

## *Chapter II*

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### **The Scars of Childhood Violence**

Emotional and psychological scars of an adolescent are caused by adverse experiences such as an accident, injury or violent attack on the victim. These scars are largely formed because of unexpected incidents that happened during childhood. Mental scars are the result of unpleasant physical or emotional experiences that have long lasting impact on the minds of people. Some of these unpleasant experiences occur due to violence enforced on them at an early age. The violence experienced is generally extremely frightening or distressing which could damage the psyche of the person. Children, who experience violence, are most likely to have permanent emotional consequences such as anxiety, trauma, anti-social behaviour, depression, suicidal thoughts or indulgence in illegal activities. This marks the beginning of criminal behaviour in children. The objective of this chapter is to trace the adverse conditions undergone by adolescents in their early childhood. Thus with the application of the study, the Adverse Childhood Experience undergone by the characters in their early childhood are analysed in the select novels of Todd Strasser.

The chapter begins with the details of childhood; criminal behaviour; exposure to violence; childhood adverse condition; the focus of the research; developmental approach; origin of risk factor; the origin and development of Adverse Childhood Experience; the application of the study in the select novels of Todd Strasser.

Childhood is the period between the end of infancy and the beginning of adolescence; it roughly falls between the age group from two to twelve. In 1960's America came up with mandated child abuse reporting law, leading to the passing of the Child Abuse

Prevention and Treatment Act in 1974. This legal measure paved the way for people to understand the influence of trauma in a child's life. For the past few decades, many studies have considered child abuse, neglect and trauma as a concern in child's psychological development. One such study is Adverse Childhood Experience, which focuses on a child's suffering due to household dysfunction factors.

To understand any problem one must start from scratch. Similarly a criminal behaviour also has certain underlying traits which could result in delinquent behaviour in the future. This chapter briefly discusses and highlights the importance of identifying these adverse factors that could lead children to become criminals. Curt R. Bartol and Anne M. Bartolin, criminologists in their book *Criminal Behaviour: A Psychological Approach* states, "...criminal behaviour in adults can often be traced to their childhoods" (50). Similarly early life experiences also contribute to the development of criminal behaviour in an individual. Anyone facing severe physical and sexual abuse during one's childhood can predispose to disorderly conduct later in life. Histories of repeated physical, sexual and emotional abuse are commonly found in young adult criminals. This criminal behaviour poses a serious threat for any healthy society.

Child abuse is a global issue that is prevalent in many parts of the world. The highest rate of child abuse is reported in the United States, Australia and Africa. The US Department of Health and Human Services documented 4.2 million referrals to child protective services, with two million children determined to be victims of child abuse and neglect. According to surveys girls are more abused than boys. These abused children show a significant increase in depression, anxiety disorder and other medical disorders in their adulthood. One of the huge concerns is that the majority of childhood abuse cases go unreported. "Globally, it is

estimated that up to 1 billion children aged 2–17 years, have experienced physical, sexual, or emotional violence or neglect in the past year” (WHO). Violence against children can be perpetrated in school, at home or online. Many boys and girls face violence from the hands of the people they trust, in particular from parents, teachers, neighbours, caregivers or peers. This can remain as a trauma in the child’s mind all its life.

United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), is a global organisation, which aims to protect the rights of children and adolescents. The organisation focuses on children’s safety and has taken many measures to protect children and adolescents from exploitation and violence. This organisation could help the children who are victims to violence to start afresh. They promote and cultivate skill developing hobbies for these children who have undergone trauma due to domestic abuse.

If a child is exposed to any form of violence, she or he might experience a lifelong consequence including physical injury, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, depression, unplanned pregnancy, sexually transmitted disease or even death. Some researchers suggest that children who experience such violence could result in brain impairment or damage to the nervous system. Violence against children also has a long term behavioural impact such as anti-social behaviour, aggressiveness, impulsive, risky sexual behaviour, substance use and criminal behaviour. Despite these serious physical and mental consequences a majority of these victims remain helpless. There is another category of children who grew up in a violent environment are more likely to behave in the same violent manner when they grow up. The cycle continues and it creates a new generation of victims. This victimisation can transform into traumatic emotions.

Childhood adverse conditions have become a common phenomenon for teenagers worldwide. “Recent studies have estimated that more than half of children suffer from at least one adverse or traumatic experience during their childhood” (Perez 1). These experiences include any form of abuse, maltreatment or dysfunctional household environment due to parental divorce, incarceration of household members, violence in the family, mental illness of any family member and substance abuse. These experiences can have an effect on the child’s growth in many different ways. Contemporary research has shown that there are connections present between childhood adversities in development of harmful adolescents and adults.

The traditional theories of crime often ignore the developmental perspective and fail to distinguish the different phases of criminal behaviour. The developmental changes across one’s life are completely brushed aside. The developmental approach examines the developmental process in a certain stage of life which changes or influences a person’s decision and actions that may contribute to the formation of criminal behaviour. It focuses on risk and protective factors. Risk factors are the factors that increase the negative effects of developing a criminal behaviour. Protective factors are the factors which safeguards a person from the harmful effects of risk factors.

Developmental approach analyses adolescent’s risk and protective factors in order to identify the factors that would provoke criminal behaviour. “Developmental ...theories of crime are collectively characterized by their goal of explaining the onset, persistence, and desistance of offending behaviour over the life – course” (McGee and Farrington). The approach begins by examining the pathway, transition and turning point of a criminal

behaviour process. The pathway to criminal behaviour is rooted in childhood, in which an individual is exposed to violence or becomes a victim of violence.

By applying developmental approach to Todd Strasser's select novels, the risk factors of the character's criminal behaviour are traced. The pathway to offense starts from familial impact on an individual. The approach follows a pattern of childhood mistreatment from parents which results as a scar in the child's mind. The suffering they face over time during childhood is identified with the application of Adverse Childhood Experience.

Adverse childhood experience is the first stage, which paves way to crime. "Many theories of criminology proposes that the roots of serious criminal behaviour appear in childhood or early adolescence" (Bartol 50). It can act as a small triggering factor for a child to become a criminal in the future. ACE states that children who go through a hard childhood often find solace in rebelling and indulging in criminal activities. In most cases the problem begins at home for a teenager. Children depend on their parents for care and affection, which if denied by them, children find a way to fill the space left barren by their parents.

The term Adverse Childhood Experience refers to the troubles undergone by a child in its early or later childhood which has an influence in his or her future. It can be due to sexual, physical or emotional abuse or neglect and household dysfunction. Household dysfunction refers to: "growing up with domestic violence, parental marital discord, and substance abusing, mentally ill, or criminal household members" (Dong et al. 773). These qualities show that the child is going through ACE. The potential exposure to more than one ACE can lead to the increased risk of being a perpetrator to violence.

The concept Adverse Childhood Experience began with public health. The discipline intersects with biology and psychology. It has recently emerged in criminology through the juvenile justice system. ACE was first developed by Vincent Felitti and Robert Anda, later along with Dale Nordenberg, David Williamson, Alison Spitz, Valerie Edwards, Mary Koss, and James Marks published a research article in 1998 entitled “Relationship of Childhood Abuse and Household Dysfunction to Many of the Leading Causes of Death in Adults” in which they first introduced the condition Adverse Childhood Experience.

Originally, the physicians Robert Anda and Vincent Felitti operated a weight loss clinic. In the clinic, they saw many patients using obesity as a defence mechanism against unwanted sexual advancements. It was found out that the participants who dropped out of the weight loss Programme have experienced sexual or physical abuse in their childhood. Similarly most of the drop outs of the Programme had a history of abuse of some form in their childhood. This led to the development of the study of ACE.

The ACE’s initial model was developed to examine the connection between childhood abuses and household dysfunction as a leading cause of death in adults. “A questionnaire about adverse childhood experiences was mailed to 13,494 adults who had completed a standardized medical evaluation at a large HMO; 9508 [70.5%] responded” (Felitti et al. 245). Through the responses, it was discovered that the individual who went through multiple categories of adverse childhood experiences were likely to have many health risk factors later in life.

Adverse childhood experiences influence the bio-psycho-social development in teenage offenders. The potential negative effects of these risk factors include adverse psychological and physical consequences and, in some cases, may result in trauma.

Symptoms of this potential trauma include various negative emotional states such as anger, hostility, anxiety, depression, and lowered self-esteem. Some children use criminal activities as a coping mechanism when they grow up.

Recent studies in criminology have indicated that ACEs may increase the odds of involvement in the criminal justice system, and young people with higher ACE scores are more likely to offend and re-offend than young people with lower ACE scores. Other assessments have also validated the ACE assessment as an effective predictor of negative outcomes throughout life. Lately, the ACE assessment tool has been improvised to identify the risk factors which have been experienced by an individual. ACE findings suggests that, “...as the number of traumatic events increased, there was a significant increase in depression as well as anxiety, panic attacks, suicide attempt, substance abuse, alcohol abuse, sleep disturbance, obesity, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and heart disease” (Botros et al. 113).

A child is sensitive to the opinions, feelings and actions of his or her parents. Any emotionally harmful attitude of the parents can affect the child’s well-being and health. The ten factors which play a crucial role in developing adverse conditions in children are “1) emotional abuse by a parent, 2) physical abuse by a parent, 3) sexual abuse, 4) emotional neglect, 5) physical neglect, 6) loss of a parent, 7) domestic violence, 8) household member who abused alcohol or drugs, 9) a family member experiencing mental illness or 10) experiencing the incarceration of a household member” (Trapassi 4). Any child undergoing any one of these conditions is considered an adverse childhood experience.

Emotional abuse is a type of abuse that involves the repeated emotional mistreatment of a child. It is also called psychological abuse. “Emotional abuse can involve deliberately



trying to scare, humiliate, isolate or ignore a child” (“What is Emotional Abuse”). It is when parents show less regard for the child. They say unkind things to their children and create an emotionally unhealthy environment. Parents who are not interested in the children, express it through not showing affection, ignoring children’s presence, their needs and not calling them by their names. Saying unkind things towards children is one of the major forms of emotional abuse. This can be done through the following: the parent makes a child feel unwanted by stating that ‘life would be better without the child’; belittling the child; threatening the child with harsh punishment; verbal abuse; comparing the child with other siblings or peers; and blaming the child for the family problems. There are also parents who create an unhealthy environment for the child by encouraging the child to commit immoral or illegal acts. Some parents expect their child to perform well in academics or any sports, which adds more pressure on the child and it results in the child isolating himself or herself from friends and family. Such behaviour can create an environment of fear, hostility and anxiety in the child’s mind.

Physical harm or physical abuse is causing injury or trauma to another person through bodily contact. “Physical abuse is one of the most common forms of maltreatment” (“Physical Abuse”). This can be done by either parents or by others. Children are often likely to experience abuse at the hands of adults such as parents, caretakers and elder siblings. This includes hitting, slapping, punching, biting, scratching, kicking, pulling hair, arm twisting, choking or using objects to induce pain. An individual who experiences physical abuse in his or her childhood are more likely to experience psychological and emotional difficulties later in life.

Sexual abuse is a form of molestation often done through force without the consent of the other party. This can be witnessed in all genders and among all age groups but it is predominant in children. Since children are easy to approach and ignorant, many adults take advantage of this and easily manipulate these young children into sexual advancements. Many children are engaged in sexual activities by adults through pressure or other means. “When a perpetrator engages with a child this way, they are committing a crime that can have lasting effects on the victim for years” (“Child Sexual Abuse”). Child sexual abuse or child molestation can occur in various settings such as home, school or street. These include indecent exposure and sexual exploitation. It often involves physical contact with a younger person and it is done by an adult for either pleasure or to demonstrate dominance.

According to Lawler and Talbot, “Emotional neglect involves inattentiveness to a child’s emotional and developmental needs” (460). Inattentiveness can be defined as a “...relationship pattern in which an individual’s affectional needs are consistently disregarded, ignored, invalidated, or unappreciated by a significant other” (Ludwig and Rostain 105). Emotional neglect in children is seen when the parents are inattentive towards a child’s emotional needs. In recent times, the most common emotional neglect is seen when a child longs to spend time with his parents. This can happen when both the parents are working and the child is often left alone in the house to play by himself. Such situations will continue when the parents come home late and ignore the child. As a result the child feels distanced and detached from its parents and finds other means to fill that emotional need. Most of the time these other means that a child prefers are drugs and alcohol. Finally, the child might end up living a life without proper parental guidance.

Physical neglect is a situation where a parent or a caregiver does not provide the needs of a child to grow healthy and to survive. “Physical neglect is the failure to provide for a child’s basic survival needs, such as nutrition, clothing, shelter, hygiene, and medical care” (“Identification of Neglect”). The basic physical needs include food, shelter, clothing and a safe environment which is free from violence or harm. Additionally, physical neglect can also refer to rejecting the children so that they do not feel they belong to their home, inadequate supervision by parents and abandoning the child. Failure in providing the necessities of a child, affects the child’s well-being, development and health. A physically neglected child will have any of these following attributes: not having proper clothing, poor hygiene, slow mental development, overweight, underweight and poor health condition. Physical neglect can cause malnutrition, untreated illness and long-term psychological problems such as depression, anxiety and low self-esteem. In some cases it can also lead to self-destructive violent behaviours or criminal activity in the future.

Loss of one or both parents at a young age can cause a devastating effect on the child’s health. Parents are the attachment figures in any child’s life. Death of any parent or divorce can have a huge impact on a child’s mental and physical growth. “The death of a parent in childhood is a traumatic experience. An estimated 3.5% of children under the age 18 [approximately 2.5 million] in the United States have experienced the death of their parent” (Li). To cope up with the death of a parent, a child should have a strong support system. Children experiencing parental loss will have higher risk of experiencing negative outcomes including psychological issues such as depression, anxiety or post-traumatic stress disorder.

A Child experiencing the departure of one or both parents could also affect its mental health. “The loss of their [parents] support, guidance, and love can leave a vast emptiness and pain that might seem impossible to heal, even if their death was expected” (Gepp and Lawrenz). Losing a parent can also mean divorce, when the child ends up in the custody of one parent and not being able to grow up with the other is also a problem. They grow up without the care and love of one parent. In some cases the connection between a child and the other parent is completely cut off. The path towards divorce in most houses is so upsetting and distressing on the child that in some cases it ends up as a scar in the mind of the child. Due to parents’ divorce, many children after a certain age have other psychological issues.

Domestic violence is violence or abuse in a family setting. “This [Domestic abuse] includes any behaviors that frighten, intimidate, terrorize, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure, or wound someone” (“What Is Domestic Abuse?”). This type of violence is commonly seen among partners or spouses. It is also seen in children, parents and elderly. The victim of domestic violence is commonly women. Many studies show that the countries with less gender equality experience more domestic violence. Domestic violence often occurs when the abuser believes that abuse is their owning material and they are less likely to report. Children who live in such households often show psychological problems from a young age and it can result in vicarious traumatization.

A household member who abuses other members of the family because of alcohol consumption or drug addiction brings misery to the whole family. According to *Psychology Today*, “One in five American children live in Homes with Parental Substance Abuse” (Bergland). When a person uses substances or alcohol it affects his health and changes

the way he or she acts at home and work space. An alcoholic parent can cause many problems in the family, especially in the child. Most of the parents are abusive due to drugs. They try to hit their kids and mistreat them. A child who is exposed to these becomes anxious, scared, worried about the family, depressed and overwhelmed. These characteristics affect the child's activities in school and the world at large. When the child is overwhelmed and could not share his feelings with anyone, he or she tries with other means to vent out their frustration by self-harming or by getting into arguments with parents. Some children might lose the ability to empathise with others.

A family member experiencing mental or physical illness can disrupt a family's peace. Once the peace of the family is affected the family members experience mental pressure, anxiety, helplessness, guilt and depression. Mental illness of a family member can create tension, uncertainty and stress in the house. "The psychological distress felt by family members often results from their feelings of helplessness and lack of control" (Jane and Seamark). The family members react in different ways. In many families the mental illness becomes the major focus of the family. When the family's primary attention shifts to the member with mental illness the children in the family experience a sense of loss and the feeling of being ignored. In some cases when the mentally ill person experiences other physical disabilities as well then the whole family has to take care of that person and the child on the other hand is ignored most of the time so it grows up on its own.

When a child experiences the incarceration of a household member, the child is prone to feel criminality as a part of his or her life and may tend to become a criminal in the future. "The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world, yet there is relatively little information on how the removal of these adults from households impacts

the youth who are left behind” (Nichols and Loper). Incarceration of a family member could disturb the serene environment of the family. This could result in a worrisome household environment which in turn leads to the children’s poor performance at school.

Especially parents, who are incarcerated, give a difficult childhood for their children. They form a bad role model and their role in the family is compromised because of distrust in them. As a result a child of incarcerated parents may become antisocial or mentally ill or less interested in studies resulting in declined grades. Thus, these ten factors determine the adverse condition a child experiences in his or her childhood.

Emotional abuse by a parent, physical abuse by a parent, sexual abuse, emotional neglect, physical neglect, loss of a parent, domestic violence, household member who abused alcohol or drugs, a family member experiencing mental illness and experiencing the incarceration of a household member are the ten factors which determine the condition of ACE in Todd Strasser’s *Angel Dust Blues (ADB)*, *Give a Boy a Gun (GBG)*, *Can’t Get There from Here (CGTH)*, *If I Grow Up (IGU)* and *Famous*. The characters undergoing any one of these ten factors are considered to be experiencing adverse childhood experiences. Moreover, the protagonists of the select novels have experienced more than one adverse condition under familial environment.

The first novel selected for the study is *Angel Dust Blues (ADB)*. The novel focuses on teenage angst, rebellion and the troubles caused by getting into drugs and bad friendships. Todd Strasser brings out a sympathetic look into a teenager’s temptations, drug usage and the road to redemption. The novel focuses on Alex, a young boy of seventeen who tries to fulfill his parents’ high expectations of him. Alex scored good grades at school and his

interest in tennis made him perform well in tournaments making him the second best player in California. Even though he was well appreciated for his accomplishments he always felt unloved by his parents.

The fourth factor of ACE is emotional neglect. At a young age Alex longed for his parents' care and attention. As he grew up, this longing turned into anger and detestation towards them. Alex's father was a businessman and his mother was a counselor. They spent most of their time travelling to different places for business. They visited Alex only on weekends so he addressed them as, "absentee parents" (Strasser, *ADB* 9). Alex felt that his parents role in his life was non-existent. In their busy scheduled life Alex was their least priority. Both his physical and emotional needs were not met by them. So he called them absentee parents.

There was one instance when Alex's interest was brushed aside and his father imposed his ideas and views on the matter. Alex was in his senior year and he was yet to decide the college he would prefer to attend after school, but his father suggested that he should join the college of his father's preference. Alex was not convinced with his father's suggestion and showed his disbelief in his facial expressions but his father completely ignored it by looking at his watch. "Alex looked up at his father incredulously. Meanwhile his father looked at his watch" (Strasser, *ADB* 20). This incident shows that his opinions were disregarded by his father. Also, Alex's father looking at his watch states that he was ready to leave and was not ready to stay back and listen to Alex's response. This incident proves that Alex's father failed to heed the voice of his son and Alex's interests were ignored outright. It was a clear indication of emotional neglect that Alex experienced from his father.

Alex's mother on the other hand was no different from his father. Alex said that his mother, "...had approached all the family crises he could remember with a new hairdo" (Strasser, *ADB* 143). This conveys that his mother was not good at handling problems rather she avoids it by disappearing into a parlour. Alex had witnessed this behaviour of his mother throughout his life. Alex preferred if his mother could sit and talk to him about his problems like any mother with care, he could overcome his troubles easily. The emotional longing of a son was ignored by his mother as well.

For many years Alex longed for a regular motherly closeness from his mother. But the way she dressed made Alex even more unapproachable, he felt, "if only she'd let her hair down, put on a turtleneck sweater and a pair of jeans, she would have been a mother he [Alex] could have related to" (Strasser, *ADB* 145). Every time Alex's mother visited him, she was dressed in suits of grey or blue. Alex noticed that it was more professional than casual. So he felt that she distanced herself from him. So he never approached her with his difficulties and issues. If Alex was troubled with something and behaves disturbed, his mother's immediate solution was to send him to a psychiatrist. According to Alex's mother, making her son talk to a psychiatrist about his emotions could give a solution to all his behavioural problems, rather than talking to him directly. This proved that even though Alex wanted to be close to his mother, his mother distanced herself from him, thus ignoring his emotions. So as a result Alex's emotional needs were abused by his parents.

Parents should be approachable from the point of view of their children. This proves that the way a mother dresses must be comfortable to the child not only during the formative



years but also during the adolescent period at least until the young adult gains confidence to confide in his or her troubles.

The fifth factor of ACE is physical neglect. It was evidently seen when Alex's parents' idea of an offspring was to have a child that was not demanding, trouble-free and easy to take care. This was expressed: "It seemed that his parents liked him best when he required their attention least. Like a car that runs for years without needing servicing, they wanted a low maintenance offspring" (Strasser, *ADB* 19). Alex's parents' expectation was compared to an inanimate object to denote that the child's significance was overlooked.

Alex's true longing for his parent's attention and time were well described by the author as:

...for years while he was growing up all he ever wanted was to see them once in a while, to eat dinner with his mother or go to a ball game with his father, or spend a day sailing with him alone. But his parents were always too busy-his father in business and his mother in politics-working too late to eat dinner home, often not coming home until after Alex was asleep. The weekends had been business and politics, too. Alex and his father would take business associates out sailing and Alex would quietly tend the jib while his father talked business.

(Strasser, *ADB* 19)

Alex and his parents never spent quality time as a family. The time they spent together on weekends and vacations was always with business people. So he yearned to connect with his parents with the time he can spend with them as a family. Alex's parents' idea of a family was underrated that they failed to recognise their child's physical need to

connect with his parents at least during weekends. Thus Alex experienced physical neglect from his parents.

The emotional neglect and physical neglect were evidently seen in Alex's life. So as a result when Alex became a teenager he started rebelling and showed less interest in all the things recommended by his parents. There was an instance where Alex was interested in European museums but he was ready to decline visiting it if his mother suggested that he would go there. The author expressed it as:

Alex was about as interested in great European museums as he was in learning Swahili. But even if he had been interested in them he would have refused his mother's suggestion. It seemed like he didn't want to do anything his parents wanted him to do ....As soon as his parents said yes to something, he had to say no. (Strasser, *ADB* 15)

Alex had the urge to rebel against any suggestion given by his parents. This was a clear indication that he needed attention from them. To further prove his dislike, Alex was even ready to flush the book "The American Guide to Colleges" (Strasser, *ADB* 16) which his mother gave him. Thus he felt the urge to show his rebellious side to his parents' suggestions.

The basic longings of a child were well expressed through Alex. He longed for simple family time together; by watching football games and having meals together. Throughout the novel Alex's emotional and physical needs were ignored by his parents. Even though they provide him with all the materialistic things he still felt unloved. Alex's parents' failure to express their love had resulted in the rebellious behaviour of their son.

The ACE conditions that Alex faced were emotional neglect and physical neglect. Alex's emotional needs such as caring, feeling loved and feeling connected to his parents, were not met by them. His physical needs including being able to relate to his parents through travel, physical touch or playing games were not fulfilled. Living in such an environment, Alex started to question his emotional and physical values as invalid. So he rebelled and tried to gain their attention. ACE states that later in life such children have a high chance of pursuing other means to fill the empty space left by their parents. They engage in bad company or doing illegal things.

The second novel chosen for the study is *Give a Boy a Gun (GBG)*. In this novel Todd Strasser wrote a vivid and humanity based portrayal of real people behind the social issues and headlines. The novel was written in an epistolary form for young adults in the year 2000. The novel narrates the events and circumstances that led to, and the aftermath of a school shooting.

The first factor of ACE is emotional abuse. Gary experienced his parents' divorce at the age of seven. Allison, Gary's friend, commented on the divorce as "nasty... That was a huge thorn in Gary's side. He just couldn't get over that" (Strasser, *GBG* 13). As Allison expressed, Gary's parents' divorce was a 'huge thorn' in his life. It kept pricking him even after seven years. He was still not able to overcome those emotions. The trauma undergone by Gary, due to the separation of the parents, is enormous. Thus the decision of the parents to get divorced is a form of emotional abuse.

Gary's parents' divorce was so intense that his mother confessed: "Arguing over money. Gary was caught in the middle, and sometimes I guess I used him to get what I thought I needed. What we both needed. It's a terrible thing to put a child through, but I didn't

know what else to do” (Strasser, *GBG* 13). The fights his parents had over money disturbed him a lot. Both his parents were immersed in getting what they wanted; they forgot the mental health of their child. These memories were embedded in Gary’s mind which made him feel that his emotions were insignificant to his parents. A child witnessing his parents’ arguments over money during the divorce rather than about the child’s custody explains the priority the parents had on material things than on the living child. Thus the emotional abuse Gary had undergone due to his parents fights over money had resulted as a traumatic experience for Gary.

The fourth factor of ACE is emotional neglect. Gary experienced emotional neglect when his father failed to be in touch with him. This incident was a reflection of his father’s disregard and disinterest towards his own son which had been haunting Gary for a long time. As ACE states, the loss of a parent’s love at a young age could affect the psychological wellbeing of the child. Similarly Gary was also mentally affected due to his parents’ divorce. Gary once shared his experience of his parents’ divorce with Allison: “... he’d [Gary] sometimes talk about what it was like when he was younger. About the divorce and how completely nasty it was” (Strasser, *GBG* 13). Gary’s father’s failure to shower his love and affection on his son is an emotional neglect. He never took Gary to a play or football match nor did he try to find out the needs of a child and to satisfy it. A child needs a certain kind of emotional need from a father and a certain kind of emotional need from a mother. The emotional support from both father and mother are imminent to the healthy growth of a child. He never considered the feelings of Gary as his father. Thus Gary suffered emotional neglect.

The fifth factor of ACE is physical neglect. Gary after his parents' divorce expressed his discomfort towards his father, because his father "...never paid child support or called or anything" (Strasser, *GBG* 13). His father completely ignored Gary's presence. He did not try to reach Gary through calls or meet him in person. Gary felt a void due to the absence of a fatherly figure in his life. Thus this became a physical neglect which affected Gary's psychological wellbeing in the later part of his life.

The sixth factor of ACE states that loss of parental love could be experienced by children after the parents' divorce. In Gary's case his father did not contact him after the divorce. As Allison mentioned "...his [Gary's] dad just left" (Strasser, *GBG* 13). The absence of a fatherly figure troubled him a lot. He missed his father's affection and was disappointed that his father did not make an effort to be in touch with his own son. This made him anxious sometimes.

The seventh factor of ACE is domestic violence. Gary witnessed his parents fight during their divorce. Cynthia Searle, Gary's mother, gave a statement saying, "It was an ugly divorce. All that yelling and fighting" (Strasser, *GBG* 13). At a young age Gary was caught in-between the mess of his parents' divorce. Their arguments became fights and Gary witnessed it everyday. Such violent environments made Gary anxious and fear his parents.

After the divorce, Gary's mother became very protective of him. An overprotective parent tends to over think about every small detail in his or her child's life. Similarly Gary's mother was also worried about Gary all the time. Hence Gary did not express his difficulties to his mother. Ryan noticed this and commented: "If you want to know the truth, I think Mrs. Searle was a little overprotective. I guess because she was the only

parent. She always wanted to know where Gary was going, and would he be warm enough, and junk like that. Gary would just roll his eyes” (Strasser, *GBG* 12). This indicates that Gary’s mother’s overprotective nature had been gaining attention among the people around him and Gary too seemed to dislike her behaviour. This over protective behaviour made Gary not to share his problems with his mother.

As a result of the emotional abuse, physical abuse, emotional neglect, physical neglect, loss of a parent and domestic violence, Gary began bottling up his emotions and became quiet, which was a sign of anti-social behaviour. Since Gary was a single child he never had anyone to share his issues or anyone to relate to, so he often thought that no one would understand his difficulties. He did not share these troubled thoughts with any of his classmates either. Gary also did not talk to his mother about it because he did not want to distress her. This affected him psychologically and as a result he was often seen preoccupied with his thoughts. Gary’s mother had witnessed this behaviour many times:

I can’t begin to count how many times on a Saturday around noon I’d knock on Gary’s door and find him still in bed, wide awake, simply lying there with that thick quilt wrapped around him like a cocoon. I’d suggest that he go outside, find someone to do something with. He’d always say he would “in a moment.” But sometimes he wouldn’t get out of bed until three or four. I always felt as if there was something inside keeping him from being happy and active like other boys. A lead curtain of sadness that was too heavy for him to lift. I’m sure it had to do with the divorce. I can’t tell you how many times I’d see him like that, then go into my own room and just cry. (Strasser, *GBG* 53-54)

Through Gary's mother's words it was evident that she blames his behavioural changes on her divorce. Gary was worried about his mother because after the divorce she solely took care of Gary. Even though Gary was disturbed by his father's behaviour, he suppressed his sorrows and hid his problems for many years to protect his mother.

Gary's yearnings were identified through other characters who had witnessed his anti-social behaviour as a result of his loss of fatherly love. Gary's friend Ryan mentioned on several occasions that Gary was a talented boy who could perform three tasks simultaneously. So for a boy with such skills, lying in bed and staring blankly at the wall for hours together could be a symptom of a psychological disorder. This worried his mother and she confessed that his uncanny behaviour was mainly because of her divorce. Ryan had also witnessed Gary's quiet behaviour when he was with him: "The thing about Gary was that mysterious part of him that you never knew. It was like something he kept hidden and private. I can't explain it, but I could feel it when I was with him. He'd just get quiet and you knew he was dillion miles away. I always thought maybe it was something about his parents getting divorced" (Strasser, *GBG* 12). He felt abandoned by his father so he immersed himself in sad thoughts. He kept his sorrows to himself that he began becoming quiet after his parents' divorce.

The ACE that Gary faced were emotional abuse, emotional neglect, physical neglect, loss of a parent and domestic violence. He grew up with a single parent and felt abandoned by the other. At some point when the emotional needs are not satisfied by the parents, the children become more distant from them. The children also try to find other means to satisfy their needs. The abandonment of Gary's father made him suppress his

emotional needs. As a cope up mechanism, he shut his emotions which later turned him suicidal. Also the root cause of Gary's impulsive violent behaviour in the end of the novel was mainly because of the suppressed emotions he had held back for years. Even though Gary could have shared his problem with others and sought help, he failed to understand that he was having serious psychological problems. This became a stepping stone for his extreme violent behaviour at the end of the novel.

The third novel selected for the study is *Can't Get There from Here (CGTH)*. The novel sheds light on the life of homeless teenagers. Maybe was the protagonist of the novel, she narrates her life on the streets of New York during a cold winter. Maybe befriended a group of homeless teenagers and considered them as her family. She named the group as, asphalt tribe, meaning they were going to stick together like a pitch mixture made up of asphalt cement. These teenagers live a pitiable life on the streets doing illegal things to make a living. At the end some of them realize their mistakes, but however it was too late for some tribe members.

The adolescents in the novel— Maybe, Tears, Rainbow and 2moro underwent domestic violence and abuse as a child which made them leave their home and move to the streets. Each character in the novel was given a name of their choice. Maybe was given the name 'Maybe' because of the uncertainties she expressed in her words. The word is similar to the word 'perhaps'. The adverb adds doubt to any where it is used. Similarly, Maybe when she was questioned by strangers or adults, most of the time she answered with 'maybe'. This was because of the distrust she had on others which was mainly developed because of her mother who abandoned her.



The first factor of ACE is emotional abuse. Maybe had undergone emotional abuse because of the harsh words uttered by her mother. Maybe said, “At night Mom would stumble in slurring her words and smelling like smoke, saying I was worthless and stupid and ugly and she wished she never had me” (Strasser, *CGTH* 101). Maybe’s mother’s failure with men made her frustrated and she expressed the frustration to her children. As a result she started behaving irresponsible by engaging in verbal abuse of her children, especially to Maybe. Children are sensitive to their parents’ opinions and when a parent calls his or her child ‘worthless’ it could affect the mental peace of the child. Maybe’s mother called Maybe ‘worthless, stupid and ugly’ which had a long impact on Maybe that even after years she remembered it clearly. Thus Maybe’s mother emotionally abused Maybe through her cruel words.

The second factor of ACE is Physical abuse. In the first chapter of the novel, Maybe expressed her hatred for children getting hit through the lines: “I hated it when kids got hit. Got hit too many times myself. Not just with fists, neither” (Strasser, *CGTH* 5). This throws some light into the physical abuse she had received in her past. Besides the abuse she received from hands she also seemed to have been hit with other objects. She did not reveal what, how or where she was hit but gave a hint that she was hit badly with objects as well.

Later through Maybe’s recollection it was revealed that Maybe was hit with an iron box on her back by her mother. Soon within a few days she was hit in the head with a lamp by her mother and was taken to the hospital. The nurses in the hospital enquired about her injury and complained to the police on the matter. Therefore Maybe was sent to a foster home. As Maybe remembers the incident as,

And then there'd be the stinging slap of a leather belt against the backs of my legs, or a pinch so hard it drew blood, and once, a burning – hot iron...

But then, about a week after the iron, she hit me with a lamp and opened up my head. She told the nurse at the hospital that I fell down, but they took me to another room and asked if that was true and I said no. I told them what really happened, and after they stitched my head they put me in a home with other kids, and the next time I saw my mom she said she hated me and never wanted to see me again. (Strasser, *CGTH* 101-02)

This incident made Maybe to leave her physically and mentally abusive mother. Maybe did not receive her mother's love and care. So she felt unloved by the only parent she had. This has scared her and made her feel as though she did not belong to her mother or anybody. Hence she lost trust in adults and found solace in her street friends, believing them to be her trusted stronghold and her only family.

The third factor of ACE is sexual abuse. Tears at the age of twelve, ran away from her home because of the sexual advances from her stepfather. Tears said that she had been blackmailed by her stepfather and when she told her mother about his sexual advancements, her mother did not believe her. Tears' mother dismissed her complaints, as she did not believe Tears. So Tears left the house. Tears could not believe that her own mother did not help her when she needed her the most. The disbelief in her mother's words hurt her the most so she left her house.

2moro was another character in the novel who had undergone sexual abuse in her foster homes. 2moro lost her mother at the age of four, so she lived with her aunt. There she was sexually abused by her aunt's boyfriend. At the age of eight she was diagnosed

with HIV. Later, she lived in many foster homes, but because of the siblings' sexual abuses she left the foster houses. She was sent out from school because she was emotionally disturbed all the time. Then she was arrested many times for prostitution and drug usage. Thus the sexual advancements and harassments Tears and 2moro experienced made them anti-social later in their teenage years. 2moro ends up becoming a prostitute and involved in theft but Tears did not involve herself in any criminal activities. However, Maybe did not undergo this kind of abuse.

The fourth factor of ACE is emotional neglect. Maybe, as a child longed to be appreciated, nurtured, cared and loved but she never experienced any of these from her mother. So when she was given a choice to leave her home she readily left. Once the tribe members were sharing the reasons behind why they were in the streets, Maybe bluntly said, "My mother told me to go" (Strasser, *CGTH* 24). The harsh words of her mother hurt her. So she felt that her emotions were neglected. This made her leave her home.

The fifth factor of ACE is physical neglect. Maybe experienced physical neglect when her mother made her do all the household work and did not send her to school. One day while conversing with Tears about her mother, it was revealed that Maybe did not have a carefree childhood, rather she was made to work, as Maybe expressed:

"I tried to be good, but she was always mad at me anyway. She said I forgot to do this or I shouldn't have done that. She wanted me to take care of the little ones. Feed 'em and clean 'em and stuff"

"Didn't you go to school?"

“I was supposed to, but most of the time we were too busy moving from one place to the next, and she needed me to stay home to look after the kids”

(Strasser, *CGTH* 25).

Maybe's mother did not give her a proper education and instead made her stay home and take care of her four younger siblings. The rage that her mother expressed while returning from work hurt Maybe. When her mother returned from work, she complained that Maybe did not do her work properly. Even though Maybe tried hard to do her best, she was criticised harshly by her mother. Enduring these every time, Maybe felt unappreciated and unloved. As a ten year old she was robbed of her right to be educated rather she was made to do household chores and take care of her siblings. Thus Maybe's basic need to educate and to play with other kids were deprived from her.

The sixth factor of ACE is loss of a parent. Maybe's mother worked for the circus. As a result, Maybe and her mother kept moving from one place to another without a stable friend or a home. Maybe never knew her father. The ACE study states that growing up without one parent will create a setback in a child's mental growth because of the loss of love and affection from that parent. Maybe said, “Sometimes I would ask my mom about my dad, but she always said he was someone she knew and it didn't matter ....” (Strasser, *CGTH* 101). The careless answer by her mother and not knowing her father in person made Maybe ignore his existence completely in her life.

The seventh factor of ACE is domestic violence. Throughout the novel there were hints of recollection by Maybe about the domestic abuse she had faced at home. Maybe remembered her mother hitting her with objects which left scars on her body. So every time Maybe saw those scars she was reminded of the harsh treatments of her mother.

Due to her mother's mistreatment, Maybe had a tough childhood and these torments were not just physical but psychological too.

The eighth factor of ACE is alcohol or drug consumption of a family member. Once Maybe confessed: ““She [mother] drank up all the food money. I was the oldest and she said she couldn't afford to keep me around anymore. Said I was the biggest so I had to go.” It was worse than that. Way worse. But I didn't like to talk about it because then I had to remember”” (Strasser, *CGTH* 24). Maybe's mother became an alcoholic because of her failure with men. So she started abusing Maybe and called her names to hurt. Maybe feared her mother when she returned home drunk. Thus her mother's addiction had disrupted the family's peace and the children suffered the most, especially Maybe who became a victim to her mother's alcoholic abuse.

Rainbow also had a hard childhood with her alcoholic and drug addict mother. Rainbow's parents divorced when she was eight. Later her father got remarried and her mother ended up as a chronic alcoholic and a drug addict. Rainbow's mother sold her twice for drugs, because of that Rainbow was sent to a foster care at the age of eleven. At the age of fourteen she was diagnosed with OCD (Obsessive compulsive disorder) and depression and she had frequently been absent from school. Later she was arrested for having drugs and served six months in a juvenile correction facility. Rainbow had a tough childhood and she was forced into depression because of her mother's abuses. The depression and OCD she faced were the aftermath of her terrible childhood. Rainbow was exposed to many things at a very young age and so she lost her innocence and preferred to find comfort in drugs and prostitution like her mother.

In the novel, Maybe hinted multiple times about the cruel treatments of her mother. Once she expressed it in her thoughts as, “The men would leave and she [Maybe’s mother] couldn’t hurt them so she hurt me instead. It was something grown-ups thought they had a right to do. When they got angry they could find some kid, someone smaller, and hurt him or her. What could a kid do? Nothing, except run away” (Strasser, *CGTH* 62). Maybe was frustrated by the fact that adults could abuse a child for their problems. She generalised her mother’s behaviour to the whole community of adults because she mentally got affected by her mother’s mistreatments that made her conclude that every adult behaves in the same manner as her mother. Thus the cruel treatment Maybe received from her mother made her lose trust in all adults, believing all of them to be abusive and liars.

As ACE states, not getting proper affection from any of the parents will affect the child’s mental growth. In the case of Maybe, Rainbow, 2moro and Tears, their basic needs, safety and trust were declined so it led to serious mental struggles, which resulted in them losing trust in adults. So they tried taking severe measures to live a contented life on the street without the help of an adult.

After undergoing sufferings many times with her mother, Maybe felt strong enough to tolerate anyone’s harsh words. She also mentions that at one point in her life she stopped crying because of her mother. Maybe expresses, “ ...I would cry whether I wanted to or not. But as I got older I learned to fight it. When they – my mom, her boyfriends, and other kids – called me names and hurt me, I wasn’t strong enough to hit back, but I would clench my teeth and blink hard to stop the tears” (Strasser, *CGTH* 60). This confession shows the hardships she had gone through in her early childhood which in turn made her strong and numb to all the cruelties she faced later in her life.

A parent blaming her child for the problems in his or her life is a perfect epitome of bad parenting and this could result in the child feeling insecure and worthless. Similarly, Maybe's mother emotionally and physically abused Maybe for many years which made her run away from home and live under extreme weather conditions on the streets. There was a time while living on the streets that Maybe realized that she could no longer survive on the street but she was ready to continue and accept her fate rather than going back to her abusive mother.

The ACE's Maybe faced at her young age were emotional abuse, physical abuse, emotional neglect, physical neglect, domestic violence, consumption of alcohol by the family member and loss of one parent. Even after Maybe had left her past adversities, the adverse conditions which she faced remained a scar in her mind and body. ACE affirmed that domestic violence of any kind causes adverse conditions in the mind of a child; it reinstated that these unpleasant environments can remain as traumatic bruises in a child's mind for a long time and it could result in anti-social behaviour in the near future. In Maybe's case because of the abuse she became numb to all emotions and had lost trust in adults.

The fourth novel taken for the study is *If I Grow Up (IIGU)*. It throws light on the plight of Black Americans in the inner cities of Chicago. Strasser after visiting many inner city schools and investigating the life of gangs he wrote the book *If I Grow Up*. The story focuses on gang life, family, choice and poverty. DeShawn is the protagonist of the novel, who is a smart kid of twelve. He lost his mother at a young age in a crossfire between two gangs and he never knew his father. Living with his grandmother and sister, he avoids gang issues but later life becomes so hard that he chooses the path he detests.

The first factor of ACE was emotional abuse, which was witnessed by DeShawn everyday in his living space. He was exposed to fear at a very young age and this affected his mental health. DeShawn's thoughts after a gun fire near his apartment were, "We were safe. At least for tonight" (Strasser, *IIGU* 19). The psychological turmoil he experienced every time he heard a bullet sound was the result of careless and incompetent parenting by his grandmother. A child to feel unsafe in his own home is an emotional abuse. DeShawn's living conditions made him strive to survive each day fearing death. Thus this made him experience emotional abuse.

The fourth factor, emotional neglect was addressed when DeShawn had confessed "By the age of twelve, seeing dead folks was nothing new" (Strasser, *IIGU* 4). DeShawn witnessed many deaths in his apartment and was able to recollect all those incidents because it was clearly engraved in his memory. To a certain age a child must not be exposed to the horror of death. This could lead a child to have traumatic memories which could result in psychological problems such as anti-social behaviour, anxiety and sleep related problems. DeShawn being exposed to such is a clear indication that his family had outright ignored his emotions.

The fifth factor of ACE was physical neglect and it was seen when DeShawn had to grow up in an environment where gun fire was common. DeShawn and his family had to dodge bullets every day to survive. The author showed a picture of DeShawn's happy family, having dinner together, watching TV and laughing at a TV show. When suddenly someone started shooting, everyone fell to the ground in fear. After the shooting stopped, they tried to go back to their routine but still the blare of the gun sounds had instilled fear in DeShawn's grandmother. His grandmother warned DeShawn, "Don't go near that



window,... They could start shooting” (Strasser, *IIGU* 1). This incident was a clear indication that DeShawn’s family was well aware of the life threatening incidents that were taking place in the Projects. Yet they completely ignored his physical need to be raised in a safe environment. Thus he experienced a harsh living condition in the Projects where his physical safety was ignored.

The sixth factor of ACE states that the loss of a parent or both the parents will affect the development of a child. DeShawn’s mother was killed in a crossfire. So every time DeShawn and his family heard a gunshot they hid immediately or fell on the ground for safety. The sound of gunfire was heard quite often in the Projects and every time DeShawn’s family heard it they were reminded of his mother whom they lost. There were bullet holes on the apartment walls and window curtains, which they grew to accept as a part of the house. But the thought that they had lost someone for a bullet still haunted the whole family, especially DeShawn. If DeShawn had any of his parents alive there is a chance that he could have been less exposed to the delinquent lifestyle of the projects.

In DeShawn’s neighbourhood it was common for children to grow up without knowing their father. DeShawn states that “ ...I hardly knew anyone who had father at home” (Strasser, *IIGU* 8). During pregnancy or after childbirth many men left their women in the projects and it had become one of the regular happenings there. Similarly, DeShawn also grew up without knowing his father but he wished that at least his sister’s kids could grow up with a father. Nia, DeShawn’s sister, gave birth to twins. One time Nia’s boyfriend went to give the drug money to someone and he did not return. So DeShawn was scared and went in search of him when he finally found him he said, “I’d been scared that my sister had lost her man, and, like so many of us, those babies would never know their

father” (Strasser, *IIGU* 132). The cruel reality of growing up without a parent was one of the most adverse conditions a child could grow up with. DeShawn had experienced such a condition which made him hope for a proper family for his sister and her children.

The loss of both the parents had affected DeShawn that he did not want the same fate for his sister’s children. So when he thought his sister’s boyfriend was missing he panicked and went in search of him. Growing up without any parent and an unsafe environment had developed a sense of anxiety in DeShawn’s mind that he began detesting violence and the drug dealer’s life his friends preferred. When someone asked DeShawn if he would join the drug dealers he would answer: “No, sir. Gonna stay in school and out of trouble” (Strasser, *IIGU* 14). Being exposed to violence made DeShawn lose his innocence and live a fearful life so DeShawn began detesting violence.

The adverse childhood experience DeShawn faced in his childhood was emotional abuse, emotional neglect, physical neglect and the loss of both the parents. He lost his mother to bullets and never knew his father. He was living in an unsafe environment as there was no safety measures in the Project. Such an environment affects the physical and mental development of a child. DeShawn became anxious and agitated when he got to know that his sister’s children might end up without a parent. This is the after effects of losing parents. As a result he had begun detesting violence and feared the safety of his family. He grew up without a proper parental monitoring which acted as a setback and it led him astray into a dark path in later part of his teenage days.

The fifth novel selected for the study is *Famous*. The novel deals with the desire to become popular and the way it questions the ethics and values of young people. Jamie is a sixteen year old young paparazzo, who attained popularity with just one photo which

landed her name in all the famous magazines in New York. She thought that her career had begun when she was offered to work as a photographer for Willow Twine, a popular actress. Later she finds herself tangled up in stealing the pictures of Twine. Only at the end Jamie realizes that life is more than just being famous.

The first factor emotional abuse was witnessed when Jamie defined her psychological problems as “deep, twisted” (Strasser, *Famous* 9). This was an indication of the deep impact the divorce of her parents and her brother’s sickness had on the mental health of Jamie. She was mainly disturbed by her brother’s sickness, because it affected the peace of the whole family. Jamie used the word ‘twisted’ because she did not feel normal rather her emotions were disturbed from its comforts. This is considered as emotional abuse. The deep impact of the emotional abuse had led her astray when she became a teenager.

The fourth factor of ACE is emotional neglect. Jamie experienced emotional neglect when her mother ignored her for the sake of her brother. Jamie’s mother had a tough time taking care of work and her sick son. At times she felt lost and the truth that her son won’t live longer because of his sickness troubled her a lot. There were times when she was preoccupied with her ill son’s life that she forgot about what was happening in Jamie’s life.

Jamie’s parents were divorced when she was eight. After Jamie’s brother developed muscular dystrophy, Jamie makes a painful confession that, “five years later... my parents got divorced” (Strasser, *Famous* 9). After the divorce Jamie’s mother had to take care of both Jamie and her sick brother. The family’s peace was affected by having a physical and mentally ill person in the family. Jamie’s house felt gloomier because of her brother’s condition. Jamie’s mother spent most of her time taking care of her younger brother that

she forgot about Jamie's life. Even though Jamie understood the situation and felt bad for her mother, she too wished that her mother would spend some time with her and get to know what was happening in her life. As a result Jamie began hiding things from her mother and later she even planned to move to Los Angeles and live there alone.

The fifth factor of ACE is physical neglect. Jamie's father, Seth Gordon was carefree and did not take responsibility for his kids. He left her, her mother and her sick brother to live alone. He did indulge in Jamie's life after the divorce. At times Jamie felt sad for her brother and her mother. Her mother was worried a lot whenever her brother got a seizure. Most of the time her mother's attention was focused towards Alex and not on her. She understood that her brother was sick and needed constant care but she too longed for that care from her mother. There were times when her mother did not sleep well and stayed up worrying about her brother. One time when Alex got a seizure she was disturbed and she forgot about Jamie's interview and her visit to Los Angeles. When she met Jamie after the incident, she broke in front of Jamie confessing her helplessness.

Carol's life had a routine: taking care of her son, working, cooking and sleeping. Jamie's needs were not taken care of when her brother felt sick. She felt bad for her mother but also felt sad that her mother completely forgot about her trip. Jamie said that she "... felt upset that she'd completely blanked on the fact that just seven hours ago I'd landed at JFK on my way back from a TV taping in LA" (Strasser, *Famous* 101). This incident showed Jamie's yearning for care and affection from her mother, which she failed to receive. As Jamie's physical needs were neglected she stopped sharing her day's activity with her mother and also began to rebel.

The sixth factor of ACE is loss of a parent. Jamie still got to meet her father and spend time with him but it was not as living with him every day. She felt that she had lost her father's care and attention. According to Carol, Jamie's father took Jamie to clubs and also served alcohol, which had a negative impact on her wellbeing. Carol lived a responsible life while her husband did not. Jamie lost a responsible father this eventually made Jamie's life hard.

The ninth factor of ACE is living with a family member with mental illness. Jamie's brother, Alex suffered from muscular dystrophy from the age of three. Muscular dystrophy is a condition which develops as a child which makes the muscles weak through time. Alex, who suffered from this disease, could not speak or control his actions. He was strapped to a wheelchair and was taken care of by a caregiver. The caregiver took care of him throughout the day and his mother took care of him at night. Jamie said:

Mom was quiet for a moment, and I knew she was listening to the sounds coming from Alex's room. Then she stood up, kissed the top of my head, and left the kitchen as if she were on autopilot. She would check on Alex, take care of whatever business still demanded her attention from earlier in the day, try to figure out what to do about dinner, let Elena go home, take care of Alex for the rest of the evening, and then collapse into bed, only to start the whole process over again tomorrow. (Strasser, *Famous* 100-01)

His condition has affected the mental health of the family.

In the novel when Jamie began narrating her story, she said: "IT STARTED WITH A CAMERA AND A COFFEE SHOP. No, that's not right. Any shrink will tell you it started way before that. Like, when my brother Alex developed muscular dystrophy

around the age of three,...” (Strasser, *Famous* 9). This shows that she was clearly aware that her brother’s condition and parent’s divorce could be the root cause of the psychological troubles. She experienced in the later part of her life. The ACE Jamie faced here was, her parents’ divorce, yearning for his parents’ love and affection, living with a physically and mentally ill brother at a young age. At the age of fifteen Jamie was made to take up the role of an adult. She had to go through all her struggles alone in her life. Her brother’s illness had affected her family’s mental health, especially Jamie’s.

The ACE Jamie experienced were emotional abuse, emotional neglect, physical neglect, loss of a parent and family member with mental illness. ACE states that if any family members suffered from mental disorder there is a high chance the children of the household might experience mental stress. In Jamie’s case, her story started from her brother’s sickness and her parent’s divorce. These two conditions are a part of adverse experiences and even though she does not seem to have faced any external difficulties as a child, she had undergone psychological pressure. This was the reason behind her rebellious behaviour and her decision to move away from her home in New York and live in Los Angeles later as a teenager.

An event can be considered as adverse if it leaves a painful memory that is remembered for a long time. Similarly the characters in the select novels of Strasser undergo more than one adverse childhood experience which puts them at high risk of becoming violent in the future. These adverse events are narrated in the form of recollection of incidents by adolescents from their childhood. The process of recollection hints that the adverse conditions the characters experienced are still left as unhealed scars.

Adverse Childhood Experience is the first stage a child faces towards crime. It can act as a small triggering factor for a child to become a criminal in the future. ACE identifies that children who go through a hard childhood often find solace in rebelling and indulging in criminal activities. The beginning of any teenager's problem starts at home. Children depend on their parents for care and affection upto a certain age. When these are denied they find other ways to fill in the gap left by their parents.

The characters who have experienced factors of ACE are: the first factor, emotional abuse was experienced by Gary, Maybe, DeShawn and Jamie; the second factor, physical abuse was seen in Maybe, Tears, Rainbow and 2moro; the third factor, sexual abuse was witnessed in Tears and 2moro; the fourth factor, emotional neglect was experienced by Alex, Gary, Maybe, DeShawn and Jamie; the fifth factor, physical neglect was seen in the characters Alex, Gary, Maybe, DeShawn and Jamie; the sixth factor, loss of a parent due to divorce or death is witnessed in the characters Gary, Maybe, DeShawn and Jamie; the seventh factor, domestic violence was experience by Maybe and Gary; the eighth factor, household member who consumes alcohol or drugs was seen in Maybe's family; and the ninth factor, living with a family member with mental illness was witnessed in Jamie's family. Among all the protagonists, Maybe had endured most of the adverse conditions, which made her hate adults and showed less emotions.

ACE talks about the haunting events a person faces in his or her early childhood. Early victimization to violence creates many problems in an individual throughout his or her life. Such adverse conditions might lead to a problematic adolescent in future. As a result of the ACE: In the novel *Angel Dust Blues* Alex became rebellious; in *Give a Boy a Gun* Gary became antisocial and quiet; Maybe in *Can't Get There from Here* became

numb to emotions and lost trust in adults; in the novel *If I Grow Up*, DeShawn feared for the safety of his family; and in the novel, *Famous* Jamie became rebellious. These could also affect the person's behaviour which can manifest and persist till adolescence resulting in delinquency. According to the developmental perspective of crime, criminal activities are a potential consequence of childhood adversity, continued by maladaptation and finally resulting in delinquency. Thus the adverse conditions undergone by adolescents in their childhood is traced in this chapter.

Early life's hardships and struggles can initiate a deleterious path to maladaptive criminal behaviour while growing up. Such violence will stay as a mental scar and affect the child's social learning nature towards peers association. The next chapter focuses on the developmental changes that occur as a result of the traumatic experiences of the early life adversities. The pathway to crime is discussed further in connection with their peer influence. The theory Differential Association is used in identifying the qualities of peer influence in the protagonists of the novel.