, numbers and figures cannot tell people what exactly these mothers' experiences are and how they feel they have been treated. The "thick description" with which qualitative methods are identified can help people understand the problem from a perspective that is different from what was described in literature.

Fourth, as a woman and community psychologist, I am concerned about the psychological well being of mothers of incest victims. Thus, I seek a research process

that can both make these women feel more comfortable in participating in the research and empower them through their participation. Walsh-Bowers (1992) points out that, traditionally, the relationship between psychologists and citizens is based on a fundamentally undemocratic model. He explains, "this relationship enculturates citizens in subordinate roles with scientist-professionals, muting the expression of citizens' fundamental liberties, thereby providing findings of dubious scientific value" (p.2-3). In quantitative studies, participants are expected to be passive in responding to the multiple-choice questionnaire or interviewer. However, in qualitative interviews, participants are encouraged to take an active role in expressing themselves. When these mothers feel that they have more control over the interview, they will feel more comfortable in participating and be more willing to share their experiences.

Rappaport (1990) believes that the priority of research should be the giving of power to the minority and ethnic groups who do not have power. Mothers of incest victims are a group of powerless women who need to be empowered. It is important for me to make sure that the design of this study will empower them, rather than disable them. Walsh-Bowers (1992) states:

Psychologists can best actualize respect for the dignity and welfare of citizens by practicing a moral imperative of social ethics, based on the values of relationality, distributive justice, empowerment, and popular participation in decision-making. (p.13)

Having an opportunity to participate in research design, making decisions, drawing conclusions and generating recommendations, mothers were not merely the object of research; they could work with me to decide what questions should be asked in

the interview, how this study should be carried out, how data should be organized to reflect their true experiences, and how conclusions and suggestions should be made to help other mothers of incest victims as well as helping professionals deal with the issue in a more adequate way.

For the above reasons, I started my study with discussions with service providers, mothers of incest victims, incest survivors, and other people who have been involved in this area. Through lobbying for collaborators in doing this study, I aimed to enable interested individuals to form an advisory committee. I expected this committee to play a steering role in the entire research. My knowledge and skills in doing research could become one of the resources which the committee would use.

In qualitative interviews, by talking and listening to mothers of incest victims closely, we could have the chance to enter into their lives and understand their experiences from within. Patton (1990) states, "qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit" (p.278). Nevertheless, the quality of the information obtained during an interview is dependent on both the interviewee and interviewer. The making up of an interview guide could help both of them to focus on the topic that is of interest to the study.

An interview guide is a list of questions or subtopics that are to be covered in the interview. Patton (1990) indicates:

The interview guide helps make interviewing across a number of different people more systematic and comprehensive by delimiting in advance the issues to be explored. ...It keeps the interactions focused but allows individual perspectives and experiences to emerge. (p.283)



Since the sharing of personal experience deeply involved the mothers' emotions, when they tried to capture all the details from their memories, they might not be able to focus on certain aspects that are of interest to the research. From my experience, some interviewees rather responded to questions which made them feel more focused and productive; otherwise, they felt as though they were talking in circles without getting anywhere.

In this study, I was the interviewer. Originally, I planned to train mother-participants to be interviewers too if they were interested in conducting interviews with other interviewees, but because my committee members expressed some concern over the issue of interviewer-effects, I decided to conduct all the interviews by myself. Having an interview guide also helped me to be more confident in collecting the most relevant information from the interview. Therefore, in order to help both the interviewer and interviewee focus on sharing that concerns the research, it is appropriate to have a set of guiding questions to be used in all interviews.

I was prepared to hold a community forum after the completion of the preliminary analysis. The forum was meant to serve four purposes: 1) to provide participants with feedback from this research; 2) to provide people who have been involved or affected with a chance to share their experiences publicly if they wish; 3) to provide service providers with an opportunity to unlearn the misconceptions implanted in their minds through education and socialization; 4) to promote collaboration among concerned citizens, mothers of incest victims, and helping professionals in making suggestions for future directions of service development for

incestuous families.

### The trustworthiness of this study

Lincoln and Guba (1985) say that the basic issue in relation to the trustworthiness of a study can be as simple as answering the question: "how can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to, worth taking account of" (p.290). Modifying the four criteria of trustworthiness proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), I asked myself the following questions: 1) how do I establish confidence in the findings of this study? 2) will similar findings be reproduced given similar conditions? 3) will the findings of this study be determined by my personal biases, motivations, interests, or perspectives?

First of all, to answer the question, "how do I establish confidence in the findings of this study", I must go back to the basic beliefs of the naturalistic paradigm. The first belief states that realities are multiple, constructed, and holistic (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). That is to say, there is no one set of absolute truths in our social reality. At any point of time, there may be more than one reality waiting to be discovered. What I found from this study was a result of the approach I chose to enter the field under study. Because I believe that "realities are multiple", I do not have to convince others that the findings of this study are the only truths in our social world, and I do not have to be excessively preoccupied with the desire of establishing the trustworthiness of this study.

I am not saying that by adopting the values of naturalistic paradigm, I, as a

researcher, do not have to be responsible for providing a trustworthy description of the mothers' experiences. The way I chose to establish confidence in the truth of the findings is through the involvement of mothers of incest survivors. Their experiences are the interest of this study. This is the kind of truth that I wanted to find out. To involve mother-participants in the process from designing the study to making sense of the data, as well as making recommendations to deal with the problem of incest and mother-blaming, is a way to establish confidence in the truth of the findings. In addition, as information (including the preliminary findings) was fed continuously back to the advisory committee for comment and discussion, the findings of this study were therefore validated.

In regards to the second question, "will similar findings be reproduced given similar conditions", I shall review another basic belief of the naturalistic paradigm. Lincoln and Guba (1985) believe that in research only time-and context-bound working hypotheses are possible. In other words, whether the same set of hypotheses can be used later on for other similar studies is debatable, not to mention the possibility of obtaining similar results. The logic here is as simple as Walters (1990) expresses it, "There is no predictable blueprint that regulates the pattern of discovery" (p.461). Therefore, I would say that the findings of this study may be transferable, given similar conditions of time and context, but the findings per se do not aim to generalize to all mothers of incest victims.

As a naturalistic inquirer, I believe the experience of each mother is unique. Although all mothers are put in the same kind of paradoxical situation as I have

discussed earlier (p. 29-34), different mothers might encounter different difficulties and treatment in their lives. Although mother-participants in this study shared some similar feelings and experiences, their personal stories are independent of others'. It is clear that all their past experiences affected the way they perceive themselves, others, the society at large, as well as themselves in relation to others and the society. Such experiences also have great impact on how they would react to different entities. There is no doubt that all these dimensions are things that I or other researchers cannot manipulate to create similar conditions for our studies.

When it is impossible to create similar conditions, there is no guarantee for similar findings. Atkinson and Heath (1991) conclude:

Researchers should be given the freedom to immerse themselves in unique experiences, follow their instincts and hunches, allow insights to arise, and then illustrate these insights vividly enough so that their colleagues and community members can understand them, try them out, and evaluate them for themselves. (p. 163)

Therefore, establishing the trustworthiness of the insights generated through exploratory research is not only the job of the researcher, it is also the job of those who are consumers of the research.

In order to answer the third question, "will the findings of this study be determined by my personal biases, motivations, interests, or perspectives", I must restate that inquiry is value-bound (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Personal values and preferences are always involved in a researcher's choice of a particular research area and methodology. Atkinson and Heath (1991) point out that "each angle or method of observation has its own bias and limitations, values cannot be separated from

facts" (p.164).

I admit that I have my own values in carrying out this study. The values that I have were stated explicitly in previous sections, especially from pages 25 to 34. Instead of doing research that reinforces the conventional portrait of a bad mother, I dedicated this study to uncovering the experiences of mothers of incest survivors, and provide them with an opportunity to share how they feel and what supports they need in the process of dealing with this kind of family crisis. However, this does not mean that the findings of this study are therefore merely reflections of my values. This study was designed to be done by collective efforts of mother-participants, they were involved in the process of the study. The findings were derived from the perspectives of mothers by quoting them directly. Therefore, this study is no longer subjected to my own interests or values; it is also the collective exploration of the experiences of mothers. Lincoln and Guba (1985) say, "if multiple observers can agree on a phenomenon their collective judgement can be said to be objective" (p.292).

#### Research questions

When I proposed this study, I had made up a list of possible questions to ask mother-participants during interviews. After the advisory committee was formed, I invited members to think about some questions that would be useful to understand the experiences of mothers of incest victims. In the second committee meeting, we shared ideas and compared our individual question-lists; we found that many of our questions were similar. From there on, we decided what questions were more

relevant to the study, and defined the sequential order for these questions. The following is the interview guide that I used for every individual interview with mother-participants:

1. How would you describe your family before the discovery of incest?
2. When did the incestuous relationship begin and when did you realize it?
3. What were your reactions to the discovery of the incestuous relationship?
4. How has the incestuous relationship between your husband and daughter affected you personally? (including relationships with individual family members and extended family members)
5. What kinds of support or services have you received from formal and informal resources ?
6. What was your experience with the professionals who were involved with your family? (including legal systems, and social service systems)
7. What kinds of support or services would you like to see improved?
8. Looking back, is there anything that you needed to help you deal with incest but could not gain access to?
9. Would you like to comment on or add to the discussion, something related to an area not specifically covered in this interview?
10. How did you feel about the interview? Is there anything I could do to improve it?

In addition to the questions alluded to above, in the beginning of each interview, I chatted with the mother for a while and asked her for some background

information. For example, one mother told me about her and her partner's occupations, how many children she has, and how many daughters were abused.

### Data collection

In qualitative research, sampling is purposeful. The major reason for purposeful sampling is to select relevant cases for in-depth study. Patton (1990) says:

The purpose of purposeful sampling is to select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study. ...Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling. (p.169)

Therefore, it was reasonable for me to recruit mother-participants from different sources through informal networking.

Originally, I tried to solicit formal collaboration with Community Justice Initiatives, where I did my practicum. However, the feedback from staff there was not very promising, so I decided that I should use an informal networking approach to lobby for mothers' participation. I started with one woman whom I knew formerly during the practicum. When I told her that I would be doing research to document mothers' experiences, she immediately told me that she would be interested in helping me set up an advisory committee and being interviewed. In addition, an incest survivor, whom I knew through my practicum, had tried to help me find mother-participants by distributing invitation letters to friends, but somehow these potential participants did not contact me.

In addition to personal connections, I posted a letter of invitation on the two bulletin boards in Community Justice Initiatives with which a mothers' group was

associated. I also asked the group leader to distribute the letter of invitation in the mothers' group and encourage group members to contact me if they were interested. Besides, I sent invitation letters to other social service agencies such as Citizens Concerned with Crimes against Children, Catholic Family Services, Family and Children's Services (both Kitchener and Cambridge), and K-W Sexual Assault Counselling Centre. I also called some other community agencies such as St. Monica House, Interfaith Counselling Centre, Lutherwood Centre, Anselma House, K-W Hospital's psychiatric services, and so on, but they either told me that they did not have the kind of clientele or asked me to fill out a thick application before I could post up anything about this study on their bulletin boards. Considering the time constraints of the present study, and seeing no positive response from these agencies, I decided not to send out any research applications.

Following a period of searching and lobbying, the advisory committee was formed. This committee consisted of four members: two mother-participants, one volunteer, and myself. In the very beginning of the data collection period, there was one woman who called me after she received the letter of invitation from the group leader at Family and Children's Services. She expressed an interest to be interviewed and wanted to meet with me in order to know more about the study. However, after a preliminary interview, I learned that her situation did not meet the definition of this study because the incestuous relationship in her family was between siblings. So, I did not conduct a formal interview with her. After six months of searching, five mothers from informal sources agreed to be interviewed. In the last month of the



data collection period, I learned that a new mothers' group formed which was a joint-effort project between CJI and 4Cs. I contacted CJI again and talked to one of the group leaders. After she talked to group members about the study, three women expressed an interest in being interviewed. However, it turned out that only one of them met the definition of this study. One of the two mothers who did not meet the definition expressed a strong desire to be interviewed; she wanted to talk about her experience. I told her that because the incestuous relationship in her family was different from other families, her information would not be incorporated into the analysis. Finally, because this woman said she did not care whether her information would be used or not, I interviewed her for about an hour. I will briefly report her experience at the end of the results section.

#### The process

As alluded to above, the process of recruiting participants started with only one mother whom I knew from my practicum. From there I found more and had the advisory committee formed. The volunteer on the advisory committee was a board member of a community agency. She found two other women who also wanted to participate in this study. Therefore, by then I had five women to be interviewed. Every time when I was informed that there was a woman who was interested in being interviewed, I called her in order to provide her with a chance to know more about the study before scheduling an interview. Since most of the women learned about the study prior to my first contact, they tended to have no questions about the study. Because many of these women were still dealing with the crisis of incest at the time

of the study, their schedules were quite unstable; so, I had to call them the day prior to the interview for confirmation. When they could not make it or did not show up, I had to phone them again for re-scheduling. Sometimes if the mother did not have a copy of the invitation letter, or if she wanted to know what exactly she would be asked in the interview, I sent her all the information she wanted prior to the time we met.

During interviews, I gave each woman an information letter (Appendix 2) which explained the detail of this study and what the interview was all about. Every mother-participant was encouraged to ask questions at that point. Then, I explained to the mother what the consent form was about and read her her rights. Again she was encouraged to ask for clarification if anything was unclear to her. At this point, if she still agreed to be interviewed, then I asked her to sign the consent form before we proceeded. All of the mothers had no hesitation in being interviewed after briefing.

Of the seven interviews, one was done at a community agency, two were done at my apartment, four were done at the woman's house. Each interview lasted about 60 to 120 minutes, depending on how much the woman wanted to share and whether the interview was done at her home. There was distraction when the interview was done at the woman's house. During the interview, I tape-recorded the dialogue and jotted down some notes regarding the woman's emotions, her body language, or her interaction with her children. All of the women whom I interviewed offered me a chance to talk to them again if I were to have a problem with transcribing their

tapes. I called five of them to clarify a few words that were unclear on the tape.

The first woman I interviewed suggested that perhaps I should schedule a meeting for all the participants in order to create a sense of community among themselves. When I interviewed other women, I told them that there was such a suggestion, and I asked them if they would be interested in such a meeting. They all expressed an interest and asked me to inform them if there would be a meeting. I reported the idea and the women's responses to the Advisory Committee. The committee thought that it would be great if I could use the meeting to obtain supplementary data if necessary, to provide participants with preliminary findings, and to discuss further action if possible.

Following up on the suggestion, I phoned all the participants and worked with them to identify a time that could accommodate most of the women. On the phone, I made it clear to them that they had no obligation to attend this meeting. Some women told me that they liked the idea and would try their best to attend, but since there was so much turmoil happening in their lives, they made no promises. Eventually, a meeting was held at my place but only two women showed up. One woman phoned me later and sent her apology because she forgot about the meeting until it was too late to make it. I will report on this meeting in the results section.

#### Data analysis

Working within the naturalistic paradigm, I did not have to rely on an a priori theory or "variables" that are usually defined by the orthodox research paradigm. As a naturalistic proponent, I believe in the idea that theories will emerge from the

inquiry. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) state:

Data accumulated in the field thus must be analyzed inductively (that is, from specific, raw units of information to subsuming categories of information) in order to define local working hypotheses or questions that can be followed up.(p.203)

Since inductive data analysis aims to uncover embedded information from the raw data, one of the most important jobs of the researcher is to identify the embedded information and make sense of it.

The data generated from the six focused interviews were voluminous; the length of each transcription varied from 25 to 45 pages per interview. I tried to organize the information in an exhaustive and understandable fashion which could help us form an unclouded perception of these mothers' experiences. In the following paragraphs, I will report the process of determining an analytical technique and the procedures I used to analyse the data and generate the findings.

In the process of determining the most appropriate analytical procedure for this study, I found that analytical techniques, such as unitization and categorization (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), and coding procedures (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), are very similar in nature. In fact, both the comparative analysis and coding procedures are rooted in grounded theory which was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). According to grounded theory, as Strauss and Corbin (1990) explain, when starting a research project, "one does not begin with a theory, then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge" (p.23). Given the fact of the shared resemblance of the analytical techniques (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss

& Corbin, 1990), I decided to integrate the essences of the three approaches to develop my own analysis procedure.

Basically, the process of unitization and categorization refers to the procedures by which raw data are first separated according to their boundaries and then organized into categories according to their similarities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). After these procedures, all categorized data would be analyzed for content.

In regard to the coding procedures, Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest that similar data should be grouped and given conceptual labels as "concepts"; then, these concepts should be compared in terms of their similarities and differences to form "categories". All these categories would be connected by means of their relationships to form "themes". When data are ready to be organized under certain themes, the researcher will be able to present the embedded information in a systematic way which allows him/her to develop a theory for the phenomenon that has been studied.

With comparative analysis, Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest that, while coding an event for a category, the researcher should compare it with the former events in the similar and different groups that were coded under the same category. In addition to coding information from the raw data by giving conceptual labels and categories, Glaser and Strauss encourage researchers to write "memos". They state:

Memo writing on the field note provides an immediate illustration for an idea. Also, since an incident can be coded for several categories, this tactic forces the analyst to use an incident as an illustration only once, for the most important among the many properties of diverse categories that it indicates. (p.108)

Glaser and Strauss (1967) believe that the practice of memo writing can later help

the researcher to develop his/her theory. When the researcher rearranges the memos and field notes for writing up a theory, s/he can have sufficient illustrations for each idea.

Referring to the techniques and procedures alluded to above, I tape-recorded every single interview and transcribed it verbatim. I repeatedly listened to the tape in order to identify every single word. When reading through each transcript, I tried to make sense of the data by asking questions as I read. For example, I asked myself: "what is this sentence telling me?"; "what does this paragraph represent?"; "are these sentences supporting the previous one or do they represent another concept?". In other words, during the process of analysis, I first examined closely the meaning of a sentence or a paragraph in order to give each event or idea a conceptual label. A conceptual label was a brief summary of an event or a paragraph. This is the procedure I called "coding".

When I finished the above procedures with all the transcriptions, I compared all the codings and started to group them under categories. There were four steps involved in this analytical procedure. First, I extracted similar codings with references from each of the transcripts and put them under different categories. Second, I allowed some overlapping of coded information under different categories. That is to say, some codings were put under more than one category. The reason for doing this was to give myself more chance to determine what codings would be better presented by a specific category. Third, I created more categories than I finally settled on in order to create leeway for further comparison between categories. Thus,

I could determine what grouping of categories would help me better organize the information and present a clearer picture of these mothers' experiences. Fourth, I re-examined all the categories and the conceptual labels underneath. Then, I re-grouped similar categories and checked out excessive ones. In this way, I could move conceptual labels around and organize categories into themes.

In the process of labelling concepts and categories, I also wrote memos on the side to help myself screen out repeated categories and to select appropriate illustrations for different events or ideas. When coding and reading subsequent transcripts, I always compared similar events or ideas to formerly used categories to determine whether they could fit into the same category. Although I allowed myself to be creative, I did not create too many categories that would confuse me in the subsequent analysis. In this process, I also tried to differentiate illustrations for distinctive phenomena and wrote down ideas and thoughts on the memos.

The last step of data analysis was to read through the conceptual labels, categories, and memos in order to develop themes. With the help of the interview guide, informants were more focused on sharing their experiences. However, there was no standardized set of responses or information that I could obtain from these mothers; it was always my job to compare the categories of each transcript and determine whether there were recurring themes that linked certain phenomena and ideas together. When themes were derived, I reflected them on the data to encode the embedded meaning of the information; then, I integrated all the broken pieces together to present a clearer picture of these mothers' experiences.

There are two issues I must discuss here before I move on to the results section. According to both social constructionism and feminist research, knowledge and reality are socially constructed rather than discovered (Gergen, 1985; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988). This is to say that in the process of doing analysis, interpretation is always unavoidable. No matter how hard I tried to remain impartial while analyzing the data, I must acknowledge that to a certain degree interpretation was involved. Even though I intended to objectively provide a precise picture of the mothers' experiences, there was still a possibility that I would have interpreted the data somewhat subjectively in the process of trying to understand the meaning of their experiences. What I did to minimize the possibility of subjectivity or misinterpretation was to provide a great deal of descriptive data and quotations in the results section. I hope that while reading the results section, with its ample supply of quotations, readers can also examine the data to assess whether the analysis is thorough and sensible.

As a researcher, I feel that I must organize the data in a easily understandable way. That was why I examined the data to see whether there were different and similar experiences across all participants. However, I am also obliged to the participants in that I must respect the uniqueness of each individual mother. Mothers of incest survivors are not numbers or statistics, they are individual human beings. Therefore, in the results section, in addition to extracting common themes and looking for similarities and differences, I will also provide readers with an individual profile of each mother whom I interviewed. I hope that by doing so, readers can also



form an impression of each mother and understand her distinctive experience.

## RESULTS

### Individual Profiles

The following stories are summaries of the participants' experiences. Two reasons for providing these summaries: 1) to respect the individuality of participants, and 2) to help readers form an impression of each woman's experience. In order to safeguard confidentiality, all the names given in the stories are pseudonyms. Furthermore, companies or location of work of these women and their partners purposely remain vague. Some women proof-read their own story did so and agreed to the presentation.

#### **Annie**

Annie has two children from her first marriage. Her son is 9 years old and her daughter is 7 years old. At the time this study was conducted, Annie was working part time for a company and doing some volunteer work at a local social service agency.

Annie's ex-husband was a very violent and abusive man. He was an alcoholic and drug dependent. During the years of their marriage, their relationship was not good at all. Her husband subjected Annie to mental abuse and a small amount of physical abuse. He constantly criticized Annie of everything she was doing. For example, when she stayed home with the children, he wanted her to get a job and make some money for the family; when she worked outside the home, he blamed her for not being home, taking care of everything. Annie felt that no matter how hard she tried, he could never be pleased. The worst part of the family was that her

children were privy to the physical abuse and they were also part of the mental abuse. So, when her children were about 4 and 2 years old, Annie decided to leave the abusive relationship.

After separation, Annie was awarded the custody of her children and her ex-husband had access to the children every other weekend. It was about a year later that Annie started to notice some symptoms in her daughter, Flora. She found that Flora would come home crying that her private part hurt. At first, she thought it might be an infection, so she started to eliminate a number of things such as bubble bath or soap, and she also gave her some pinworm medicine. She went through the whole scope of elimination but her daughter's complaints persisted. Finally, Annie took her daughter to the doctor to see if she had an infection, but the doctor could not give her a definite answer. As the entire summer passed, Annie still could not figure out what happened to her daughter.

One night, Flora came home from a weekend visit screaming that her private part was extremely sore, so Annie took her to the emergency ward of a hospital but nothing major was found. This hospital trip was the beginning of the breakdown process where her daughter started to disclose small details of what happened. For example, she would draw a picture about a man with an erection. This disclosure suggested to Annie that there might be something sexual related to her daughter's complaints, therefore, she started to document Flora's behaviour and complaints and brought this matter to the attention of Family and Children's Services (FCS). However, since there was never any substantial physical evidence of sexual abuse,

FCS told her that they could not do anything for her. Later on, because Flora had exhibited tremendous changes in her behaviour, Annie took her to see a child therapist.

Flora changed from a happy girl to a crying girl. She became restless in her bed and often had nightmares. In counselling she kept disclosing bits and pieces of information from her drawings. She also talked about things, such as she was kissed by someone down below and there were two boys who came from England. Annie had some suspicions that her daughter was talking about her own father because he was born in England. Finally, after Christmas Flora came home one day and for about a week she was totally distraught and tearful. One day, she came to Annie and told her that she was really scared because her daddy was hurting her with his fingers and with the metal handle of a spoon. Flora told Annie that her dad would usually take her into the bathroom in the middle of the night or come into her room to do these things on her. Although it was something that Annie had suspected, she was still shocked and angry. She immediately called the child therapist and notified FCS of Flora's disclosure. Annie was told by them that she should not let her kids see their dad.

Since Annie got the children's custody after divorce, her ex-husband kept taking her back to court for custody appeal. Over the past years of custody battle, Annie was awarded custody three times. After Flora's case was reported to FCS, they ordered a psychological assessment for Annie. At that time the case was passed from the original worker to another worker. Prior to the assessment for the sexual abuse,

her ex-husband filed for custody again, so the FCS worker who was involved in the case knew that her ex-husband was going for custody. Nevertheless, neither her ex-husband nor the worker had told Annie and the assessor about the custody appeal, therefore, it was after the assessment that she found out he was going to court for custody.

When the investigation and assessment were done, there were about 14 professionals involved in the trial who gave their testimony in court. All these experts believed that child sexual abuse had happened and thus her daughter's disclosure was validated. However, the judge gave Annie many reasons to prove that she had been an inadequate mother and thus full custody of the children was awarded to her ex husband. At that time Annie was not working, she was on Mother's Allowance (MA), but she was ordered to pay child support. In court, the judge told Annie why she lost the battle. First, she had a boyfriend and their relationship was unstable. Second, she had been on MA which showed that she was teaching her children to abuse the welfare system. Third, the psychological assessment (PA) indicated that she was mentally incapable of looking after her children. Fourth, her PA also showed that she was obsessed by the idea that her daughter was sexually abused by her father rather than anything else. Annie was extremely upset with the diagnosis and the judge's decision. She said she only spent about one and a half hours with the psychiatrist and then she was labelled as having mono-symptomatic delusional disorder. Her access rights to her children were then abrogated.

Annie felt that her case was mishandled by FCS and the judge. Because there

was a custody issue blended in the case, people tended to overlook the more serious problem of child sexual abuse. At the time this study was conducted, Annie lost her children and all of her access rights; she was not allowed to contact her children. She worried about her children's physical and emotional well being. Since the children were granted to their father, Annie learned that her son had tried to commit suicide six times. Annie was very concerned about this and she talked to FCS. However, FCS said it was a custody issue which they were not going to do anything about. Meanwhile, Annie was still trying to seek help and looking for ways to get her custody back.

**Beatrice**

Beatrice is a mother of three children. She had one boy 17 and one girl 13 from her first marriage. Then she had a youngest girl age 5 from her second relationship with her common-law spouse, Karl. While I was conducting this study, Beatrice had separated from Karl and lived alone with her three children. Karl had two boys from his first marriage. After Beatrice left him, he married another woman who had four children from her previous marriage. Beatrice was working full time outside the home in a factory in order to support her children.

Beatrice lived with Karl from 1984 to 1989. At the time they started living together, they agreed not to have babies and Beatrice had her fallopian tubes tied in order to prevent pregnancy. Shortly after they lived together, Beatrice found that Karl constantly put her down by indicating that she could not get along without him, so their relationship became very shaky. She would move out of the house to prove that she would do alright by herself with her two kids, but then Karl would ask her to come back. He would treat her to a trip, buy her things, and promise to treat her better. So, in those years she moved in and out many times. Looking back, Beatrice could not explain why she always went back to the abusive relationship.

A few years later, despite the operation that she had, Beatrice got pregnant again. Karl wanted her to abort the baby, but Beatrice decided to keep her. So, the conflict between them became stronger. Because of that Karl accused Beatrice of everything and always found fault in her. He would call her dirty names and say that the baby was not his. One time Beatrice became very angry and fought with him. She

threw a telephone at him and hit him. Karl called the police in and threatened to lay a charge on her. From this vantage point, their relationship deteriorated even more. There were a few things that made Beatrice feel very uncomfortable. First, she found that Karl was a very sexually oriented man; when she had her period and was unable to have intercourse, he would do some sexual activities beside her in the bed. Second, Karl's brother was a "flasher" who exposed his penis to others. Third, Karl's son used to masturbate on the floor in the living room. When she saw him doing that and suggested that Karl talk to him or ask him to do it in his room, Karl would say it was alright for his son to do it in the living room while they were there. Fourth, when Beatrice was working at nights, sometimes she called home and her older daughter would complain that Karl had been chasing her or fighting with her over something. By the end of 1989, Beatrice left him for good.

Following the separation, the court gave Beatrice custody and Karl access to Laurie. Since then, there were a lot of problems between Beatrice and Karl about access to and support for their daughter, Laurie. In 1990, Beatrice found Laurie came home from access visits physically abused on two occasions. There were bruises on Laurie's face and nose. Beatrice reported this matter to Family and Children's Services (FCS), but they said it was not physical abuse, and they told Beatrice that she was an over-protective mother.

In August 1991, when Laurie was about three and a half years old, she came home from a weekend visit with her father and told Beatrice that she had a sore bum. When Beatrice asked her why, she told her mother that Karl had put his fingers



and the wire of a cordless phone into her vagina. After discussing with a friend, Beatrice called the Crisis Centre and was advised to take Laurie to the hospital and had her examined by a doctor. In the hospital, Laurie told the nurse and the doctor the same thing, but the doctor told Beatrice that although Laurie's vagina looked red and inflamed, he could not conclude that she had been sexually abused because the appearance of the vagina area could be a result of some sort of skin infection. The doctor told Beatrice that he would report the matter to FCS, but he said the child would have to be brought in a hundred times before anybody would really believe her.

When the case was reported to FCS, their first comment was that this is an access issue rather than anything else. Being worried about Laurie's safety and receiving no support from FCS, Beatrice denied Karl's access for 4 months. Her lawyer called in a child psychologist to do an assessment of Laurie once at her house and once at Karl's house. The result of this assessment indicated that what Laurie said was believable and there was some indication that Karl was a child molester. When they finally got to court, the case was presented as an access case, not an abuse case. Karl was given supervised access.

Regardless of the decision made by the court, Karl filed an appeal to change the conditions of his access rights. During the course of this access battle, Beatrice became very ill and lost one of her kidneys. She was hospitalized for about three months. Thus, it was not until September 1992 they met in court again for the access matter. Beatrice found that the judge was not interested in the case at all; he twice

asked them to go into his chamber and urged them to settle the dispute. Finally, Beatrice and Karl reached an agreement consisting of a three-year contract of access: the first year, mainly a supervised access; the second year, an unsupervised access plus some overnight, the third year, unsupervised access with overnights and holidays. At the time, they were still in the first year contract, but there were lots of problems. Karl always threatened to re-appeal for completely unsupervised access to Laurie.

Beatrice felt that the justice system was not fair to her and she did not think that things would change for her. What concerned her the most was to find inexpensive counselling for her daughter and herself. The court had suggested to her to see a private counsellor but that person would charge her \$100 per hour. Thus, Beatrice was lining up for a free counselling service for both herself and Laurie, but she did not know how long it would take her to receive the service. Beatrice said that up to the time of this interview, Laurie still remembered the abuse. She was still having nightmares and talking about the abuse in play situations.

## Connie

Connie has two girls from her previous marriage. Her daughters were about 11 and 7 respectively. Connie was raised in an emotionally hostile family. Her parents had never told their children they loved them nor hugged them. So, Connie always thought that every family was the same as her experience. Connie's ex-husband abused Connie both mentally and physically in the years they were together. Finally, Connie divorced her ex-husband. She had the custody of her daughters and he had access to them every other weekend.

Some time after Connie left her ex-husband, she met Cam. They lived together about a year and a half before they got married. Cam also came from a similar family background and there were civil wars in his native country. According to Connie, Cam was a very controlling and angry husband. The new family as a whole would go places together on weekends just like other families do, but their communication and emotional relationships with each other were weak.

The incestuous relationship between Cam and Connie's oldest daughter, Jo, started shortly after this couple lived together. The relationship lasted about a year and a half before Jo revealed the abuse to Connie. The nature of the sexual abuse was mainly touching and fondling; there was no intercourse. Before Jo told her mother what happened between her and her step-father, Connie was totally unaware of anything.

The disclosure came very suddenly one morning before Connie was ready to go to work. Jo came up to her mother and told her that Cam had sexually abused

her. Connie was completely shocked and overwhelmed; she really did not believe her ears. She trusted that what her daughter told her was not a joke because it must have taken a tremendous amount of courage to tell, but she just could not believe the incestuous relationship could happen. Connie's anger was threefold: She was angry at Cam that he would do such thing to her and Jo; she was angry at herself for not noticing anything; and she was angry at Jo for not telling her right from the beginning. Nevertheless, Connie chose to believe Jo and confronted Cam right away.

After sending her daughters to school, Connie phoned Cam and asked him to come home because she needed to talk to him. When she confronted him the first time, he denied the matter, but when Connie told him to tell the truth, then he admitted what he had done to Jo. Cam's confession led Connie into deeper distress. Although she confirmed that incest had happened, she did not know how to deal with it or what she should do next. By lunch time, Connie took Jo to lunch, told her that she believed her, had confronted Cam, and was thinking of what to do next. That night Cam was still in the house but Connie consciously separated her daughters from him. She was always with her daughters upstairs while Cam was down in the basement by himself.

The next morning, Connie still did not figure out what to do because it was something that never happened in her life--to deal with incest was such a scary idea to her, so she phoned her ex-husband and asked for help, then she went to see a counsellor whom she used to see in the past. It ended up that Connie's ex-husband phoned the police and her counsellor phoned Family and Children's Services (FCS).

Since Connie was very confused and she wanted to have some time alone to sort things out, she sent her daughters to stay with their father for two months. After the case was reported to the police and FCS, Cam was taken out of the house and charged for sexual abuse. Because her own family of origin was quite hostile, nobody would talk to anybody about their personal problem. Also, because incest was not something she thought she could share with people or disclose to her minister, Connie found herself completely isolated. So, she decided to stay with her best friend in order to get some kind of support.

Connie was then going back regularly to see her counsellor. She voluntarily joined a mothers' group at a social service agency, but she was still ordered to join another mothers' group run by FCS. During the crisis, Connie's husband saw this was the perfect opportunity for him to file an custody appeal, so he did. Since Connie did not call the police and FCS by herself, she was considered an inadequate mother who was incapable of protecting her children and dealing with crisis. Therefore, the court gave her a supervision order.

The case of incest had been disclosed more than two years, but Connie was still working on it. She still had the custody of her children, but she had to go into court every six months in order to get the supervision order renewed. In other words, she would be assessed by a social worker periodically to determine if her parenting skills were up to par to keep her daughters. Jo had been going for counselling since the disclosure and she felt that she had done enough. Cam had served his sentence and was on probation. He was still going to an offenders' group run by Community

Justice Initiatives. Both of Connie's daughters wanted Cam to come back to their lives and stay together as a family, so Connie was working on that too. She and Cam had participated in a couples' group and some couple counselling.

At the close of this study, the family was going to family counselling together, and Cam was given supervised access to the children for an hour session at FCS every other week. Connie told me that Cam had changed a lot; his anger was no longer present and they started to talk more about their feelings when they met. However, since communicating his feelings and thoughts were something Cam had never done in his past, he would regress to his old way sometimes and their communication would fall back to the old pattern. Therefore, according to Connie, there were still a lot of things for her and Cam to work on if they were going to get back together. However, Connie found that her relationship with her daughters, especially with Jo, was ten times better than before with which and she was very pleased.

## **Dorcus**

Dorcus had been married to Mike for 21 years and they had two sons 21 and 19 years old, and a daughter 18 years old. The relationship between Dorcus and Mike was quite good to begin with. Since they had their children coming along one after the other in the early years of their marriage, Dorcus had to stay home looking after their children, and thus Mike was the bread-winner of the family. According to Dorcus, Mike had been a good husband and father because he always put his family's needs ahead of everything. However, as years went by, Mike started to drink a lot and their relationship started to erode. Dorcus felt that Mike was still there for the family in that he provided for the family, but he spent whatever was left over on drinking outside the home. Dorcus was left alone to take care of their children and the house. Several years later, Dorcus could not stand this kind of life, so they came to a point of determining whether to split or to talk and work things out. After extended discussion, they decided to leave their home town and live in another province.

Living in a new environment, the family pulled back together again. Both Dorcus and Mike were working full time outside the home, and their children were all going to school. Mike did not go out in the evening at all, and the couple's relationship became much better and closer. Dorcus was quite happy with the change and thought that her marriage was working. When Lynn, her daughter, was about 16, all of a sudden after the Christmas holidays, she told her brothers that she wanted to stay with her friends and did not want to go home. Lynn refused to talk or to see

her parents. Dorcus insisted on finding her and talking to her. Finally, Lynn told her mother that her father had been having sex with her.

The incestuous relationship started when Lynn was about 4 years old and stopped when she was 13. So, Mike was having sex with his daughter for about 9 years, but he had stopped it for 3 years before the disclosure. When Dorcus learned from Lynn about what happened, she immediately held Lynn to her chest, kissed her, and told her that she believed her; they hugged each other and cried together. Dorcus said since she had some suspicions on her own a couple of times in the past years, she had no reservation about believing her daughter.

When Lynn was under ten years old, on one occasion, when Mike was coming home drunk, Dorcus found him sleeping beside Lynn with his penis out. They both were sleeping and there was nothing more than what she saw. She immediately dragged him back to their bedroom. Next morning, Dorcus told Mike what she saw last night. Mike said he was drunk and did not know what happened. Dorcus told him that although Lynn was a child it was not nice if she woke up and saw him with his penis out. She demanded of Mike that if he ever come home drunk again he should either sleep in the sitting room or make sure he could find the right bedroom. Dorcus had also asked Lynn about little things, such as how much she knew about man's body and sexual organs, but Lynn did not answer her questions directly and said nothing about the incestuous relationship. The second incident happened a few years later when Mike was sleeping at night and Dorcus came home late lying beside him, Mike wanted to make love to her. As they were making love, Mike asked



Dorcus: "where is your mother?" Dorcus was puzzled. The next morning, she asked him why he would ask about her mother, he said he was dreaming about the old days while Dorcus was still living with her parents.

After this incident, Dorcus became suspicious. She called Family and Children's Services (FCS) and told them that she suspected something happened between her husband and daughter. People at FCS advised her to do some checking such as go home unexpectedly, and keep a close eye to see whether there was any touching or inappropriate closeness. Dorcus followed those suggestions, she excused herself from work and came home unexpectedly earlier, but she observed nothing peculiar. There was another time when Lynn got some pamphlets from school on incest, Dorcus told her that if anything like that happened, she would like her to tell because the person doing that is sick and she would believe her. Lynn said to her mother that if there was anything she would tell her. Since Dorcus saw nothing and heard nothing, she just assumed that she was over-sensitive, so she was kind of putting the idea behind her back.

After the disclosure, with the support from Mike's brother and his wife, Dorcus went home with them to confront Mike. Mike denied the first time, but when he was told to tell the truth, he admitted. Following the confrontation, the family had a long discussion. Mike regretted what he had done to Lynn and he was willing to seek help. Dorcus and her children decided to let Mike stay in the house as long as he sought professional help. While Mike was waiting for counselling, there was a lot of turmoil happening in the family on Mike's side. Some of his brothers turned

against him and said they were afraid that Mike had done or would do something to their children. They urged Dorcus and Lynn to do something more about it. So, finally, Lynn had to call the police and have Mike charged.

Since Mike had voluntarily stopped sexually abusing Lynn for three years and he put a lot of effort into counselling, his sentence was very brief. After Mike was released and on probation, his family invited him to come home for Christmas on a trial basis. Following this visit, Dorcus and her children felt that they were ready to live with Mike again, so Mike was allowed to return home sooner after he served his sentence. In order to deal with this family crisis and to understand what was going on in their lives, Dorcus, Mike and Lynn participated in group and individual counselling. Dorcus found that she learned a lot through counselling. Before the disclosure, Mike did not believe in counselling at all, but then he had nothing but praise for it. Lynn was still going for counselling, but according to Dorcus, Lynn had some hesitation in the beginning. Dorcus had to put a lot of effort into encouraging her to try. Subsequently, Lynn became more willing to go and tried to open up. Meanwhile, Dorcus felt that her relationship with Lynn was much much closer than before and this was what she had always wanted to happen.

**Emily**

Emily works full time in a social service agency and is a mother of five children all from her first marriage. Among the five children, four of them are daughters and the youngest one is a boy. The age of her children varies from young adolescent to early adulthood. Because her ex-husband was an alcoholic who was extremely abusive, Emily and her children finally left the abusive situation, and then six years ago she met her present partner, David.

According to Emily, David was a silent man who liked his work and thus spent a lot of time working. In the family, he would neither share his thoughts and feelings nor argue with anyone about anything. Inside the house, David would do what he was supposed to do, but he would not spend much of his time to bond with the family. The only family function they had was having everybody in the house. Very rarely would they go out as a family. On the one hand, it seemed that it was always Emily and her children as a group, and David was by himself; but on the other hand, because the children's father was an abusive alcoholic, they were looking up to David and seeing him more as a father than their own father. They all knew how to get their individual time from David.

Three years ago, Emily's ex-husband committed suicide. This tragedy created a lot of turmoil in the family. Emily and her children did not know how to deal with the chaos, but they worked closely together to arrange the funeral and everything. David then started to withdraw himself from the whole thing and became emotionally detached from the family. He changed his working hours from days to afternoons, so

in that way the whole family were going out doing work all day, and when they came home he was off to work. The communication between them and David became very minimal. However, because the children lost their real father, they expected to get more from him, and there was more sibling rivalry. It was a very stressful time for everybody and, according to Emily, David just avoided dealing with it at all.

Having been in an abusive relationship and working full time to support five children, Emily did not really have the time to deal with her abused experience. The death of her ex-husband brought a lot of those experiences back which left her with some very unpleasant and tense feelings. She felt very unhappy with things that happened to her life, thus she decided to take a short break. It was during the March break that Emily took two of her children with her to stay with her sisters for a few days.

The sexual abuse that David perpetrated on Emily's older daughter, Carmen, occurred during the March break, and about a week later he abused her younger daughter, Elma. These were the only two incidents. At that time, they were about 13 and 12 years old. The two sisters did not know that the same thing had happened to each other. A month later, when one sister read the other's diary, they realized that both of them had been told that she was his favourite, and so he touched her and rubbed her breast and vagina. Both Carmen and Elma knew that it was not right for him to touch them, but before they found out the abuse had happened to the other sister, they thought it was just an accident. Carmen was a heavy girl, she was watching TV with David one night and talking with him about her self-esteem when

David tried to feel some of her "heavy spots" and thus rubbed her breast and vagina. Elma came home sick one day and she had some kind of pain on her stomach. David was supposedly rubbing her stomach but then he rubbed her vagina too, so Elma thought perhaps he accidentally slipped his hand or something. When they found out he was lying to them and had been taken sexual advantage of them, they were very angry and decided to tell.

One night when Emily came home after work, she found that one daughter had been doing a lot of crying, so she asked her what happened. Her daughter did not tell her about the abuse; instead she told Emily that she did not like her friend's attitude. Emily did not understand why she was so upset with her friend, but she did not follow up with her for the answer. The next morning, Emily went to work. Her supervisor called her into the office and told her that her daughters had told their teachers about the sexual abuse, so the school called the police, and the police notified her supervisor. When Emily heard that, she was shocked and she did not know what she could do. She was told that she could not see her children until she was informed to do so. Besides the two victimized daughters, her other children would also be interviewed by the police in order to see if anything happened to them.

After investigation, both the police and Children's Aid Society (CAS) confirmed that it was only the two daughters who were sexually abused for the two incidents. David was charged for sexual interference and was sentenced for 4 months plus 2 years probation. However, until this day, the social workers did not tell Emily what exactly happened. It was her daughters who told her how they were abused.

Since she knew about the abuse, Emily found herself having lots of questions to which she wanted answers. However, because incest or child sexual abuse had always been a taboo subject which not a lot of people like to talk about, she could not find anybody to talk to. So, she found that a lot of the questions that she had, she could only discuss with David and find some answers from him.

This family tragedy happened about three years ago. Since then Carmen and Elma have participated in some counselling, Emily participated in a mothers' group for a short while, David attended a men's group and some individual counselling, Emily and David participated in a couples' group, and the whole family attended family counselling. However, Emily found that she still had a lot of things that she did not understand. Apparently, her daughters already forgave what David had done to them, and all the children wanted David to come back to their lives, but Emily still had some reservation over the matter of reconciliation with David. She said she did not know whether she would ever be ready to re-unite with David.

## Fiona

Fiona's first marriage left her with two daughters aged 15 and 11. A few years ago, while she was working part time, she started taking part-time courses in a university. Fiona met her ex-fiancee', Tom, while she was taking one of his courses. After a period of courtship, they got engaged. Since their relationship became more steady, Fiona found that there were lots of boundary issues between Tom and her two daughters.

It seemed that Tom liked to watch Fiona's daughters change their clothing and he would make all kind of comments about their body development. In the very beginning, she thought that perhaps Tom did not know how to deal with girls because he only had boys from his previous marriage. Later on, she found that she had to remind him about his interference with her daughters' privacy. There was one incident in which Fiona's younger daughter was taking a shower and Tom wanted to go enter the bathroom to read her a story, Fiona and he then had a major argument over this matter. Fiona felt that unless her daughter invited him into the bathroom to read her a story, he should never have assumed that it was alright to do so. Tom did not agree with her and expressed that it was her problem not to let him do something for her daughter. At that time Fiona was pregnant with his baby and she felt that Tom was trying to be more dominant. In addition, because she was pregnant she had some problems holding her part-time job. Thus, Fiona felt that he was trying to manipulate her while she was in an economically unstable state.

Fiona said that Tom was a very manipulative man. Shortly after their

relationship began, Fiona started to feel guilty about being involved in a second relationship while the first one was not completely dealt with. She was still trying to extricate herself from the previous marriage and there were a lot of things to be dealt with. However, when she told Tom that she wanted to end the relationship, he accused her of plagiarizing a paper she did for him. Realizing the fact that academically they had a professor-student relationship, apparently there was unbalanced power between them, Fiona stayed in the relationship. At that time she had to deal with her ex-husband, to find a house for her children, and to keep up with her job, thus she did not think she had the mental capacity to fight with Tom. Although Fiona did not end their relationship at that time, Tom still constantly put her down and made her feel that she was academically inadequate.

When their daughter, Maggie, was about a year old, Fiona started to notice that there was something wrong around Maggie's vaginal area, but because it was such a horrendous thing to think that as a father Tom would do something to her, Fiona said she subconsciously suppressed her own suspicion. On the one hand, when she noticed that there might be something wrong while he changed Maggie, she would find an excuse for him and rationalized the situation. On the other hand, she by all means would avoid letting him handle the baby. Nevertheless when she finally had the courage to confront his false accusations and to convince herself that she should leave this man, she ended her relationship with Tom.

After they broke up, Tom left the country for a while. He came back later trying to retain their relationship. Fiona refused to make up with him and applied a



restraining order to prevent him from coming to her house harassing her. So, Tom gave up coming to see her but he wanted to have access to Maggie. In the beginning, Fiona had some reservations about letting him see Maggie because Tom had been restricted in all of his access rights to his sons from previous marriage. She wondered why an upper middle class, professional man would lose all his access to his children. Because of his persistence and her daughter's restlessness, Fiona finally agreed to let him see Maggie. Since Tom was not allowed to come on her property, she had to drop her off and pick her up at the agreed time and place.

The discovery of the incestuous relationship occurred gradually through what Maggie revealed to her mother, her older sisters, and her neighbour friend about the games her father played with her. At different times, Maggie told them that her father urinated with her, bathed with her, tickled her bottom, and played "lick and tickle" with her. Each time when Maggie referred to his touching on her bottom, she pointed to her vagina. In addition to that, Fiona observed a whole range of behavioral changes in Maggie. She would snatch her older sisters' breasts and private parts, she would ask her mother and sisters to play "lick and tickle" with her, and she often cried out from nightmares and said "don't let him take me away! don't let him touch me!" Since these things happened, Fiona went to a child counsellor to seek advice to deal with Maggie's behaviour change.

Hearing so many different incidents and realizing there was something wrong with Maggie, Fiona decided to report her suspicion to Family and Children's Services (FCS) and the police. After hearing the "lick and tickle" game, the counsellor also

called FCS. When a detective came to see Maggie, she told him the same thing, but when he asked her direct questions, she would not answer. So, the detective told Fiona that because of the child's age, she was unable to be a credible witness, and thus the police could not lay a charge on Tom. His advice was that this child should not see her father alone again. Although the detective said that he could not charge Tom, he helped Fiona to draw FCS's attention to investigate the case.

Following the break-up of their relationship and the discovery of incest, Fiona found herself very distressed. Tom had threatened to keep her out of a Masters program which she had been trying to get into. She had to file a sexual harassment complaint to the university to stop him from threatening and chasing her on campus. She had to deal with Maggie's nightmares and thus found herself suffering from sleep deprivation. She had to deal with her other daughters' reaction to the disclosure. Because she was under horrendous stress, she had to take some kind of tranquilizers. When she realized that depressants only put her into a deeper depression, she cut back on them and pulled herself together to face the battle.

When this study was still in process, FCS was regarding this case as a custody issue because Maggie did not tell them anything in the half-hour investigational session. When Fiona filed an appeal requesting supervised access for Tom, the judge did not think there were doubts in the case, so although he ordered a psychological profile of Tom which was not done before the hearing, he granted the father a month of unsupervised access. Fiona found herself being put in an awkward position where she did not know what to do to convince people. Maggie told her mother, her sisters,

her neighbour, the detective and her counsellor about the abuse, but she did not reveal it to the woman worker at FCS. Therefore, Fiona's words were not substantiated. Fiona offered to be tested for honesty, but there was no response. She felt that when she could no longer deny child sexual abuse had happened to Maggie and took deliberate actions to deal with it, her moral judgement was questioned and her effort was devalued.

### Interview Data

Prior to the detailed discussion of the research findings, I would like to present an overview of the experiences of the mother-participants. In addition to some factual information about the incestuous cases, the reader will learn about the following topics: what mothers wanted to know when incest was first disclosed, how they felt about the incestuous relationships between their spouses and daughters, what actions they took to deal with such a family crisis, what they learned from such a tragic experience, how they were treated by their communities, what they thought about the services they received, what kind of struggles they had gone through, and what kind of changes they wanted. I have organized these topics in the following outlines:

- A. Relationship between the abusers and victims
- B. Characteristics of the perpetrators
- C. The nature of child sexual abuse
- D. Ways of discovery
- E. Mothers' immediate responses after discovery
- F. The immediate reactions of the perpetrators
- G. Mothers' feelings and further reactions to the discovery of incest
- H. The impact of incest on mothers
- I. The effect on their relationships
- J. The impact of disclosure on other children and the family as a whole
- K. Mothers' support from informal sources

- L. Mothers' support from formal sources and their experiences with helping professionals
- M. Experience with the problem of mother-blaming
- N. Some persistent predicaments
- O. The advantages of being in self-help groups
- P. Improvement recommended in community services

Although it was not part of the study design, it just turned out that the participants of this study could be equally divided into two distinct types. Of the six women whom I interviewed, three of the incestuous relationships occurred while the woman was still living with her partner (type A family), the other three occurred after the woman separated from her partner (type B family). Therefore, in this subsection, if there were fundamental differences between the two types of women, I will report them as two separate groups. Otherwise, I will report their common experiences and feelings as a whole.

The age range of all the participants varied from early thirties to early forties. Four out of the six women had a full time job, one woman had a part-time paid job, and another woman was a part-time university student. In terms of race, all mother participants were white. Of the six families, five of them had only one daughter who was sexually abused, and one family had two daughters who were abused.

#### A. Relationship between the abusers and victims:

In four of the six families, the incestuous relationship was between a biological father and a daughter, and in two of them the abused relationship was between a

step-father and a step-daughter. Since one family had a step relationship involving two daughters, there were three sexually abused victims from these two successive families.

#### B. Characteristics of the perpetrators:

Almost all abusers were described as somewhat controlling and/or abusive. The form of abuse varied from mental, sexual, to physical. However, the most reported form of abuse was mental abuse. One woman reported both physical and sexual abuse on top of mental abuse. One woman reported both physical and mental abuse. One woman reported only sexual abuse.

#### C. The nature of child sexual abuse:

None of the sexual abuse cases involved actual intercourse. Basically, the abuse in type A families involved inappropriate touching, kissing, fondling, rubbing on the breasts and vagina. In some cases, the victims were asked to touch the perpetrators' private parts too. The abuses in type B families involved touching, kissing, licking, fondling around the genital area, and digital penetration with fingers, spoons, and telephone wire.

#### D. Ways of discovery:

Almost all of the incestuous relationships were reported by the victims directly as an obnoxious event, except one very young child presented it as a fun game that her father played with her during weekend visits. In terms of the way these mothers learned about the incestuous relationship, there was no apparent difference between type A and B families.

Cf the six families, three mothers either observed some physical or environmental evidence before their daughters told them directly about what happened. After they had some suspicions, two of the mothers took deliberate steps trying to eliminate doubts. However, no matter what they tried, they just could not confirm until the day they were told by their daughters what happened. The other mother who also observed some physical evidence on her daughter did not do anything. She said that it was too scary to think that her child's father would do such an awful thing to her. She said she was in a denial state then.

Of the remaining mothers, they reported that they did not notice anything extraordinary which would make them suspect anything like incest. They observed no unusual closeness between their daughters and spouses in their presence. They said there was nothing transparent for them to think of any possibility that child sexual abuse could happen in their families. Therefore, if their daughters had not revealed the abuse, these mothers would not have known of its occurrence.

#### E. Mothers' immediate responses after discovery:

Different women reacted differently to the discovery of incest, but in general, all women reported that they felt shocked and overwhelmed. A mother said, "I just kind of flipped down" when she was told by her daughter that her father had been hurting her private part. Another mother said, "I was shocked, I mean...it was just such a...tragic feeling...to have this little child being abused."

Many women also reported that at the moment they learned what happened, they felt immobilized. They did not know how to think straight or know what was the

right thing to do. However, although these women were quite disturbed when hearing about the incestuous relationship, all of them managed to communicate to their daughters that they believed them and were willing to side with them.

One mother, because she had some suspicions prior to the disclosure, was able to tell her daughter right away that she believed in everything she told her. When the mother described the chaotic disclosure, she said, "I know I cried and I screamed; I held her and I kissed her. I told her that I believed her." Another mother reported that her daughters disclosed the abuse to their teachers, thus, she was not allowed to see her daughters right after she learned about the abuse. This mother was forced to be separated physically from her daughters for about six hours for investigation. During those hours, she was extremely restless. What she wanted was to be with her daughters to support them. When she finally got the chance to see her daughters at the police station, what she did immediately was, "I picked up my children, I gave them a hug, told them I believed them."

Confronting the perpetrator was another immediate response of these mothers. Type A mothers confronted their spouses face to face immediately after the discovery. Although these women did not have a clear idea about what they could or should do after hearing their spouses' confession, they just wanted to know the truth from them. Some mothers confronted their spouses alone, others did it accompanied by friends or relatives.

Since type B mothers were not living with the offenders at the time of discovery, their ways of confrontation were to challenge their ex-spouses' honesty and



deny their accesses. For this group of mothers, they believed that one of the effective ways to protect their daughters was to keep them physically away from the offenders.

#### F. The immediate reactions of the perpetrators:

All of the offending spouses from type A families denied the abuse when they were confronted by their wives/partners the first time. However, when these women insisted that they believed their daughters and wanted the offenders to tell the truth, these men admitted what they had done to their daughters or step-daughters.

Interestingly, none of the perpetrators from type B families admitted anything. In other words, for this group of men, from the first day of disclosure, they continued to deny their behaviour. When the women in type B families challenged their ex-spouses' access to the victims, these men in turn threatened to fight for full custody of the daughter.

#### G. Mothers' feelings and further reactions to the discovery of incest:

Some mothers reported ambiguous feelings in believing and disbelieving the abuse. Because incest was an alien subject to them, these women claimed that sometimes they wished incest did not really happen. A mother from type B families said, "...it was something that I had suspected, but I never wanted to have to face that...you know, I never really wanted to hear her say, yes, he's abusing me." Another mother who had no suspicion prior to the disclosure felt the same way too. She stated:

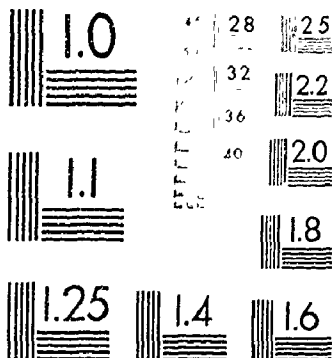
Yes, I believed my daughter, but it was not something that you wanted to believe, so, even though you can't have it both ways, you are hoping that...it's as stupid as what you think that you are hoping that something is going to work out that he's going to say "yes, she's not

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lying and no, he didn't do it." I mean it is not possible but that's, you know, in my mind that's what I was hoping for.

Another woman pointed out the fact that sometimes when the stress was too overwhelming, mothers under such critical circumstances would rather deny sexual abuse had happened. Denial or disbelief could help release some stress temporarily.

She explained:

There was a point where we would want to go into denial too, and tried to find, figure out what it couldn't have happened, or you know maybe it wasn't as bad as it seems, you know. Yeah, we did some pretty weird stuff too.

It seemed that mothers who were still living with their spouses at the time of disclosure (type A families) reported more confusion and anger. Besides telling their daughters they believed them and confronting their spouses for their daughters, these mothers did not know what direction to take. Their feelings were mixed with love, anger, sympathy and hate. A mother said:

When she [her daughter] told me, I think it was like a burden that was lifted from me because it was out. It's not something that I had to wonder about any more, or suspect, and...I still shocked because it was...different in thinking it and facing it in reality. ...it was just like my whole life had been nothing but a lie. Everything that I ever believed him was just drove away. My marriage was a lie. ...Right in the beginning I thought you know, ok, this is happened to Lynn, and this is Mike, he's sick. He took away Lynn's childhood. He ruined her... and he's a sick person. But, he's my husband and I love him. Now what do I do?

Generally, these women's anger were threefold. They were angry at their husbands/partners for betraying them and hurting their daughters. They were angry at themselves for not knowing or not knowing enough to prevent it. They were angry at their daughters for not telling them right after it happened. Again, their anger was

mixed with sympathy. A woman reported:

Uh, [one of the main things I felt was] anger. I felt sorry for him because the first thing came to my mind was this guy really needed help. Uh, anger at myself for I didn't know. Anger at my daughter that she didn't tell me. Uh, I guess anger was one of the main ones. ...Uh, I think I was angry for a bunch of reasons with him. Uh, I trusted him and that probably was the biggest one.

Sometimes, these women's feelings of anger were also mixed up with some self-inflicted blame. A woman stated:

[Some of my reactions included] anger, revenge, and because of that point I had no idea what he had done. I started to questioning where I was, why hadn't I noticed that, uh how could I let this happen. ...Most of the anger was at him. Most of it was, uh, you got to pay, you know.

All of the mothers in type A and B families sought external help from friends, relatives, and professionals. Some of them talked to friends or relatives before they reported the case to police or Family and Children's Services (FCS). However, it seemed that women in type B families were more determined in taking legal actions and separating their daughters from the offenders. They were more decisive in reporting the abuse to concerned authorities. Because their daughters were younger (ranging from two and a half to four years old) than the ones in type A families, this group of mothers expressed more concern over their daughters' physical health. A mother said:

I phoned all afternoon, all day...when she told me about the licking and the tickling. ...Itold the counsellor. ...Iphoned around, I got a hold with someone from the 4Cs' house...and I phoned FCS [to report the abuse]. ...Iphoned the police, the police came. I told them the whole story. ...Iphoned my family doctor, and I went in and talked to him. ...I took her to paediatrician, the paediatrician told me that she looked ok now, but he couldn't say what she looked like before not having seen her, but he could establish now that she was with him the guideline or

the parameter of normal.

Another mother said:

I went to a friend to find out what he did. [From there] we called the Crisis Centre. ...I wanted to take her to the Crisis Centre to see if she was physically harmed. Take her to emergency rather than waiting for something to happen. So, I went up to K-W hospital. ...The crisis Centre was the one told us to [take my daughter to the hospital]. ...we didn't know where to go.

H. The impact of incest on mothers:

The incestuous relationship between their daughters and spouses affected mothers in four major aspects: intellectually, psychologically, physically, and financially. Not all the mothers reported their experiences in terms of all these aspects. Also, the degree of the impact varied from individual to individual. Nevertheless, mothers from both types of families reported some similar experiences

a) Intellectual growth

Two mothers reported that they had gained some insights from the crisis. A mother from a type A family said that she learned something new about the concept of family. This woman claimed that before the disclosure, she was not aware of the fact that lacking communication and passionate expression in her family of origin had a negative impact on the way she constructed her immediate family. She stated:

I didn't come from a family it was like that... In my family, there was no physical contact at all. No hugging, no playing, no anything between parents and kids. ...my father had never told any of his kids that he loves them, never. ...That's the way I grew up. ...I thought it was normal. ...It was like I have to be taught [how to express my passionate feelings to my kids]. ...I always always told myself that my family would be different; that it was almost like I wanted to break the cycle that I knew it was there. In my own mind, I thought I was doing it, ...but when I look back, I think, I am not sure how I thought I was doing it then

because I wasn't. ...But, now I feel I have done it. ...I don't know why it took something like that for me to open my eyes, that just realize how bad it was. ...I don't think if there wouldn't been a crisis, I don't think that [the change] would have happened. ...And now I look at it (the crisis), and I consider it a blessing.

Another woman from a type B family also reported intellectual growth in the area of child sexual abuse. She said since she was forced to deal with the issue, she read a lot of books, spoke to different people who have expertise, and attended workshops and conferences. She said, "it's certainly made us aware that it [child sexual abuse or incest] can happen to anybody."

#### b) Psychological damage

When these mothers talked about how their psychological well-being was affected, the negative effects could be long term. First of all, these women worried a lot and they felt helpless when they started to deal with the sexual abuse of their daughters. One mother reported:

I'm afraid of her well being. I've been, I worry about it any time that she's not good...Whether she's supervised or not supervised...that I am concerned about her. ...I don't know...because there's nothing I can do.

Another mother reported that when she was left alone to deal with the crisis, she felt extremely lonely and helpless too. She found nobody she could talk to or discuss alternatives with. She stated:

uh, so at the time when it happened, it was such a taboo subject that as a parent, you need, I as an individual I need a lot of the answers. Uh, because of the support aren't out there, and nobody really understands how the mom's feeling, it ended up that the offender very often was the only person you can talk to. ...You can read, and you can uh, but even through reading there were something there that doesn't really fit. ...It was tough and there was nobody but you to do it. Nobody, you know, because by that time everybody was straight from

you. ...It's just like left that to mom. ...So, I was just struggled through barely! And it was very difficult.

Some women reported that they often suffered from the detrimental feeling of guilt. A mother said:

...but that you know I feel so guilty that I should have confronted, I should have done something. But, he had me so beaten down and defeated that I was barely functional. ...The guilt is the primary thing. You know, hindsight was 20/20. I should have seen all these things. I should have dealt with that then, I didn't.

Sometimes the feelings of guilt were not only derived from not taking early enough action to deal with the abuse, but also from the way they dealt with their daughter all along after disclosure. A mother reported that when her daughter repeatedly asked her to play the sex games her father played with her, this woman became irritated. She yelled at her daughter and told her to stop because it was a wrong request. When she realized that her daughter was scared, she felt very guilty about not dealing with her request calmly.

Another mother shared that her feeling of guilt was so mixed that she felt tortured by it. On the one hand, this woman thought that although she did not find out about the incestuous relationship, she had tried different ways to uncover it, thus, she should not be held responsible for it. But, on the other hand, after realizing that her daughter had suffered from abuse in those years, this woman blamed herself for negligence. Therefore, she felt guilty about not being able to help her daughter out.

This mother says:

In regards to my feeling guilty about what happened, I don't think there was a lot of guilt there because I was...I wasn't alert enough that I've seen something that was there, ...and I did everything but come

right out and ask, you know, and that, for that I don't feel guilty. I feel guilty because I didn't see more. ...I am torn apart for Lynn that she had to go through that, and that I couldn't be there to help her.

All women reported that because their emotions were affected they were barely functional in the first few months after the disclosure. Since there was not enough support for them in their own circle, these women had to go to a counsellor or a self-help group for emotional support.

#### c) Behavioral and physical effects

Of the six women whom I interviewed, two of them said that their body and mind suffered such that they had to rely on medication at one point, and one of the women had a serious operation during the course of the access battle. One woman reported:

I wasn't sleeping at night because she (her daughter) had nightmares. She wakes up screaming. So, I would go to bed and I would lay there tensed, waiting for the nightmare. And then I finally fall on sleep, you know, in exhaustion only to be waken up by the screaming, so, supreme sleep deprivation, tensed. ...So, as soon as my doctor's office open, I phoned him and said "you have to give me something to calm me down, so I can get through this... my doctor knows me, I had natural childbirth for three times, I take nothing. I don't take any medication. So, if I tell him I need something, he knows I am probably close to cracking up completely or death, or something. ...they [the pills] are depressant that it would put me into a black black depression. It was really bad [for me].

Another mother also expressed that she was physically and mentally tired all the time after the disclosure. She was very distressed and irritated that she cried a lot. Finally, she became physically ill and lost one of her kidneys. However, in her case, there was no indication whether her illness was a result of her emotional instability, the side-effect of the depressants that she took, or a natural failure of an organ. This woman



explains:

I'm living, I can't say in a dream world, it's not a dream world, [it's] like a horror story. ...I am tired of running and hiding. ...It's not a fair treatment that the mother gets and all I am trying to do is to protect her. Nobody understands it. ...you know when I was a basket case, I was getting some help with you know, relaxant or something. I mean I was not very straight for a while, you know, just cried and woke up with a lot of stress. I mean it just too much. I have enough problems without this [incestuous thing] on top of it. ...While in the mean time I lost the kidney, I was in the hospital about ten weeks.

d) Financial threats or burdens

Another issue that affected these mothers was that they constantly worried about their financial situation and were afraid of losing their jobs. When they were dealing with the abuse, they needed to take time off work to organize things. When incest was reported, mothers were left to deal with their kids. They needed to present in court, to look for a new place to stay, to take the victims to places for investigation or counselling, to gather information and resources, to meet with lawyers and prosecutors, and/or to seek professional help. All of these tasks required them to take leave. Sometimes they also needed to take days of sick leave and to think about new directions. A woman complained that her ex-spouse was trying to take her to court many times in an attempt to forfeit her work. She stated:

Yes, [I suffered] financially [and] mentally. Like I got to keep my job. If I lose my job, where am I going to live? I got three kids and no job. Uh, he's burying me, taking me to court. ...Just the stress of knowing you have to have the job. Knowing that if you don't have a job, you can't make all the obligations. ...for a whole year that he puts me behind the eight-ball.

Another woman had to take some time off work to organize things for the family and for herself, but during that period she was so afraid that her company was

not going to take her back. This kind of worry bothered her very much, but she says, "I had to go back. I had nothing else to support my children". It is understandable that when all of a sudden they had to pay so many bills for legal assistance and other professional help, these women's budgets were extremely tight.

#### I. The effect on their relationships:

##### a) Their relationship with their daughters

Almost all mothers claimed that they had a better and closer relationship with their daughters after the disclosure. One mother stated that she felt closer to her daughter, but because she lost the custody of her children, she did not have the chance to develop it in depth. Other women who were still with their daughters felt good about the positive change in their relationship. One mother said:

My relationship with Lynn is much more better because...uh, she was always fighting with me before, ...She would always find something to fight with me about. And it seemed to me like her father and her had such a good relationship that I couldn't understand why I always [had] been the one that was picked on. ...I always dreamed that my daughter and I would be the one [who] would have that relationship, and it wasn't there. ...But now things are different. She talks to me quite a bit, and I can tell her moods more. ...when it (the disclosure) first came out, and Mike was getting help and things started to pick up a little bit, I would always or at least once a week or once every three or four days, or something, I would go up to her, put my arms around her and say "how are you doing? Is everything ok? Is there anything you [would] like to talk about?" Give her a big hug and kiss, and things like that. And not because I wanted to stop but it kind of slipped and you didn't do it so often. ....So, she was kind of moody for a while, and I asked her what was wrong, and she said you never talk to me any more. You never hug me any more. You don't ask me if there was anything wrong with me any more. ...That's how she felt, yeah. Like when I kind of stopped doing it as often, and of course I immediately put my arms around her and told her that it wasn't something that I intended to do, it was just something that happened. And if she wanted me to do it then, [it's] fine; I am doing it again.

When a mother told me that her relationship with her children, especially the survivor, became much closer, I could observe the joy she had on her face. She said:

I would have to say number one my relationship between the children and I is 200 times better than it was before. I can now look at the family as, just the three of us for now, as being a loving family. So, I would say that would be the number , the biggest difference. It's just the, the communication is there now. The understanding is there. The openness is there which was not there before. They could talk to me and I am willing to listen. I can talk to them and they'll listen. If something bothering them, they'll come to talk to me. Uh, ...even to the point where, even my oldest [the survivor], my 11 [year] old will the minute I walk in she wants to hug. It's...things are just really really different. It's very much more open, more comfortable.

Some other women found that their relationships with their daughters were not just closer. Because they felt very sorry for their daughters, these women found that they also gave in too much to a point that they did not know when to say no to their daughters. They felt that they were not fair with other children in the family.

A mother stated:

You know, she is a big thing. She's more spoiled than the two [children] of mine. They have never got away with this stuff but she gets away with. It was not because I love her, you know, love her any more than anything like this. This...I think she has been through a lot for a kid her age.

Another mother who had a similar experience said, "I probably, the two girls that were victims, I went through a period where I felt very very sorry for them that I rarely say no to them, you know, the poor children."

b) relationship with their partners

Mothers from type A families found that after they discovered the sexual abuse, the kind of trust they had in their spouses was gone. Some of them also

realized that they did not know enough about their spouses' past. Even after some ground work was done, they still felt that the trust between them was shaky, the anger was still there, and the hurt was not healed. One mother said:

I trusted him to look after these children. And, uh, I have found out recently about his own past and thing that had bothered him about his own personality that he never ever shared before, so I felt betrayed. We lived [in] a big secret. He wore his mask the whole time, that kind of stuff I think is not fair.

When talking about the future direction of their relationship with their spouses, different women had different ideas. It seemed that whether they would make up or not really depended on their previous relationship with their spouses. One woman stated:

...I still cannot tell you that if we will ever re-unite because I don't know. I have to know what was wrong. I have to learn to re-communicate. ...it is scary. Uh, yet he has made some changes but, uh, all those learned behaviours [I don't know] whether he would revert back. ...uh, would I ever totally get over the anger? probably not. But I would talk about it. The hurt, the betrayal would always be there. They would never be forgotten. ...I am not making a commitment, no.

Another woman expressed that the trust between her and her husband was completely gone for the first while, but since her husband was honest with her after that, she felt that she could start to trust him again. In addition, because her husband did not have any support from his family, she felt that she had the obligation to stand behind him and help him through. Her husband was grateful to her for her support. However, after he was released from jail and went back to the family, this woman found that she had great difficulty in having sex with her husband again. Even though she somehow overcome her reluctance as time went by, she found that the impact

was still there affecting her from time to time. She reports:

Uh, it was a long time before I could have sex with Mike afterwards. ...The first time was very hard. Then, ...I am not a very sexual person anyway. ...there's time now that the incest comes into my mind, and if it does, I tried to put that out of my mind, that was one of the reason why I didn't want to know any specific details. Because if I knew something that he had done specifically with her (their daughter), and he did it to me, then that would trigger something with me, and it would ruin. ...Like I said, it does come in my mind sometimes that I just kind of push it away. And if it's so strong that I can't push it away, I push Mike away.

For this woman, "sex is in the back row of a marriage" she says. But, in the past, she did not have the right to say no to her husband when he wanted sex. Now, as they have more communication and understanding, her husband told her that he realized that "sex is not number one any more". She says, "he has learned to control himself enough that, uh, he still wants more than I do, but when I say no he understands. ...he respects." So, since their relationship has been rebuilt on more solid ground where communication, understanding, and support were the primary focus of their marriage, this woman felt that her relationship with her husband was much better than before.

The other woman who was also very angry with her husband in the beginning started to work on their communication. She stated:

The relationship between Cam and I, we are still working on. So, that's hard to say. There are lots of issues that have to be...still be working on. Uh, communication is starting which is good because we never communicated before. We always yelled or argued, or whatever, but I would say probably within the past years [after the discovery of incest] the argument has been very minimal. Most of the time we can just discuss it, and we can talk it through.

When I asked her why she was willing to work on the relationship, she replied:

Probably a bunch of reasons. After it happened, well, I wouldn't say after I was over my anger because I still have anger, it comes out a different time, different things that he says. Uh, a lot of what he was that was good, at least part of what he was good. I went through a very rotten first marriage. ...This one, even though [it] wasn't great, was better than what I had for the first time. ...I guess I thought of I couldn't hate myself, I can't hate him either because a lot of the faults that I saw in him I also saw in me. And I wanted to accept myself. And I guess I just feel that with that communication which is still, we are getting there, but it's still one thing that is lacking. I think there is potential there of having a very functional family again. The kids both want that [to] happen, and I think if that wasn't the case, there would be no Cam and I. My kids definitely come first. This is what, so far, this is what we choose to do.

For mothers from type B families, since their relationships with ex-spouses were already rocky, when they found their daughters abused during access, their feelings toward the perpetrator became more negative. When their ex-spouses kept denying what they had done to the child, these women's anger was even heightened. Because there a lot of argument, threats, and legal appeals were involved, their relationships with the offenders became more tense. One mother said:

We never really got along...I mean he was a very manipulative man so I mean it really didn't change the relationship between him and I other than...I don't think I could ever...I know that he's sick but I don't think I could ever forgive him for what he's done to her. I mean to this day he'll still deny it. ...it[the abuse] places a lot of stress for us both... I mean both financial and emotional.

Another mother claimed that she was harassed by her ex-husband after the disclosure. She stated:

Like he's burying me that way. He is stalking me continually. He...uh...I called it stalking [and] harassing. ...He sent the police to my door 4 or 5 times... He called my ex-husband to find out how much money my ex-husband might have paid me. He reported me to the income tax... he declared on my account as his income tax is all paid to me. ...He got me on the phone and he was tapping the conversation. ...He chased

me with his car a couple weeks ago.

To this group of women, it seemed that their ex-partners really wanted to frighten them and kept them quiet for what they did to their daughters. Some women said this intimidation worked quite well in the beginning, but when they realized that it would be an endless battle if they gave in, some of them started to be more assertive to counteract the endless threats and harassment. A mother said:

He was doing these (chased her around, threatened to sue her for contempt court, and tried to prevent her from entering a Masters program), you know, it just, it just intimidating, threatening thing. And it worked right, but I didn't want him to know that it was working. I am trying to take control again. So, I started cutting back those stupid pills [which made me more depressed]. ...I was going to counter that. I was not going to be a victim. I was not going to sit and worry, and curling in the corner and say "oh, please don't do that to me!"

To summarize, because of their confrontation of the abuse of power, these women's relationship with their ex-spouses became even worse.

#### c) Their relationship with extended families

Most women reported that their parents were quite supportive when they heard what happened, but again this support really depended on the depth of the previous relationship between the woman and her family of origin. A woman explained that because it was the general practice of her family that everyone just minds one's own business, so her family did not show any concern for her at all. She stated:

My family is the kind of family that doesn't, they just [do] not want to get involved, just [do] not want to know what's going on. And what's in your life is in your life, not anybody else's. ...Mydad feels it's not his place to ask questions. Not that I don't think he's not interested, he just does not want to get involved. So, I have not said anything, but we

haven't sat and talked about it.

Another woman expressed that because she used to be the one who provided her parents with support, they were unable to reverse the caring relationship when she needed the emotional support. So, she was pretty much on her own too.

Some other women who were luckier in getting support from their parents and family felt very grateful to them. One woman said:

Well, my...my family had always been aware of what was going on. ...Infact, it was my parents, ...I have two sisters that are both married and I have my parents. They were...all of them...were very supportive, especially my parents. ...I'm very, very close with them... we have always been a close knit family.

Another woman found that her husband's family was rather critical and judgemental. When they found out what happened, they only wanted him to be fixed and charged. They also discontinued their regular contact with the family and wanted to find out if their own children were abused by the offender. Fortunately, this woman had her family of origin on her side, and this was where she received most of the support from. She reported:

They, when I called my sister, she cried and she talked to me. They got my brother, she told my brother, and they both went together [and] told my parents. And my parents called me right away. And this had been three months after the disclosure, and that was the only thing they would [be] mad at me for was that I kept this to myself and dealt with it myself when they could have been there for me all along. My parents told me that, so did my sister. ...I have been home twice [her family lives in another province] since the disclosure, ...and I talked quite extensively with my brother and his wife, my sister and her husband, and my mom. My dad, he's old and he's...kind of just wants to stay out of the picture when you are talking about something like that, but my mom did talk to me about it. It was good. It was good to have someone to talk to, other than his family, and counsellors, and you know, it was always nice to have someone [close] to talk to.



d) Their relationship with friends and others

In general, many of these women told me that they lost friends after the disclosure. They found that their friends only wanted the offenders to be locked up and did not want to hear the details or to understand the mother's feelings. Therefore, most of these mothers did not have any support from friends. One woman said:

People don't really want to hear this stuff. They really don't want to talk about it. Uh, hang them [offenders], lock them up, that's the response. That's all they want. ...initially when I was trying to find my support [from friends] and trying to find my help, but I quickly learned. ...I quickly learned that they don't want to listen. They don't want to know this.

This was truly a tragic experience that when these women were emotionally vulnerable and needed support, their friends were just indifferent. So, experience taught them to conceal their feelings and avoid the topic completely. Another woman reported she tried to find support from her only best friend, but because they had different opinions on the matter, she felt that she could no longer talk to her about her problem. She also found that because incest is a taboo subject, she could not talk to anyone else either. She said:

Since it [incest] has happened, I tend not to talk about my family life at all when I am at work, or, actually when I'm at everywhere, unless someone knows the situation. And then sometimes it's even still very reluctant because people don't accept. I mean I don't expect people to accept the abuse, but people are not willing to listen to anybody who talks about it. So, I find that I was more closed when I was with people that don't know, and that part really bothers me. ...It's not a topic that a lot of people want to talk about except to say that they [offenders] should be shot. That's what they all want to do. I didn't want, I don't want anybody pointing finger at me and yet having to explain myself. So, I just tend to avoid the whole issue completely.

Sometimes people withdrew their friendship from mothers of incest survivors in order to protect their personal beliefs. A woman reported that she lost some of her friends because they did not believe the fact that an upper class, professional, white man would sexually abuse his daughter. She reported:

There are lot of people who refused to believe, who don't want to believe that someone that they know of would be capable of doing that and so they rejected me. ...I guess it's easy to understand that people don't want to believe. I mean I can understand that, because I didn't want to believe either. It took an awful lot of me to face it and not being denied it any more, so I understand. I don't appreciate it a great deal, but I understand.

J. The impact of disclosure on other children and the family as a whole:

Generally speaking, other children in the family were also affected by the abusive relationship in some ways. It is understandable that the atmosphere of the family would become more tense and stressful. Again, this phenomenon also depended on the previous relationships within the family. Some mothers reported that since incest occurred and was disclosed, they somehow paid more attention to the victim; thus, other children might have felt left out, emotionally disturbed, or angry. When there were complaints or some acting-out behaviour was observed, the stress level of the mother would increase intensively. A mother reported that after the disclosure, she had to deal with sibling rivalry among her children as well as with her other daughter's self-esteem problem. She expressed the following:

That was really really difficult because three of my children in some ways blamed the two victims because all of the sudden the family was just ripped apart, and we had to move. Financially, we were down to one income. Uh, there was a lot of stress. ...The other ones (children) felt that they are (the victims) getting special privileges. So, when I finally realized, you know I had to work through that. ...[In addition],

there was a time uh Sharon (her other daughter) and I had talked about [she was] wondering what was wrong with her, why hadn't he (the offender) [been] fondling her. And it was crazy stuff. It was! I would not want to re-live it, I tell you.

Another mother reported that after the disclosure, because of the victim's acting out behaviour and the new arrangement of family members' personal schedules, her other daughters were quite disturbed. She reported:

She [the victim] started poking her sisters' genital area. She started grabbing her older sisters by breast. Uh, then she would tell them the things that had happened. They would [be] upset because these aren't the thing they want to hear either. ...But it affected the whole family. ...when I was told that there was this group for moms, there was a conflict because my two older girls belong to a church group that meets on the same day too. ...I asked my oldest [if] daughter she would take care of the baby when I went to the meetings, she, I guess it was the final straw, that's her, you know what she wants to do, and she ran away from home for a weekend. ...She said she didn't want to stay with her [the youngest daughter].

Some women in type A families reported that after the disclosure and things started settling down, the whole family became closer because family members learned to communicate with and understand each other. One mother pointed out:

The two girls, uh, still don't get along, but that's nothing unusual. That will always be, I, the, but even there I noticed that as much as what they fight during the day, a lot of the time they lay in bed at night and talk, between the two of them, which they never did before either.

Another woman also reported that she observed a certain level of understanding and forgiveness developed in the family. She believed that it was because the whole family did spend a lot of effort together, and thus understanding and forgiveness were possible. She said:

He (the offender) has talked to the two girls. Uh, they talked about it pretty openly uh of what has happened, and how [it] was his

responsibility. He's totally uh proud of what they [the girls] did, uh, tell right away because, you know, no, maybe nothing would happen in a month but probably it was going to, you know. ...They seemed to work it through quicker than I have. ...Basically they say because he's trying. He said he's sorry. He realized what he has done, done wrong. ...They seemed more comfortable with it than I do. We've done a lot of work on that and we've done family counselling also. We have a lot of business to discuss.

The other woman thought that there was still a lot for her two older sons to deal with in terms of understanding the whole issue of sexual abuse, but she concluded, "I think as a whole as a family, I think we've drawn closer again. We talked a lot more. We shared more things."

#### K. Mothers' support from informal sources:

When I asked the participants what kind of informal support they gained during the crisis of disclosure and its aftermath, half of the women mentioned their families of origin. Consistent with what they spoke about concerning their relationship with others after the discovery of incest, these women said that they rarely obtained support from friends or neighbours.

For type B mothers, they reported that they perceived some support from friends and neighbours. At least they did not feel that their friends held them responsible for the abuse. However, for type A mothers, they reported a strong feeling of isolation. One woman said, "I am very isolated now. ...I felt that within my community that I was blamed too, so, you do, you do become isolated."

Mothers from type A families knew that they could not expect substantial support from friends. They understood that because people were ignorant about incest or child sexual abuse, they were unable to show concern or support. Some

mothers felt that when incest was revealed, people tended to judge and make all kinds of negative comments. So, they felt grateful to those who knew about the abuse but did not say anything behind their backs. In other words, to these women, other people's silence might be perceived as a way of support. For example, a mother said, "there are, at least I know of two people that are friends or friends of ours, and they also know and haven't said anything. And someday I might get a chance to say thank you to them." A woman felt that she was lucky to have a supportive boss who cared about her and her husband. She was grateful to this person because he did not spread the news. She says, "it was nice that we had a boss that was understanding and supportive. It didn't...like nobody else at the plant knew, it didn't get out."

Although these women did lose a lot of friends and were usually left alone to deal with the crisis, they found that they gained new friendships from women in the same boat. One woman reported:

I have talked to a lot of mothers, and through that some of the mothers had become friends which is nice because you tend to lose a lot of your old friends. And I have talked to a lot of mothers and your friends vanished very very quickly, so you know you have friends that the same thing has happened to, you know you are on safe ground. And you know that no matter how you are feeling, you can talk to them about it, uh, which is a very good feeling.

L. Mothers' support from formal sources and their experiences with helping professionals:

Most of these women obtained support from groups and/or individual counselling. Some women were somehow luckier than the others in that they found emotional support and counselling from more than one source. But, there was a

woman who could only have a telephone intake with a prospective counsellor. At the time of our interview, this woman told me that because she did not have the money to pay for a private practitioner, she had to queue for free counselling service for both her daughter and herself. She was still waiting for an interview.

a) Private counselling

Generally, all the women who have seen a private practitioner were satisfied with the kind of help and support they obtained from their counsellor. They felt that their counsellors were very nice, understanding, and supportive. Some women who had participated in self-help groups felt that they had gained tremendous support there too. Information regarding how these women felt about self-help group participation will be reported later.

b) Social service agencies and social workers

Contrary to their experience with their counsellors, there were lots of negative feelings expressed toward some social service agencies and child welfare workers. Predominantly, these women felt that Family and Children's Services did not have the expertise to handle child sexual abuse cases. All the mothers from type B families felt that their voices were not heard by the workers in that agency. A woman commented:

Family and Children's Services...I think... uhm...I'm...I'm going to be open for a law suit. I think they're the biggest bunch of idiots that I have ever ran into... they have no ideas how to conduct a case. The expertise that they are supposed to have...I know more about sexual abuse than I think they do. You know...only because of the organizations that I've been linked with [as a volunteer] and the conferences that I've gone to. I think they totally screwed up this whole case. I've heard of hundreds of cases they just totally botch right up.

They don't consider the best interests of the children or the family.

Another mother complained:

The initial call that I made, I felt like I was being put off. You know, so what if he had a bath with her, so what if he played lick and tickle, so what! ...This is supposed [to be] their job to protect children, and you phone and tell them this child needs protection, and this is not right, and it is like they are questioning your moral judgement. ...the fact that they never bother to come to my home to talk to her (her daughter). ...They are, deemed that this is just a custody issue, and they weren't going to get involved.

### c) Mothers' groups

A mother who participated in both FCS's mothers' group and a mothers' group run by Community Justice Initiatives (CJI) felt differently about the way mothers were treated. She found that workers and volunteers at CJI were willing to take time to listen to mothers and would try their best to find resources for them. This woman felt very grateful to a group leader who expressed genuine concern for her in a warm and humane way. She reported:

There was probably weeks, probably months, that went by that one of the co-leaders would phone me. Usually Monday of every week that just asked how I was doing, which showed me that as far as I am concerned they did care. And some people might say, well, it's not professional, but I considered it very very professional because they really were concerned about what they were doing.

However, regarding FCS, she said:

I found that with Family and Children's Services, they put you into a group, and that group is "mothers", and all the mothers are the same as far as they are concerned. They treated everyone the same whether you belong to the group or not. Uh, I mean there was a lot of mothers that still denied what happened, and yet you [are] still put in and treated exactly as what they are, which I guess I don't understand that it's like they fit you into this wheel that goes around, and you just follow it and keep on going around and around with everybody else.

I don't think that they know people have names. It's just you are number so and so, and this is where you should be right now. I found that they didn't listen. ...They don't know in which direction they were going. And I think that is, the biggest thing is the mandate now, is to try to reunite the family if it is [at] all possible. Unfortunately, I don't think they [child welfare workers] have been trained to do that

#### d) Family and Children's Services

Every woman who had dealt with FCS complained about it. They did not think the attitude of workers there was acceptable. They were extremely frustrated when dealing with workers there. One woman commented:

I don't think I ever got into court with everything was ready, and all the paper work was done. I got to court a few times when [they] haven't read the paper work yet, because nobody had done it. Organization [is] really lax. Communication there is awful. The right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing. ...I mean one time, I think I had asked about four different people before I got the answer or something. And there were a lot of times when you asked a question, they would say "I don't know. I would find out", but you'll never hear back from them. ...And I found that really frustrating and yet when you questioned them about it, [they would say] "well, funding doesn't allow it." Well, I don't think funding has anything to do whether they get back to me with an answer or not.

A woman who worked at a social service agency also found herself distressed by the way she was treated. She said:

I felt let down by where I work, ok, that they could not have been supportive. I just felt, I felt that, they initially told me that I should take time off work to be with the kids 'cause it was a lot of things that needed to happen. ...I didn't go back to work until September [almost 6 months long], and I had no contact from anybody from there [FCS].

She said that her colleagues were told not to contact her. Nobody really knew what happened to her except her supervisor. She explained:

It [the disclosure] happened on the Friday, and on the Monday, I was just like a pendulum that swinging just up and down. And I had all



these questions [about the abuse] and I think they felt that because I work there I should know all this stuff. I think to read it is one thing, but it's another thing to experience it. But, yeah, I think in a lot of ways I felt shame, blamed, uh betrayed, I guess. I am not sure that's an agency they really do to help.

#### e) Lawyers

Another source of formal support some of these women acquired was from their lawyers. In this study, four out of the six women whom I interviewed had a lawyer. The need for having a lawyer was determined by the age of the victim when the case was disclosed. In one case, when the mother felt that her voice was not heard in court, she hired a lawyer for herself too. Generally, these women felt that their lawyers did a reasonable job for them. At least they felt that their lawyers were serious about the case and willing to listen to details. A woman told me that although her ex-husband denied that sexual abuse had happened, her lawyer was still willing to take time discussing with her and working with her closely to make sense of what her daughter was telling her about the incident.

#### f) Police officers

All the women had dealt with the police in one way or another; however, their experiences with police officers varied. Some of them felt positively; others felt negatively. Their feelings were really determined by whom they worked with at the time of reporting the abuse. Almost all mothers reported that the police officers were nice to their daughters, and they were pleased with that. A woman reported:

The detectives were very nice. They were concerned about her [the victims] feelings. They didn't sit-in on the interview. They wanted to...to, went there. Lynn [the victim] knew that they were there. They also asked if she wanted a female officer, it was her preference. So,

that they were pretty good with her that way.

When I asked the above mother how she felt she was treated, because I sensed that there were some unpleasant feelings, she stated that as long as her daughter was treated right, she did not really care about how she was treated. She said, "Well, with me it was kind of, uh, how can I say it? uh, I was more concerned of how they treated Lynn than myself."

Another woman reported that she had both positive and negative experiences with the police officers. Initially, she contacted FCS and asked them to do something about the case, but FCS did not take any further action. Then, when her daughter's father came on her property which he was prohibited from doing, she phoned the police and two officers came to her house. She explained:

They questioned what I said because they said there have been false accusations. ...First of all they attacked me. Then they listened to me and they phoned the detective. He came and I told him [about the sexual abuse]. ...So, he came downstairs, closed the door and spoke to her (the victim) alone. ...Anyway, he says the most important thing was that he (the offender) was not allowed to see her alone again. That, you know, he was convinced that there were something wrong that should be dealt with. ...He phoned FCS and wanted to know why the hell these people aren't doing their job.

This woman said if the detective had not phoned FCS for her, FCS would not do anything further to investigate. So, in this way, she felt grateful to the police.

Two other women reported some negative experiences with police officers in the way they were treated. One woman who had dealt with the police directly said that police are vicious people. She felt that they are very powerful and threatening. Another woman said the police did not have common sense about how to deal with

sexual abuse cases, and she felt offended by their attitude. She said:

Uh, I [was] just very much made to feel...that I was an offender when I went to the police station. I went on my own free will. They wanted to talk to me and asked me if I would come down, and I said sure. Even there, they gave me no direction, no indication, no answers; and these are people that are supposed to be, they are supposed to look after this stuff like all the time. This is what they do. When I left there, I was no further ahead than I walked in.

g) Legal system and judges

During the interviews, four women who had gone through the legal system expressed a strong negative feeling toward the system and the judges. All women felt that they were put down in court, they were made to feel powerless, and they had no control over what was going to be presented in the court proceedings; their voices were not heard, and they were unfairly treated. More precisely, they felt that the judge who was involved in their case did not do a good job; they felt that the judge was very prejudiced and unreasonable to them. In fact, coincidentally, three out of the four women had the same judge. Unfortunately, in family court here in the K-W area, the judge is the only person to make decisions for the case. The following are excerpts from these women's comments:

The judge was a complete farce as far as I'm concerned. I've never seen or heard anybody so unprofessional in my whole life. He was falling asleep up in the trial, he couldn't remember one day to the next what was being said. I mean I'm...I'm totally disgusted with...uhm...judges like that being on the stand, especially in something that's so serious.

Oh, [the] legal system? Sucks! ...When it [the sexual abuse] happened, I denied [him] access. It went to court...as an access case, not under a, an abuse case. ...an hour and a half into the case, he (the judge) calls the two lawyers into his chamber and says "it has to be some way these two can settle this." The two lawyers said "I don't think so, there are

considerable differences..."...so,he listened for another day and a half. ...He calls us back into his chamber again, but this time he talks to Judge B. Judge B takes Karl and I and the lawyers into his chamber and says that he (the original judge) wants us to settle this out of the court. While we had to make arrangement down the road, blocking up our two weeks that has been set aside for our case, filling it up with other cases, because he was not interested in listening to a family access, abuse case, he wasn't interested at all. ...The justice system is...thatthe mother has not a lot of understanding. Those guys up there are men. If they have been abused as far as by [their] ex-wives, as far as a legal access battery, or something like that it may take them out of there. ...the stuff I feel is important isn't being brought up in court because it's not considered "big".

All along, the legal system is not fair. ...youare a mother and you have not done anything wrong, it'salmost like you have to prove to the legal system that you didn't do anything wrong. Uh, this "innocent until proven guilty" thing didn't seem to work [for us]. It was almost "guilty until proven innocent". ...Ididn't do the right thing. ...Ileft the offender and the victim stayed in the same house for that one night [after disclosure]. ...Idid [separate them] like they were not in the same room together by themselves or anything. ...Itjust nothing came into my head all of the sudden [that] said that's what you should do. So, to me, what I did seemed ok at the time. ...Because I didn't make that decision that very first day, so I am still not capable of looking after her and protecting her as far as he's concerned. So, it's still boils down to guilty until proven innocent. And when you say to him, what would you like me to do to prove to you [that] things are different, you don't get any answer. So, [from the legal point of view] I am guilty and I will always be guilty.

We told the judge. We presented all the aggregated evidence, told the judge what had happened. His [the offender] lawyer claimed that I am just a vicious manipulative woman who's upset because he (the offender) ended the relationship that I didn't want it to end, regardless of the fact that I have a letter from him asking why I ended the relationship. ...Andthe judge refused to read the aggregated evidence. He chose to believe him and he is denying it. And the judge has given him unsupervised access. ...The thing that bothers me is the judge ordered a psychological profile of her father, but he didn't even wait until that was done before he gave him a month of unsupervised access again. ...she(the victim) told the police officer about tickling. She told me, her sister, the neighbour about licking, how can that be explained? The judge chose not to see that or hear it. ...thejudge agreed with him.

And then the judge turned around and said to him, "I would suggest you have a third party present during the visits just so you don't face more allegation". The judge more or less said these are false accusations when he said to him [that]. ...In other words, I am a liar. Does a judge have the right to say that? Should he? That's subjective opinion, and that's very biased and very prejudicial.

M. Experience with the problem of mother-blaming:

All the six women had more or less experienced some sort of mother-blaming in the course of dealing with the incestuous problem that happened in their families. The sources of such blame came from all facets of our society which included ordinary community members, helping professionals, police officers, lawyers, and judges.

A mother felt some kind of resistance from her daughter all along before the disclosure, and she found out later on that some mother-blaming was involved. She checked with her daughter about it and confirmed what she thought was quite true regarding mother-blaming. This woman reported:

She said to me that she felt the same way that I felt. She thought that we would have a good relationship as mother and daughter. She wanted that closeness too. And she says "mom, I would start something on purpose just to fight with you" and I looked at her and I said "Lynn, do you think that somewhere deep down inside you were blaming me because I didn't see what was going on?" And she kind of stopped; she said "I never thought of that before." She said then "maybe you are right". So, we both agreed on that [there was some mother-blaming involved].

Unfortunately, this was not the only experience of mother-blaming that this woman found. When she discovered the incestuous relationship between her daughter and husband, she went to a social service centre for help. However, when the counsellor found that she allowed her husband to stay in the house while he was getting help,

that counsellor denied her privilege to service. This mother stated:

When she found out that he was, Mike was still in the house, I kind of felt [that she had] a different feeling towards me after that. And she didn't set up another meeting. She never asked what is my last name. And we left. And we were no further ahead as far as I am concerned when we were first went in there. ...and she told me to call her and set up another appointment. I called at least 20 times and left the message on the answering machine, and she never did reply.

The second woman said that at the time of investigation, she wanted to go to the police station and be with her daughters to support them, but she was not allowed to do that. She says, "I was hurt. Those are my children. ...I felt that they thought I was contaminated by the man, so I just wasn't allowed to go, I didn't have the right to go." Later on, when this woman expressed concern for her partner, she was mocked by the police officer about it. She explained:

I thought, he can't go with these barn clothes on, so I phoned up to the gentleman [the male police officer] and said how do I get the proper attire to him, so they said to me just take it to the court house. So, I was up to the court house. The police officer said to me "did you cut the legs out?" and I was thinking "oh!" That's how cut and dried it is. They don't, they don't realize that this is the man you lived with, and the emotions, yeah you are angry, but there was another part you can still care. You were a pretty confused person, pretty crazy stuff. ...It was pretty clear to me that what was wrong with me that I was...even considered bringing this man his suit so he would look good. ...So, once again, the reflection, I felt the reflection was back on me, something is wrong with me, this woman.

This same woman had another experience of mother-blaming with her daughters' teachers. She reported that when she picked up her daughters at school, she perceived their blaming and resentful feelings toward her. This woman also expressed that the problem of mother-blaming could be in very subtle form. Often time, mother-blaming could be reflected on people's presumptions about mothers.

This woman elaborated:

I also had the teachers tell my girls that when they told them that "does your mother know?" and they said "no, mom just wasn't there." The teacher says "moms are pretty smart, you know, they might know." And that was very fearful because I didn't know. I wasn't there. It wasn't fair. The offender had said to me "yeah, I had to be very careful, you work at [a social service agency], you know, I had to make sure you were going." But, that was just the belief. Yeah, so that was another thing that the kids knew that I didn't know but we had to work through. Why did the teacher think that you should have known, you know.

The third woman felt that the presence of mother-blaming could be clearly identified in the legal system. She felt that the mother must have a lawyer to speak for her in order to prove that she was not guilty. She felt that she was treated as a criminal before the court. Without considering other circumstantial factors, the court convicted mothers for neglecting their children's welfare. This mother stated:

I went through the first while (a few times) without a lawyer. ...I just assumed that I didn't do anything wrong and why should I need one. But, the more I got into it, it felt like I was being accused, and I needed one. ...and if I didn't do anything wrong, why should I [be] convicted. Why should I have to convince other people that I didn't do anything wrong? ...and you are the mother, and you fall into the offender category because you didn't protect your children. So, instead of falling into the victim category, you fall into the offender [category]. ...I have to keep fighting to prove that I, I also was a victim. I was not the offender. And I really, after two and a half years, I am getting tired of it. I didn't do anything wrong, why do I have to keep defending myself?

The fourth woman reported that after the disclosure of sexual abuse, while she was investing her energy in finding justice for her daughter, she somehow overlooked her son's needs. Then, instead of helping her to deal with the issue, FCS blamed this mother for her son's feelings of being left out. This mother felt that because

blaming mothers was something easier than convicting perpetrators, so FCS decided to condemn her and dismiss the case. She explained:

So, then what happened was FCS turned around and decided that my parenting skills weren't up to par and they brought an application against me saying that I was emotionally harming my children and dropped the one sexual abuse [case] against my ex-husband after they had validated her (the daughter) complaint.

This same woman reported another kind of mother-blaming that she felt. She said that sometimes the problem of mother-blaming did not carry a name; once she was a mother, she was blamed for whatever she did. She gave an example:

I think that there's a real lack of support for the mothers within the system. ...there's just so much turmoil...and the thing is when you...when you come forward...because you know the odds are against you to begin with, I mean...you're damned if you do and you're damned if you don't. If I hadn't come forward and she (her daughter) had disclosed to another professional...I mean which she did...she disclosed to quite a few people, I could've been liable. I could've been sued because I didn't come forward. Yet, when I did I was treated like a mad dog. Like I was...I was victimized because I came forward with my concerns.

From the mothers' reports, I observed that there was a contradiction in the way mothers were blamed. For example, if a mother did not take immediate action to report sexual abuse, she would be blamed for failing to protect her child; but, when a mother took immediate action, she would be blamed for being over-reactive or over-protective. The fifth woman said that she felt that she was blamed by FCS for telling them that her daughter was sexually abused. As a result of her report, she was labelled as an over-protective mother and neurotic about abuse. She explained:

I had two episodes with the caseworkers..., they don't listen to a word you say. They don't listen to one word I say. The mother is guilty the minute she walked through the door. ...He [one of the workers] wrote a letter [and] said I have nothing to worry about, that I was being an



over-protective mother. ...She [the other worker who handled the sexual abuse investigation] wrote that on the report that I strip search my child after every visit to make sure that nothing [has] happened to her. ...youknow, you don't need to nail me to the wall. This is what I feel what she's doing.

The sixth woman said that when she reported the sexual abuse to FCS, she was blamed for over-reacting to the matter. When she finally convinced the people at FCS to interview her daughter, they said because her daughter did not disclose the abuse at their office, they did not think anything has happened. When the case was brought to court, she felt that both the defense lawyer and the judge were putting her down and blaming her for raising up the accusation. She said:

When we went to court a month ago, the lawyer stood up and verbally raped me, and made me out to be garbage or trash. ...Iwanted them to stop shooting the messenger. ...Children tell her mother. Of course, that's the person usually that they [have] most bonded to, the person they trust the most with that kind of disclosure, and yet it's the mother who all of the sudden is on the line. The perpetrator is innocent until proven guilty, right, but the mother is guilty until proven innocent. There's something wrong with that.

#### N. Some persistent predicaments:

Women from both family types felt that they were put in an awkward position. The difficulties that each group of women faced were different because of the nature of their marital status. For women from type A families, the abuse problem was complicated by the stability of the on-going relationships within the family. For women from type B families, the abuse problem was complicated by the access issue.

First of all, if the victim was a young child, it was supposed to be the mother's job to protect her, but if the mother denied the perpetrator access after her child told her that she was abused by him, the mother was forced into a situation in which she

would be charged for contempt of court. In this case, the mother might be considered irresponsible and have her full custody taken away. One woman said:

Now I face the dilemma: do I break the law? Family and Children's Services says that if I refuse to allow him to have her, they can jail me for contempt [of] court, and then Family and Children's Services will consider my children abandoned and will give her to him. He will get custody of her. So, what's the point? ...If you make a stand, it's going to end up ultimately the same. He's still going to get her, right? And then you are not going to be around for her to tell, right?

Second, for one mother whose daughter was abused during access, she knew that taking her daughter to see her father was something she was supposed to do, but after the disclosure of sexual abuse, if she continued to send her daughter to her father, she was afraid that she was sending a message to the child that she agreed to the abuse and condoned the abuser's behaviour. This woman explained:

I can't possibly take her [to her dad] after she has told me that. There was no way that I was going to take her because she is going to think that I condoned it. ...So, it's really a dilemma. I can't, I couldn't live with myself as a mother if I ever thought that she would believe that I am a part into that.

A third difficulty for mothers was related to the problem of finding enough physical evidence for conviction. Mothers knew that the only way they could gather more valid physical evidence was to send their daughters to the perpetrator again and again, but in this way they did not know how many times their daughters had to be hurt in order to obtain the evidence that would be considered convincing. A woman pointed out that even if the mother is courageous enough to send her daughter to the offender in order to test whether she could obtain physical evidence, the chance is still low. This mother had consulted with a doctor and she said, "he [the doctor] told

me that they can only prove sexual abused children in less than 40% of cases [which] penetration have not taken place. There are some real good odds!" So, these mothers knew that stopping access meant losing the physical evidence for conviction, but no woman would endanger her daughter for the so-called "required physical evidence". Therefore, unless they were ordered to grant the perpetrator access, they denied it the first day after the disclosure of sexual abuse.

The fourth adversity in fact is tied into the antecedent one, because it also left mothers in a no-win situation. One woman said because her daughter did not want to see her father after the divulgence of sexual abuse, she did not force her to go; she thought she was doing the right thing for her daughter and herself. She explained:

I know there was once upon the time, there was something she was afraid of. So, why...if...the way I'm looking at it is if I send her over there and something happens again, Family and Children's Services will look at me the wrong way like putting her in a compromising situation. You know, if they don't believe me what happened now, and there's concrete proof that comes out the next time, what is that [situation would] put me?

Nevertheless, the result was that the perpetrator took this woman to court again and charged her for contempt of court.

Fifth, when these mothers tried to help their daughters talk about the abuse, they faced the dilemma of being accused of making a false allegation. They felt that if they asked their daughters about the details of the abuse by using precise terms, when their daughters picked up those terms from them, they would be judged for putting words in the child's mouth. But, if they simply told their daughters to tell

their "stories", they would also be accused of making up stories for their daughters.

A woman who had this experience reported:

When I took Laurie over to the Children's Aid, Laurie was very brave. She asked me, where are we going, and I said we are going to a special place, a special office...and I said there is a lady there who'd like you to tell...well, this is my mistake: I told Laurie that she has to tell me, to tell the lady, now I put it, "the story", about what happened to her while she was with Karl [the father]. ...I used the term "story" but you see...I couldn't, I didn't want to put ideas in her head and say you remember, you know, you can't even help her with the gesture, you know...that's giving her... uh the... uh allegation, but not giving her herself, to be able to...sort out the way that we want to hear. You know what I mean. I wanted her to tell her story, her own story.

As a result, this woman's precaution over the "telling procedure" only put her in deeper trouble. Despite the physical evidence and the positive result of the psychological assessment, this woman was accused by her daughter's worker that she made up a story for her daughter.

Sixth, some women experienced a problem of the timing of report. If a mother prolonged the report of the abuse, she would be blamed for jeopardizing her child and considered an unfit mother. A woman told me that because of uncertainty and hesitation, she did not report the abuse on the same day she found out, but she told her ex-husband and her counsellor about the abuse the next morning; then, they called the police and reported the case to FCS for her. When the case went to court, she was considered an inadequate mother. This woman found it very difficult that she was not given a chance to explain the reason for her belated action. Then, every time she went to court, she was always pinpointed. She stated:

They would not [be] willing to let me forget that I made that mistake, and they were really judging me on that. So, no matter what I did, or

what I try to do, they would always go back to "but you did this" . . . So every time I asked for something and I still, still with the access with the kids and Cam, it's still boils down to the kid's lawyer does not think that I am a fit mother.

Seventh, contrary to the above hardship, some women found that they were accused of falsely believing that incest had occurred and wrongfully separated their children from the perpetrators. One mother who believed in her daughter and took immediate steps to protect her was labelled as obsessed with the idea of child sexual abuse. Given this reason, this woman's custody and access rights were denied. She said the judge told her many reasons why he was giving the custody to the child's father, and "being obsessive" was one of the reasons that he gave her. She says, "...He (the judge) also said that I refused to believe anything but that she's been sexually abused and keep implying this to the children, so I'm going to destroy the relationship with their father." So, in order to spare the relationship between the father and his children, the court decided to terminate this woman's relationship with her children. In other words, the court believed that the father-children relationship is more important than the mother-children relationship.

Eighth, some women from type A families found that they were forced to hate and leave their husbands after the disclosure of incest. The difficulty that they faced was a dilemma of womanhood. Socially, these women were taught to be understanding, caring, and responsible for their husbands' needs, but all of a sudden they were expected to terminate their relationship with their men at the moment incest was disclosed. These women felt that they were deprived of the right to decisions. Other people around them tended to make decisions for them without

asking how they felt about their spouse as an individual, and without considering that, besides anger and hate, they had other feelings toward their spouses too.

A woman reported that when she was in the police station, she was very confused about everything. So, she was hoping that she would be getting some information about how to deal with situations like that, but the only thing she was told was to cease her relationship with her husband. She stated:

The only thing I was told by them is don't think that you are going to talk to this guy again. ...Don't think that you are going to have any kind of relationship with your husband. It's not going to happen. Stick with your kids. He's scum. ...and don't think that that man like this can be helped because he can't. They are no good.

Many times, people's comments only served to complicate the mothers' decision making process. It was clear that when they were inclined to keep the relationship, they were made to feel shame, blame, and guilt for their decision. No wonder this woman said, "when I left there, I was probably more confused than anything." Another woman who was thinking of reconciliation reported that she also felt a sense of rejection from others.

O. The advantages of being in self-help groups:

In Kitchener-Waterloo, two social service agencies run self-help groups for mothers of sexual abuse survivors. These agencies are Community Justice Initiatives (CJI) and Citizens Concerned with Crimes against Children (4Cs). Family and Children's Services also run groups for mothers, but people were mandated to be in the group. Of the six women whom I interviewed, four of them had participated in self-help groups, and one of them had also joined the mandatory group at FCS.

Those who had been in a self-help group reported positive experience with it.

The followings are excerpts from the women's comments:

It gives you the support knowing that you're not the only victim out there. That really helps.

...I found the mothers' group because I knew that I needed to talk about it [incest]. I knew I was at nowhere. I [was not sure that I] was crazy or I wasn't? ...It (the self-help group) was very helpful.

[It was] great! I was really nervous the first night while I went in for my interview, and went really well. Uh, then the first night in the group, I was really really nervous. But, the women there made me feel comfortable. And when you listened to other people that have gone through pretty much the same thing, then, there was two moms that were pretty similar to me, and they were still with their offenders, and...I was quite comfortable after that. And it didn't take me long to start talking about the abuse. Everything got dealt with. Everybody was there to support, and they are still there [supporting me].

It's about about two weeks and I was in the mothers' group already. So, I found that really really helpful. Uh, if I needed to talk to somebody during the day that I couldn't wait for the mothers' group next week, I could always phone them. ...So, I found it really really helpful. ...And that probably was [where] all the support in the beginning came from.

A woman who had participated in a self-help group and a mandatory group (i.e. FCS) explained why self-help groups were more desirable. She said the statutory group gave her a bad feeling and the atmosphere there was more tense. She described it in this way:

I was court ordered to go into it, and that was not a good feeling. I think they can keep track of how I was feeling and what I was doing. ...it was almost like saying you are guilty but we want you to in this group to figure out whether you really are or not. ...I feel because people are not quite as honest at Family and Children's Services because those people (workers) have power, they can make or break you which is not a good feeling. ...they are listening everything you are saying, and they are either going to give you your kids or they are not

going to give you your kids back. Whatever you say is going to end up in court, and like it just, so people, I don't think [people] open up quite readily in situations like that.

One of the reasons that these women enjoyed the self-help group was that they found it more casual and relaxed. There was no curriculum set out, thus they could focus more on feelings and up-coming issues. Some women also reported that in the self-help group people were more likely to be honest about their situation and there was a better bonding among members. She says:

[In the self-help group], if you say something like, you know, you are not supposed to see the offender and you did, you know, stuff like that they got to report. I mean I understand that they have to report it, but it, it's still more causal, more comfortable situation. So, everybody that I kept contact with has been from the self-help group.

A woman who worked in a social service agency echoed the problem of a mandatory group. She said:

Uh, because people see CAS as having a lot of power, they can apprehend their children, or, I think they feel threatened. I don't know whether the trust is there for them to really really open up. So, I guess when I talk about CAS initially for moms right after investigation, they [CAS] needed to be there, but then [they] needed to direct them [moms] probably to somewhere else.

To summarize, these women felt that a self-help setting provided them with a safe and comfortable environment to talk about incest and problems mothers faced. Because of the self-help nature, group participants felt that there was a natural bonding among them, therefore, they were more willing to share and support each other.

P. Improvements recommended in community services:

a) More resources and self-help services



All women believed that information or resources for mothers of incest survivors should be more readily available. Many women mentioned a need for having a resource centre or a resource person to guide them through the crisis. They said when the incest was disclosed, they needed to know where to report it, how they could go about finding help, and whom they should talk to in order to obtain first-hand information. As one woman said:

When I first found out, my questions were: ok, now what do I do? Who do I talk to? Where do I turn to? You opened a phone book, there was nothing. You know, you don't see it advertised on a bulletin board. You walked into a doctor's office, I know my doctor's office, and it says "child abuse". There's nothing about incest. And this is a paediatrician. And I feel that there should be more... information available to the public.

Furthermore, these women felt that there were not enough self-help services for mothers. One woman said, "I still say, though, the more stories I hear, the more groups are needed. ...I mean there's a lot of this [incest] happening. I am not sure where the mothers are going."

#### b) More public education programs

The second thing that these women would like to see changed was having more public education programs to help increase people's awareness of the problem.

One woman commented:

I know it's not something that there are a lot of people are going to open their minds to, it's information sessions, seminars, uh all that kind of stuff. It's...we are not a small town any more. Yet I don't ever expect it would be a topic that people talk about on the street or anything, but I also would hope that people would be more open-minded at one point or another. ...It's almost a daily occurrence now that we hear one story or another. And I just think that...I think the public needs to be more aware...more aware of why it happens. Not

just that it is happening, but the why it happens. ...The regular citizen has to know what's happening and why.

Regarding public education, some women felt that educational programs should be designed to meet the needs of different target groups. For example, there should be educational programs for mothers of incest survivors, because they need to deal with the issue, the stress, and their children. Mothers need to know the root of the abuse problem in the family. One woman said:

I think that from the time...the investigation was done, I think people [mother] have to realize what moms are going to go through, what [the] family is going to go through. ...Dosome education around moms instead of shaming and blaming. ...Ithink there was a lot focused on mom. If mom is not able to work this through, uh, you can't expect the kids to recant. ...Firstof all, mom has to find out what has happened because there was the big thing in her mind: where was I? what happened? ...there'sa whole process of understanding that would help me [as a mother] try to understand this. ...It'svery stressful.

In addition to educating mothers, some women felt that social workers needed to be educated too. These women found that many social workers who handled incestuous cases lacked the required knowledge and skills. A woman addressed the point that education for workers is equally important. She stated:

I don't think that they are qualified enough. ...Ithink, well, all the training in the world...the schooling, the books, the statistics can teach them facts and figures. It still doesn't prepare them how to deal with a child that has been molested.

This same woman cited an example to demonstrate how inadequate the worker was while she was dealing with her daughter's case. She reported:

I had this FCS worker tell this child...tell my daughter that she didn't believe her in front of the...in front of her father. And although she had never asked my daughter what happened. My daughter had never disclosed to her...and she turned around and told the child that;...even

for me as a lay person I know better than to say that to a child.

Another mother who worked at a social service agency also found that many of her colleagues did not know much about incest or child sexual abuse. Speaking from a worker's point of view, she believed that if there were some special training for workers who were handling these cases, it could help them to do a better job. She said:

My experience is some workers don't know...uh...it'suh, pretty tough stuff. Yeah, I'm not sure if I want to work with that. You know, when it was handed on your plate, you got no choice. Yeah, uh, so if you, I guess it is if the workers, have someone to help solve the issue, it will probably help a lot.

c) Reconstitution of FCS and its investigation procedure

The third thing many of these women wanted to see changed was the reconstitution of Family and Children Services or Children's Aid Society. One mother recommended the following:

I would want Family and Children Services totally revamped. I'd like to see more people that are qualified, be able to deal with these kids, uhm, to be able to deal with the mothers. I mean although it's very traumatic for the children, it's a very traumatic time for the mother too. ...I think they're going to need just a specified team to be able to deal with it because there's all kinds of child abuse, but I mean sexual abuse requires a lot of delicacy and a lot of knowledge.

In addition to having a special team to deal with child sexual abuse cases, some women also wanted FCS to develop a set of guidelines and procedures to help mothers deal with incest. A woman said:

In the beginning when you...when you go to FCS, I mean they should be able to have the steps to be able to walk you through, instead of walking you up to the garden gate and then giving you the royal screw and brushing you off, which is what I feel has happened.

After seeing her daughter's interview mis-handled, another mother found out there was a guideline set out for interviewing pre-schoolers, but FCS did not follow it in their investigation. She says, "I would like to see FCS follow the guidelines that are set out. Like I was told about this IPCA. There's a format for investigation that must be followed. FCS failed to follow that." She cited her daughter's example and told me:

They interviewed my child in a strange place, [with] a strange woman, for a half-hour [session], and said "she didn't tell us anything. This is unsubstantiated. It doesn't mean he's innocent, it just mean she didn't tell us, therefore we can't prove it." And I said, "how do you expect a two-and-a-half year [old] child going to a strange environment with a strange woman to disclose something like that at a month after it happened." ...I wanted more than one interview to establish a relationship for trust. And according to the IPCA guideline, that is what [is] supposed to be done. ...Ideally, the child should be interviewed in familiar surroundings with a familiar person there with the interviewer. And the IPCA guideline says it is appropriate with pre-school children to ask direct questions rather than hope for just disclosed.

Another mother expressed the view that she did not agree with the present practice that during investigation, mothers and children were separated. This woman felt that she needed to be with her children to support them and to have more understanding of the entire incident.

d) More services and empowerment work for victims

The fourth thing some of these women wished was having more services for victims and giving them more control over the case.

A woman explained:

I think there has to be more [services] for the kids out there. I shouldn't say the kids, uh, any victims, kids especially, because I think

they have to be dealt with right away. I heard some stories where people have waited months, months, and months to get the kids into a group. ...I mean if you can't afford it [private counselling], the waiting list to get in the counsellor is forever.

Another mother said:

I think they (the legal system) give the offender too much power. ...They're quick to say that well they believe him...that this child's lying about what's being said. ...I feel that my children had no say in anything, they have no rights. ...They (FCS) got my daughter into a social group...and like that was just one session which was...although it did a lot of good...it wasn't enough.

A third woman reported:

They [the victims] would have liked to see more control. They felt that once they told, everything was taken out of their hands, and they had no particular control altogether. ...That was probably the only difficult area that my two children had expressed as far as they are concerned. They wanted this man to be fixed, [but] they didn't want this man to be charged. They wanted him to stop but they didn't want him to go to jail.

e) A need for reform of the legal system

All of the women wanted to see the legal system changed. One of their suggestions was to establish a special team in court to deal with child sexual abuse issues. One mother stated:

Well, I think with the court they're going to need just a special team that deals with sexual abuse. I mean these people are going to have to be so trained that they can pick up on...I think the norm is that kids don't lie about it unless they are totally brainwashed. And if they're totally brainwashed, their stories aren't going to be consistent anyway. So, they're going to need people that can pick up on that kind of stuff.

Another suggestion was that judges needed to be educated in issues concerning child sexual abuse. These women felt that there should be some specific guidelines for judges to follow. They needed to demonstrate their accountability. A



woman suggested:

...They are going to get more formalized training. I mean the judges aren't keeping updated...updated on anything. Uh, so, they are going to have just specific people dealing with those type of cases all the time. ...Because they (judges) have nothing that's written in concrete...of what [they] are supposed to do and the steps that are published out in government. That's what I've (the judge) done, and it hasn't gotten us anywhere but totally screwed up our family life.

Another woman indicated that the mandate and practice in the legal system were not parallel. She pointed out:

Uh, part of the legal system says the mandate is to reunite families, but yet the legal system, at least from my perspective, will do everything to keep you apart [as much] as possible as they can. ...And again it's the fact that the right hand doesn't know what the left hand is doing.

This woman thought that when mothers came before court, they were viewed as the same. The court did not consider individual differences at all. She explained:

I understand that they can't put families back together if...you know, if things have not improved that you have not worked on your family. But again, you are not a number, you are a person. And again, too, as far as the legal system goes, I think they looked at you as a number. Not saying "ok, this family has done this, this, and this". It's like "well it only happened a year ago, you can't see each other", and "because that's what the statistic says it should be". So, I just think maybe there needs more fair, more understanding. Not more lenient, just more understanding.

Another mother felt that the justice system should grant credit to the parent who looked after the child. She also thought that the court should trust the child when she came forward to tell about the abuse. She said:

The justice system could never be improved. If they could improve, I wished there would be unbiased judges...uh...you know...people are going to listen to both sides of the story. Listen to the parent who is with the child. ...Hears her [the victim] in play, hears her...you know, whatever, listen to the child herself.

As alluded to earlier, many women felt that the judge whom they had was very biased and prejudiced. Therefore, they really hoped that there would be some fair and impartial judges in court. A mother reported:

I believed that the judge that I had was very biased, and since then I have been told he was. Not just my case but many cases. I find it very unusual that the only time I got the positive responses was one when he was in holidays and I had another judge, and two when we were called back on the Friday and he doesn't work Friday in Cambridge. And those were the only two times that I got the positive response and it was without him. ...I have heard that other judges are very hard on you, but they are very fair. And that's what I found with both the other judges that I had. They were very fair. They weren't easy. I got a lecture from one of them, but she said what she had to say and that seems to be it, but she still saw it my way. Uh, any other time I went to court that with the other judge (the one she used to have) and I got nowhere. It was like I, I wasn't even being heard.

#### A brief report on the special case

The experience of the mother whose three daughters were sexually abused by their father's brother in many ways is similar to other mothers' experiences reported above. The abuse started when the three girls were under the age of ten. There was no actual intercourse, only fondling and digital penetration were involved. In those years of abuse, the three girls' uncle threatened them with a gun not to tell anyone about the abuse. After the disclosure, this woman found that even though her husband was psychologically supportive, she was left alone to deal with the problem in a practical sense. She said because her husband had a full-time job outside the home, he had the excuse not to be physically involved in the process. She felt that, although friends sympathized with her, the practical support that she needed was not there for her. The offender's lawyer put a lot of blame on her. Her sexuality and

ability as a mother were questioned by this lawyer. When her daughters were giving their testimony in court, she was not allowed to be in the same courtroom to accompany and support them. She found that the court procedure and schedule dragged extensively. The first trial was scheduled eight months after the disclosure and her daughters had to tell their stories repeatedly to police, teachers, crown attorney, the defense lawyer, and judges. Consistent with other mothers' suggestions, this woman wished that there would be more services for victims and mothers. At the time of this study, this mother started going to a self-help group for mothers.

#### Group Meeting

Following up on the recommendations of the advisory committee, a group meeting was scheduled for May 11, 1993. On that evening, two women turned up and another woman called in the middle of the meeting concerning her apology. As alluded to previously, this meeting had three purposes: 1) to provide participants with a chance to meet other women who are in the same situation, thus to reduce a sense of segregation; b) to provide participants with a safe environment to talk about their personal experience in participating in this study; and c) to give participants feedback and invite them to make suggestions for the application of the research findings. But because of the low turn-out rate, this meeting did not really reach all of its goals.

During the meeting, we spent some time talking about our experience in participating in this study. A woman reported that participating helped her to understand her daughter's experience of wanting to stop talking about the abusive experience. This mother also said that during the interview, in order to help me



understand her experience, she delved very deeply into her inner feelings, which was almost like making her re-live those experiences again. She found that this particular experience was not a good one at all, but she was pleased that she gained some insight into understanding her daughter's reluctance to talk about the abuse. This woman said, although she felt a little bit distressed for a couple days following the interview, she recovered and she still thought that it was truly a worthwhile experience for her.

Actually, after I finished interviewing this woman, we talked about how she was feeling. She shared with me the same insight about understanding her daughter's feeling. She said she felt a bit depressed thinking about the period after the disclosure of incest, but as she looked back, she realized that she has accomplished so much which she never thought she could have done. I helped her to talk about her feelings of achievement before I left her. I suggested to her that if she would still be distressed the next day, she could either phone me or her counsellor. This woman was seeing a counsellor on a regular basis and she had a very good relationship with the counsellor. In about a week, she did not phone me; so I phoned her to find out how she was feeling. She told me that she was fine. When she shared this incident again in the group meeting with the other woman, she said she was completely done with it. She even concluded that if she would be asked to be interviewed again, she would probably do so. In fact, this woman will be working with me to present this study in a workshop.

When talking about participants' comfort level in revealing their experience

during the interview, a woman pointed out that having known the researcher prior to the study made her feel very comfortable talking about her experience and feelings. I also shared with them that I had a similar experience. When I was interviewing someone with whom I had a previous relationship, I felt more comfortable and at ease when prompting for more specific information; but, when I was interviewing someone I met for the first time, sometimes I hesitated to ask for specific examples as I felt that I was intruding into other people's privacy.

After giving participants feedback concerning their input and the possible uses of the findings, I encouraged them to add any supplementary information or make suggestions. From this vantage point, participants talked about their frustration with police officers, Family and Children's Services, and the legal system. As a result, I found that the content of their sharing in this meeting was consistent with what most women said in the individual interviews.

In addition, we identified three possible reasons for other women's non-attendance. First, since most of the participants were still dealing with the problem of incest and some were fighting with the offenders for custody and access, this was bad timing for a group meeting. Secondly, leaving home for meetings might be an obstacle for some women who have young children to look after. Most of the women who did not show up for this meeting were those whose homes I had visited to conduct the interview. Thirdly, it is also possible that a face-to-face encounter was threatening to these women. They might fear being identified as mothers of incest survivors or fear meeting someone they knew in the community.

To conclude, although there were only three of us, the interaction between the participants was quite good. This small group composition provided us with a cosy and comfortable atmosphere for sharing. Our discussion served to support the interview data.

### Community Forum

Originally, I included in the study design a community forum. The purposes of holding such a community meeting were to increase people's awareness of the problem of father-daughter incest and the lack of supporting services for mothers, and to promote community collaboration in establishing effective programs and in planning prevention strategies.

After discussion with the advisory committee, I sensed that since incest is still a taboo subject in our community, the women did not feel comfortable organizing a forum for two reasons. First, they did not feel comfortable with the idea that anyone in the community could attend the forum. They were afraid that there would be obnoxious people coming in with an intention to embarrass or accuse them and their families. Secondly, they were afraid of meeting someone they knew in the community and thus being identified. Taking their concerns into consideration, I abandoned the idea of organizing a community forum by myself.

Nevertheless, since I have been a volunteer working with CJI in the area of preventing child sexual abuse, I was invited to present the findings of this study in the afternoon session of a workshop sponsored by CJI called "An ounce of prevention". This workshop was scheduled for June, 1993, but because of some unpredictable

impediment, it will not be held until October 1993. Since this workshop is to be hosted by a community service agency, women on my advisory committee felt very comfortable participating in it. They believed that people who paid a registration fee to go to a workshop would be more supportive, willing to listen and understand than those who might attend a forum my committee would organize. In this way, they felt more secure in sharing their experiences with this study.

Two women from the advisory committee will be working with me to talk about this study in the October "An ounce of prevention" workshop. We planned that after our presentation, there will be small group discussion with workshop participants and a plenary session. In small groups, we will ask people to identify strategies in preventing mother-blaming and in creating more support for mothers.

By encouraging workshop participants to think about alternatives to the problem of blaming mothers for incest, our presentation in this workshop will be taking the form of a community forum. More importantly, through collaborating with a social service agency, I will not only be able to increase people's awareness of the issue of intra-familial child sexual abuse and to promote a general understanding of and support for mothers of incest survivors, I will also be able to involve more service providers to actively design prevention strategies as well as helping programs for the mother-population. Hopefully, through direct dialogues between service providers and potential users, more understanding will be facilitated and more effective help will be made available.

## DISCUSSION

Although the problem of intra-familial child sexual abuse has been studied over the last decade, there has been very limited documentation of the experiences of mothers of incest survivors. The lack of knowledge in mothers' experiences often led social scientists to arbitrarily explain the roles of mothers in those incestuous families. Unfortunately, by adopting a traditional framework, either in terms of theory or methodology, many studies only provided us with a distorted picture of these women and served to perpetuate the problem of blaming mothers for the occurrence of incest. The focus of this thesis was to document and analyse the experiences of mothers of incest survivors. By interviewing mothers and giving them a voice, I was able to present their experiences from their own perspective.

Generally, the results of this study showed that all the mothers believed their daughters and sided with them to deal with the sexual abuse. These mothers took action to confront their partners and protect their daughters. They all expressed empathy for their daughters and did not blame them for the incestuous relationship. These mothers were all angry at the abuse and at the perpetrators for what they did to their daughters. After the disclosure of incest, all mothers were willing to seek help for their daughters as well as for themselves. Although some women did express empathic feelings for their spouses, they put their daughters' welfare ahead of their own feelings toward their husbands/partners with whom they had a previous relationship.

Specifically, the findings of this study invalidated the conclusions and

assertions made by many previous researchers, yet substantiated some of the feminist research I reviewed. Therefore, in the following paragraphs, I will discuss the findings of this study in relation to both mainstream and feminist research.

Speaking from a systems theory's point of view, Lustig et al. (1966) argued that incest is a peculiar behaviour pattern employed by dysfunctional families to defend against separation and loss. This is to say that keeping an intact family is considered far more important than preventing child sexual abuse in the family. However, the results of the present study indicated that, even though they were fully aware of the great possibility of ripping the family apart, all the mothers were still determined to believe their daughters, challenge their spouses, and report the abuse. As these women reported, one of their major reactions was anger; they could not tolerate the fact that their spouses were taking away their daughters' childhood and hurting them physically and psychologically.

Meiselman (1978) and Hoorwitz (1983) believed that mothers in incestuous families are usually incompetent. Because of their alleged passivity, they tend to interchange their roles with their daughters. In other words, there is a great possibility of role reversal between mothers and daughters. Moreover, these authors contended that the mothers' dependency needs would frustrate their husbands and lead them to turn to their daughters for emotional gratification, which in turn would increase the risk of incest. However, the data from this study showed that, while many of the offenders were controlling and abusive, there was no indication that the mothers reversed their roles with their daughters nor were they passive or dependent.

In fact, they were the primary caretakers for their children, besides working outside of the homes to support their families. In fact, some of these women were decisive and independent enough to terminate the abusive relationship with their ex-spouses before the disclosure of incest.

Rosenfeld (1979) and Mayer (1983) insinuated that mothers of incest survivors not only intended to withdraw themselves physically, sexually, and emotionally from their husbands, they also set up the opportunity for their husbands to sexually abuse their daughters. Yet, in this study, some women reported that they could never say no to their husbands' sexual requests. When the latter wanted sex, they got it. There was almost no way that they could object to their husbands' sexual needs. One woman's explanation of her husband's abusive behaviour is worth mentioning here. She explained that if her husband felt that she could not fulfil all of his sexual needs, he could have gone outside the home rather than having sex with his own daughter. The abuse of his own daughter was a matter of choice. Mothers whose daughters were abused during access (type B families) felt that it was the perpetrator's choice to take sexual advantage of his own child while she was with him. Mothers sent their daughters to their fathers because by law fathers had the right to access, but some went beyond their rights to sexually abuse their daughters. No wonder some mothers did not want to send their daughters to the offenders after hearing their daughters' disclosure. They just did not want their daughters to think that they approved of the abuse.

Tinling (1990) theorized that in order to overcome their feelings of inferiority,

mothers of incest survivors would tolerate or facilitate incest to occur. She believed that mothers could have known if they wanted to, but because they wanted to sustain a sense of superiority, they pretended not knowing about the incestuous relationship between their daughters and husbands. However, results of the present study showed that not one mother intended to perpetuate incest. All the women were angry at the perpetrators for inflicting harm on their daughters, and they were angry at themselves for not being sensitive enough to stop the abuse. In fact, some mothers did seek help from professionals once they had some suspicions of child sexual abuse. If mothers intended to maintain feelings of superiority by fostering incest, they would not have chosen to believe their daughters, which in turn brought them feelings of guilt, shame, and blame. They could have just denied what happened and kept silent. But, because of these mothers' willingness to listen to and help their daughters, there is no support for Tinling's claim.

When comparing this study with the work of feminists, certain similarities are observed. Sirles and Franke (1989) and Dadd, Smith, and Webber (1991) found that if the offender is the biological father of the victim, if the victim is younger, and if there is no genital-genital contact, mothers are more likely to believe their daughters about the abuse. In this study, in five of the six families the abuse started when the child was under the age of ten, in four families the incestuous relationship was between a biological father and a daughter, and none of the cases involved genital-genital contact; consequently when these daughters revealed the abuse, they were taken seriously by their mothers. However, because this study was not designed to



test mothers' belief or disbelief of their daughters, I can not conclude that mothers would not believe their daughters if none of the above criteria is fulfilled.

Hagood (1991) reported that when mothers first discovered the incestuous relationship between their husbands and daughters, they experienced feelings of shock, numbness, anger, horror, fear of losing their minds, and so on. Results showed that mothers in this study manifested similar kind of feelings. Although different women reported different intensity of those feelings, they certainly experienced some of these feelings with the disclosure of incest. In addition, consistent with Hagood's findings, these mothers also felt a sense of helplessness when they were left alone to deal with the chaos caused by incest, and a sense of powerlessness when they were dealing with the judicial system.

As Caplan and Hall-McCorquodale (1983) and Orr (1991) pointed out, no matter whether some of psychopathology was found in a child or an incestuous relationship was found between a father and a daughter, mothers were always blamed for causing such problems. Similarly, women in this study reported that, being mothers, they felt blamed for everything from the point of the disclosure of incest. For example, some women were blamed for reporting the sexual abuse too soon after discovery while having no "definite" physical evidence; others were blamed for deferring the report a day later after discovery. This implies that mothers were put in a no-win situation; no matter what they did, they were not considered adequate.

Strand (1990) reported that mothers' relatively slow reaction to incest was a result of their confusion about their sexual identity and feelings of stigmatization. It

is evident that mothers in this study also shared similar feelings. Because these mothers did not expect incest to occur, they had no knowledge of how to deal with it. More precisely, they did not know how to react and what to do. They were just confused and unable to sort out what actions to take. For mothers who were still living with their spouses at the time of disclosure (type A families), when they tried to figure out why incest happened, they naturally thought about every aspect of their relationship with their spouses including their sexual life. However, more women reported feelings of stigmatization and fear of being exposed to local communities. They were afraid of being talked about and judged behind their back. They learned from experience that without understanding the entire situation, people would make nasty comments about them and their daughters. In other words, before anyone pointed their fingers at them, these women had already felt shame and blame.

Wells (1981), Graham (1984), and Hagood (1991) found that many mothers of incest survivors were themselves victims of child sexual abuse. Because they still carried a lot of pain from their own past they were unable or unwilling to deal with their daughters' abusive experiences. In this study, no one reported that she was sexually abused in childhood. Yet from their stories some women did carry a great deal of pain, mainly from unhappy memories with their family of origin or with a previous marriage. Those experiences were often associated with physical and/or psychological abuse in previous relationships. Although some women expressed the view that they had not completely dealt with those negative experiences, when they learned that their daughters were abused sexually, all of them were willing to pull

themselves together in order to help their daughters deal with the abuse.

Comparing the experiences of mothers reported in Orr's (1991) study with this study, there were several experiences shared by both groups of participants. First, all mothers in both studies expressed strong anger toward the offenders. For some women, the anger was still deep down inside them even two or three years later. However, some of the women in my study also empathized with the offenders and were willing to help them change. They explained that although the anger still came out from time to time, they were learning to acknowledge and work on those feelings. Secondly, all women in both studies felt that after the disclosure, they were left to do the hard job without adequate support or services. They felt that the judicial system was often being lenient with offenders, but harsh with mothers. Thirdly, the women in this study echoed the women in Orr's study in that, as mothers, their voices were not heard at all in the child protection and justice systems. Instead of being treated as victims, they felt they were treated as offenders.

With regard to mother-daughter relationships, the results of this study supported the notion of mutuality of influence between mothers and daughters proposed by Schaffer (1977), Dorr and Friedenberg (1984), Schaffer and Crook (1985), Williams (1987), and Caplan (1989). It was evident that after the victims chose to tell their mothers about the sexual abuse, these mothers had the opportunity to intervene and to express their concern for their daughters. From their reports, before the disclosure of incest, these women's relationships with their daughters were not close. They claimed that they always wanted to be close to their daughters, but

since their daughters did not express the same interest or because they were used to being quite hostile to each other, these women did not know how to start building a more intimate relationship with their daughters. Some women reported that after the disclosure, their daughters started to communicate feelings and emotions with them, and express a desire to establish a more close and affectionate relationship with them. By receiving such favourable cues or invitations, these mothers were pleased to respond to their daughters in the expected manner. They indicated that they felt more comfortable and capable of freeing themselves to interact with their daughters in a more compassionate and caring way.

### Recommendations

Through repeatedly reviewing these mothers' experiences, I have developed some suggestions for different professionals who work with mothers of incest survivors. First of all, I strongly feel that Family and Children's Services as well as other community agencies need to re-evaluate and reconstruct their present working models. Since incest is a very sensitive issue, it really requires some people with special skills to deal with specific target groups. Frontline workers must understand that when incest or child sexual abuse is reported, what the mother needs at that critical moment is information and support. When she is confused, she wants to have someone guide her through without judging her or making her feel guilty. Genuine concern and prompt response are always appropriate.

Moreover, more funding should be granted to support self-help groups, public education, and preventive programs. Nevertheless, funders should focus more on the

quality of services. When funding a program, grants should include expenses for program evaluation. In this way, service providers would pay more attention to the quality of their services, and funders will have a baseline to determine whether or not to continue to support a specific program.

The general practice of the justice system also needs to be revamped, but this is also a difficult place to push for change. Generally, judges, prosecutors and lawyers are given too much power and control in the trial procedures and in the courtroom. Our society is used to believing that judges, prosecutors, and lawyers know better than lay people about justice and they are perceived as unprejudiced. However, our society fails to recognize the fact that these professionals are human beings too, and often their personal values and experiences affect their attitudes and judgement. In family court, there is no jury. The judge is the one and only person who has complete control over the entire case. The mother can only sit there listen and wait for her lawyer's turn to speak for her. What if the lawyer is not doing what s/he is supposed to do? Should the mother not be given a chance to express her opinion or explain something for herself? Should the judge's decision not be examined by a group of professionals who have proved to have legitimate knowledge in the area of incest? Should the judge's or the crown attorney's authority not be challenged? Should there not be other ways to deal with incestuous cases? I think this whole area needs to be re-examined.

From the results of this study, it was evident that police officers need to be trained in how to deal with incestuous cases. Because our society has delegated

authority to police to conduct the investigation, they are usually the ones whom mothers and victims first contact. The issue of child sexual abuse or incest should be included in the police training curriculum. They need to learn about conducting investigations in a non-judgemental way. They need to be familiar with local resources in order to direct people to relevant information or services after a case is reported. When mothers go into the police station to file a report, they should be given the right to choose a male or female officer to do the report.

#### The strengths and weaknesses of this study

This study is an original piece of work intended to reflect the personal experiences of mothers of incest survivors. As the researcher, I would like to share here the strengths as well as weaknesses of this study. I believe this research has contributed to the issue of intra-familial child sexual abuse in several ways:

1. It widens the narrow range of existing literature in the area of incest, especially regarding the experience of the mother-population.
2. It has provided documentation of the experiences of mothers of incest survivors from their own perspective, which is congruent with some professional reports and feminist research.
3. It has identified some predicaments that mothers of incest survivors encountered in the process of dealing with the sexual abuse in the family.
4. It demonstrates how mother-blaming has been happening in our society through mothers' interactions with community members, police

officers, child protection workers, counsellors, lawyers, and judges.

5. It illuminates how inadequate Family and Children's Services and judges are in handling child sexual abuse cases.
6. It has provided mothers of incest survivors with an opportunity to articulate their frustration and/or use their experiences to educate me and other concerned professionals.

Although this research has contributed to the issue of child sexual abuse in many ways, it has several areas that needed to be improved. First, the sample size of this study was smaller than expected. Originally, I planned to interview 10 women instead of six but there were a couple of reasons that prevented some women from participating in this study: a) when mothers were in the midst of the incest crisis, they did not have the time and energy to participate; b) when the crisis was over, some mothers might not have wanted to re-live the experience through sharing their stories with a researcher; c) because of confidentiality, I was not allowed to go into mothers' support groups to explain this study in person. However, I sensed that some frontline workers were not in favour of this kind of study and might not have encouraged mothers to contact me for enquiry; d) since mothers who were clients of Family and Children's Services were reluctant to be in the groups, they might not have trusted or listened to the group leader who described this study for me.

Secondly, because this study is a pioneering research into mothers' experiences, my focus was a bit too wide. Within a one-and-a-half hour interview, a wide range of general questions was asked, sometimes leaving out specific details. I

found that if I followed up on every detail that a mother told me about, the interviews would have been endlessly long.

Thirdly, during the process of developing interview questions, I was not aware that I would have some participants whose daughters were abused during access (type B families). In addition, the mothers on my advisory committee came from type A families and did not point out to me that there would be type B cases. Although I modified some of the questions when interviewing type B mothers, as I look back, perhaps I should have further modified some of the research questions to fit their situations as single parents.

Fourthly, it would have been better if this study also included information reported by professionals on how the judicial and child protection systems are supposed to work. In that way, we could have a better understanding of the whole picture regarding how mothers were treated by Family and Children's Services and the judicial system.

Fifthly, there was a human factor affecting my collection of data. Adopting the naturalistic approach, my aim was to obtain rich and detailed descriptions of the mothers' experiences. However, since some of the mother- participants and I did not know each other prior to the study, when we met the first time to do the interview, we had to adjust to each other's reactions. There were two respondents, the first and the fifth, with whom I did not feel very comfortable probing for details. With the first woman, since it was the first interview, I was quite anxious, so I could only manage to finish all the questions and ask a few questions for clarification. After that



interview, I replayed the interview-tape and found that I should have followed up on some information. So, I evaluated my own performance and managed to do a better job for the subsequent interviews. Nevertheless, with the fifth woman, I sensed that she was a bit uneasy sharing her feelings and thoughts with me when I was trying to probe deeper. So, sometimes I hesitated to ask for more. Consequently, these two interviews were comparatively shorter than the rest.

If I have the opportunity to conduct similar research in this area again, I would do so in the following way:

1. Lobby for formal collaboration with Family and Children's Services, Citizens Concerned with Crimes against Children, and Community Justice Initiatives. In this way, hopefully, I can expand the sample size and do a few pilot interviews.
2. Focus on certain aspects of these mothers' experiences in relation to the problem of mother-blaming, for example, to document their experiences with a male or female child protection worker, and with a male or female judge. Another example would be to compare the effectiveness of mothers' groups (i.e. statutory vs self-help groups) and mothers' experiences with each group.
3. Focus on studying only one group (e.g. type A or B families) regarding women's experiences.
4. Also interview service providers in order to understand how they perceive their roles and how they perceive the mothers whom they

serve.

5. Arrange informal meetings with mother-participants in order to establish a relationship prior to the indepth interview. In this way both the researcher and participant can have better psychological preparation to talk about deeper feelings and personal experience.

#### The uses of research findings

When I initially proposed this research, I sincerely hoped that this study could evolve into some concrete action taken by the mother-participants. However, as time went by, I did not see enough interest, energy, and cohesion emerging from the participants. I was quite disappointed for a while, but then after talking to a couple of people in the field, I found that there are some channels through which I can make good use of this research.

The two women on the advisory committee and I were invited to present this study in the forthcoming CJI workshop. Thus, we will have a chance to report the results of this study to service providers, concerned community members, and related professionals. Community Justice Initiatives (the host agency) will send invitations to Family and Children's Services, Regional Police Office, Probation Office, Legal Aid Office, and many other social service agencies. In this way, we can use this opportunity to educate workshop participants, make them aware of the problem of mother-blaming, and facilitate constructive discussion to make changes.

Recently, a women's group formed in the K-W area, temporarily called "Women Seeking for Justice" and consisting of 22 members. All members, except one,

are mothers whose daughters were sexually abused during access. In fact, one of the women in this study is also the founder of the group. When I was writing this section, I was told that the group was going to form a professional board. Meanwhile, two lawyers, one therapist/professor, and one MPP from the K-W area expressed interest in sitting on the board. I was also asked to be a board member. This board will be responsible for examining the present situation and looking for alternatives to push for a change in the judicial system. Once I am introduced to this group, I will share with them the findings of this study and encourage them to make use of it.

In addition, I will be doing some groundwork to lobby for changes in the judicial system. Summaries of the findings regarding mothers' experiences with the justice system will be sent to the Chief Judge of Kitchener-Waterloo area and the Attorney General (Ontario). Upon receiving research findings concerning how these mothers felt in the course of dealing with child sexual abuse, I hope that the judicial system will do something to rectify misconceptions as well as biases and ensure the accountability of lawyers and judges. I will inform my research participants and members of the "Women seeking for justice" group of my action. If they want to support me, they will be encouraged to petition. I hope that mothers and their families will be empowered to speak up and lobby for better support and understanding in the court system.

Through an introduction by a friend, I plan to discuss my thesis research with an experienced feminist therapist. This therapist used to do on-job training for different community service agencies. I hope that in our discussion, we can explore

the possibility of doing something together to influence frontline workers at Family and Children's Services. I strongly believe that genuine empathy is as equally important as good counselling skills; the lack of either one would prevent helping professionals from establishing better forms of assistance to help incestuous families deal with the problem of incest.

In terms of increasing public awareness of the problem of mother-blaming, I am prepared to write a newspaper article for the K-W Record regarding the experiences of mothers of incest survivors. I am also prepared to write professional articles for community psychology and feminist journals. I hope that by doing so, I can alert scholars to do more studies in this area.

A personal reflection on the entire process of this research

Having the chance to conduct this research project and work with mothers of incest survivors, I certainly learned a lot about issues concerning intra-familial child sexual abuse. More importantly, I have learned something about myself and myself in relation to other women. Sometimes, I found it very difficult to share my learning with others because I internalized things very quickly, and I do not know how to share with others in a systematic, rational way. However, with the help of my personal journal (I have been keeping a journal since I started working on this study), I would like to share the following.

First, when I started to make contact with some service providers, I learned that, although many of them have been working in the field for some time, they did not have the sensitivity to acknowledge the root of the problems that mothers of

incest survivors have been facing. When I shared with them what I saw as signs of mother-blaming, some of them disagreed with me and told me how inadequate some women are. As part of my nature, I tend not to argue with strangers or someone I only have met a few times. So, I did not say much except to make it clear that I would be doing this study, and I asked them if they could help me distribute invitation letters and explain the research to potential participants. As I looked back, I found that I was not political enough to handle the situation. Perhaps I should have fed them with more empirical studies concerning the problem of mother blaming, or I should have kept on lobbying for their collaboration.

Secondly, in the process of lobbying for support from service providers, I did not gain the kind of support I expected to have. When I was trying to recruit research participants, I had to call frontline workers many times to find out if they had spoken to their clients. I left messages for them to call me back, but they never did. It took me several months to realize that I could not count on them, and at several points I wondered if this study would actually be possible. When I heard from mother-participants that they had trouble contacting workers, I certainly understood and identified with their feelings.

Thirdly, in the process of conducting this research, I encountered some conflicts with my own socialization as a woman. I was brought up in an environment that often viewed women, including mothers, as either good or bad. When I was younger, I often heard my mother and her friends criticize other women for not being good enough in certain "women's work". In order to avoid being criticized, I picked

up quite a few skills such as sewing, knitting, flower arrangement, and cooking to prove my femineity or adequacy as a woman to be. In addition, I always wanted to be a perfect wife, but I gradually understood that there would not be a perfect wife or husband. After six years of marriage, I learned to accept myself and my husband as who we are, but sometimes I would still judge myself as either being a good or bad wife. Although I recognized how mother-blaming is at work in our society and I resented it, I realized that unconsciously I was also a part of it, only that I was doing it in a very subtle way. For example, I used to give a ride to two little girls every Sunday to go to church; sometimes when I found their clothing dirty, I thought that perhaps their mother should have paid more attention to their untidiness. As I started to analyse the data and write this thesis, I realized that I have lost sight of the complexity of people's lives. These two girls' mother worked full-time in a factory and had another younger child to look after; she might want her daughters to look tidy, but she might not have enough time to ensure it. So, I recognized that without understanding this mother's situation, I was judging her parenting skills.

Fourthly, I also found myself experiencing a variety of emotions throughout the completion of this study. When I met with my thesis committee in December to propose this study, I was told that my emotions would be affected while doing this research. At that point, I thought that, because I have been an emotionally stable person (most of the time) and I always knew what I was doing, hearing these mothers' stories would not have an emotional effect on me. In spite of this presumption, there were several times in the interviews I had to take deep breaths

and control my tears from falling on my face. When I was transcribing the tapes, those heavy feelings struck me again so that I seemed to lose myself in those stories. There were times when I looked at my husband and asked myself what I would do if he were to sexually abuse our child, if we had one. These experiences told me that even a thought of the possibility of dealing with incest in my own family could put me in a very depressed mood. Thus, I realized how brave my mother participants were when they decided to take part in this research. My heart really felt for them.

Lastly, in the process of doing this study, I experienced fear of rejection from friends. In our society, most of us are trained to view mothers of incest survivors and their activities in a negative and blaming way. When I shared with friends general ideas about my thesis, even just the topic area, some of them would start to make negative comments about mothers, others would say "wow! you are very brave." and then they would turn to talk about other subjects. Some people asked me: "Do you really think mothers are innocent?" or "Do you think these families would have a future?" Sometimes I would explain and try to educate them a little bit; other times, I would try to be brief. My reactions always depended on my mood and my perception of whether the other party was ready to be open or not. If I felt rejected, then I would be brief. When I perceived someone would not be interested in my topic study, I would just say I was doing something related to child sexual abuse. As a result, I could understand mothers' experiences of being silenced and pressured by relatives and friends.

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research study was to draw people's attention to hearing the voices of the silent party, mothers of incest survivors. Customarily, when incest is revealed, people will sympathize a little with the victim and condemn the offender. Once people learned that the offender is caught and put in jail, they thought the entire crisis is over. Neither would they care about treatment for the victim nor the needs of the mother who is left to take care of the chaos caused by the abuse. When the mother is remembered, she is usually held responsible for the entire "unfortunate" situation. The most unfair part is that mainstream research tends to devalue mothers and blame them for the occurrence of incest. As a result, mothers of incest survivors are stereotyped and stigmatized in the literature. Moreover, in reality, these mothers are treated as criminals even though they are indeed victims.

Recognizing the problem of silencing the voices of mothers of incest survivors in mainstream research, the documentation of mothers' experiences becomes fundamentally important. The results of this study have demonstrated how cruel our patriarchal society is in the way we manipulate these mothers' lives. In order to put up with the "standard" that is set by our male-dominated society, mothers of incest survivors have suffered extremely. They were put in a no-win situation in which no matter how hard they tried, they were still blamed for what they did. Service provision in our society only reflected the reality that mothers' needs are considered the lowest priority. As Orr (1991) pointed out, the underlying message that is sent



to mothers is "good mothers have no needs but to meet the needs of others" (p. 91).

As I approach the end of this thesis, I sincerely hope that by hearing the voices of these mothers, social scientists, members in the judicial system, people in Family and Children's Services, helping professionals, and community members will start thinking about some alternatives to restructure the way we deal with intra-familial child sexual abuse and to help mothers feel that they are normal human beings too.

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**APPENDIX**

## Appendix #1

A Letter of Invitation

From: Josephine Fong (a volunteer at CJI and a graduate student at Wilfrid Laurier University).

To: Mothers of incest survivor.

Re: Participation in a study, "Hearing the voices of the silent: Alternative to the problem of blaming mothers for incest".

Date: October 20, 1992.

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Dear Mothers,

I am doing a research for my M. A. thesis which aims to know the experiences of mothers of incest. Thus, I am writing to invite you to participate in this research project.

Working with some members of CJI on the "Consumers' Guide" project, I learned that mothers of incest victims are generally misunderstood by our society.

In order to find out more about how mothers of incest victims are viewed by professionals, I have been reading studies on mothers. I often found that mothers were described as passive and inadequate. I also found that almost all of these studies excluded the mothers' own experiences.

Recognizing the lack of mothers' voices, I decided to conduct research that recognizes mothers. I believe that research should be done to understand the hardship that mothers experience after the discovery of incest. It is also important for service providers to recognize the kinds of support that will help mothers to deal with their situations.

I also believe that mothers of incest victims should be granted an opportunity to participate in designing studies that would reflect their true experiences. Although I have some ideas about how to make the voices of mothers heard, I may still overlook some of the important aspects that are relevant to mothers' experiences. Therefore, I would like to involve mothers of incest victims in the process of designing the research, carrying it out, analyzing the information, and making suggestions for helping professionals. I believe that by cooperating with you, this research will provide an accurate picture of the needs of mothers.

Showing your interest does not mean that you have to participate in all parts of the research and have expertise in doing research. You may chose to be a committee member, an interviewer, an interviewee, a data analyst, and/or a speaker at a community forum. I will train you to do any of these things if you wish.

Any information that you share in our interviews will be treated in strict confidence. Personal names and possible identifiers will be disguised. You are free to participate in and withdraw from the research project according to your wish. Once this project is complete, I will provide feedback through a summary report, personal feedback session, and/or community forum according to your comfort level.

If you are interested or want to know more about the proposed study, please feel free to contact me at 725-4826. If I am not in, the answering machine will pick up your message. You can leave your name and telephone number where I can reach you.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely yours,

## Appendix #2

Letter of Information

My name is Josephine Fong and I am a student in the M. A. program of community psychology at Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo. As a part of my program, I am conducting a research project named, "Hearing the voices of the silent: Alternative to the problem of blaming mothers for incest". My thesis advisor is Dr. Richard Walsh-Bowers. The purpose of this study is to understand the experience of mothers of incest victims from their own perspective.

I hope that the findings of this study will help to: 1) bridge the gap in existing literature regarding the experience of mothers; 2) provide alternate explanations of the mothers' experiences from their own perspective; 3) increase people's awareness of the problem of mother-blaming; 4) correct misconceptions regarding mothers of incest victims among helping professionals; and 5) advocate for mothers in striving for adequate supporting services.

Since you have indicated your willingness to participate in this study, I will spend approximately 90 minutes with you to learn about your experience. I am interested in learning how you feel about the incestuous relationship, how you experienced the process of dealing with the situation, and how you feel about the existing helping services. Your participation in this study is absolutely voluntary, you can withdraw from the study at any time. If you have any questions concerning this study, please feel free to ask for clarification.

Any information that you share in our meeting will be treated in confidence. Your participation in this study is voluntary and you are free to withdraw your consent at any time. As a part of the study design, I may have one or two assistants helping me transcribe verbatim and/or analyse some of the data. However, if I do have assistant(s), I will delete your name from both tape and transcript before they listen to or read your information. The results of this research project will be printed as my thesis and will be presented to my research committee at Wilfrid Laurier University. There is a possibility that portions of the thesis will be submitted for publication at a later date. All information will preserve strict rules of confidentiality and no information will be printed that could serve to identify you in any way. However, as I will present information in mothers' own words, I need to ask your permission to quote you while maintaining your anonymity.

I would be pleased to contact you after the research project is completed. It is my responsibility to provide you with feedback regarding your personal input and the use of the study. You may chose to obtain such information in the form of a summary report, personal feedback session, and/or community forum.

If you have any questions regarding this project, please do not hesitate to ask me before you sign the accompanying consent form. If you have further questions afterwards or you want to know about the progress of this study, you may contact me (725-4826) or my advisor (884-1970, ext. 2630). Please indicate on the consent form in what way you would like me to provide you with feedback when the research project is complete.

Sincerely yours,

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Josephine Fong, researcher.

Consigned by:

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Dr. Richard Walsh-Bowers,  
research advisor.

## Appendix #3

Consent Form

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have read and understand the letter of information which describes this study, and I agree to participate.

My consent allows Josephine Fong to:

- a) tape record this meeting.
- b) use information given by me, in this meeting, for the purpose of her study.
- c) discuss information given by me with her research advisor, Dr. Richard Walsh-Bowers, at Wilfrid Laurier University, for the purpose of her study.
- d) share the job of information transcription and analysis with her assistant(s) from the Steering Committee.

I further understand that:

- a) my participation in this study is voluntary.
- b) I can refuse to participate in this study at any time.
- c) sharing my experience in dealing with incest may remind me of some unpleasant moments in the past.
- d) all information given by me will be treated in confidence.
- e) any papers or reports, either published or unpublished, that result from this study will preserve codes of confidentiality and anonymity.
- f) if I have further enquiries I can contact Josephine Fong.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Please check the following items if you wish to receive information about this study's results from the researcher (you may check more than one item):

I would like to receive feedback at the completion of the study regarding \_\_\_my input and/or

\_\_\_the uses of the findings.

I would like to receive feedback in the form of:

\_\_\_a summary report by mail

\_\_\_personal feedback by \_\_\_phone or \_\_\_visit

\_\_\_attending a community forum (to be arranged if feasible)

My phone number :

My address :