

Interview with Vinita Adhikari

Founder of Antardristi Nepal, she is a psychologist offering free counselling services to survivors of sexual abuse

Vinita also offers training in schools to children and younger people who have suffered from sexual abuse and have nobody to turn to. Her counselling service has helped many people who have suffered from such abuse. Especially in a place like Nepal where women do not have many people to talk to or organizations where they can seek help.



Antardristi Nepal

Antardristi Nepal, an organization working against child sex abuse was formed in 2003. Founded by Vinita Adhikari, this organization seeks to empower and support survivors of sexual abuse through psychological counselling, family empowerment training, and community outreach. It also seeks to dispel myths and foster social change to work towards the elimination of sexual abuse against women and girls. Antardristi Nepal has successfully been working to support, educate, and empower survivors of sexual abuse for the past eight years. They have helped victims recover psychologically from trauma and restored their self-esteem.

Can you tell us about your family background and your childhood memories?

I am the youngest among my four sisters and I have a younger brother too. Now I am taking care of my father who is 80 years old. All my sisters and brother are away. My mother expired 7 years ago. My father is a retired civil engineer but he is engaged in an organization which he established when he was bit young. He is not that active, but he holds the position of an advisor in that organization.

We are an educated family and studied in one of the nice schools in Kathmandu. I was born here. I was an average student but managed to complete my Master's degree in Psychology. Since, in our time parents used to be authoritarian. Mine was not away from that. Even though, being authoritarian they never discriminated us. They send us to a good school, given us good manners etc.

As I told before I was an average student. I was good at sports, I used to excel in athletics, but not interested in studies, was very weak in mathematics. Somehow I managed to complete my School leaving certificate (SLC)

I started working as soon as I finished my SLC. I was 16/17 then. I worked as a teacher for primary school students, took home tuition too. Later I worked as a translator, transcriber, and researcher for few months. After that joined the knitting factory as a quality controller and later turned out to be a psychologist. From that tender age I started working and I am still working tirelessly.

Today I feel happy that I took psychology as a major subject. Nobody guided which subject I should take as a major one. I did that on my own, and with the money I earned I completed my college. I am really doing well in my profession which has become my passion. I myself is an inspiration for what I have done today, this might sound awkward to reads as this transfer you the feeling of ego, but it's not that, I have a certain characteristic, I am never dishearten by failure. I try to do better every time, and I am an optimistic person. I go with the saying "Everything happens for a reason" It's oblivious that there was/is always a family support. A very good example is that, when I have completed my grade 12, one of my friends approached me with an exciting idea of going to India for graphic designing course, I, as a teenager and young lady, very excited; relay this option to my parents. They were ok with that, and let me tell you in my family before doing anything new; my parents generally used to take the opinion of astrologers. That day also, I was excited and waiting for a good news from my parents to get permission to go and do a course on graphic designing, they disappointed me by saying the astrologer did not gave permission to do so. I was sad, full of tears, feeling very low. But now when I look back and think of this incident, ok that was not what my life was looking for, I had something in store for myself and the society.

I never had a dream of becoming anything as normally children do have their aim, goal career. But finally I became a heart doctor for those in need of emotional support.

Can you tell us about your present position and who has supported you?

Before the completion of my Master's degree, I established a psychological counselling centre (Antardristi Counseling Center), rarely people come for counselling then. In that duration, I got a chance to visit women and children cell of Nepal Police, to see what type of issue come there to file the case. I observe most of the time, there were lots of domestic violence cases come and very few rape cases. Ok they come there to file the case, but what I found and feel was that, everybody was just looking at the offenders' side, which is ok; sending the offender to jail etc, but no one was there to take care of the mental justice of children. There and then I made a decision that, I would take

care of these children and had a bold feeling that " If not now when, if not me who", then I register Antardristi Nepal as an NGO and started working.

What are your main achievements and have you faced any challenges?

Even though I was an average student I managed to complete my Master's degree which is a great achievement for me. I think my greatest achievement has been opening this office. Through my work I have helped many people regain their happiness which they had lost due to their negative experiences. It gives me great satisfaction to see the children who I have counselled find the happiness which they had lost. I can now see the children whom I have counselled doing well. They used to tell me they felt like dying and now they are coping with their daily life, this to me is a great achievement. I feel very happy when I see ex-patients working in banks and other offices. My eyes fill with tears when they come to see me and they are happy again. We also provide counselling services in the schools to boys who tease girls and to boys who go around bullying others. After our courses about 95% of them have left these kinds of activities behind. We have also been successful in helping to support children as young as two or three years of age.

In the beginning we used to talk with the Principals of Schools and offer to provide training about the sexual abuse but the Principals used to be hesitant and could not talk about these issues. They used to tell us that we should not talk about sexual things in school. This used to surprise us but we worked hard at convincing them and finally they allowed us to do counselling in schools. Today the situation is still similar and it is not easy to talk openly regarding the things related to sexual abuse in Nepal. When we visit some schools the children ask us, "Are you going to talk about AIDS"? It is very hard to make them understand. Sometimes we receive frightening phone calls from victims of abuse. For example, someone will ring up and say that they are going to commit suicide or that they are going to cut their wrists. Finally they ask for help and say" please save me" and sometimes I am able to help them with counselling which really is a challenge for me. When I work with really young children I use pictures and I also give their parents counselling as well. Nowadays, some schools have started to invite me to provide counselling to the children. I teach classes in those schools twice in a week when they invite me.

To talk about achievement, from 2003 Antardristi Nepal is working tirelessly to combat sexual abuse. Now we have one big safe house and two transit centres for such victims/ survivors. Till date we have almost provided awareness to more than 100000 and provided trauma counselling to more than 150 clients.

Since sexual abuse is still a taboo and stigma to talk about, we had to face difficult time when we used to go to schools and communities 10 years back, but today most of the schools and communities welcome us to deliver such classes in their areas.

Moreover, this is not a visible issue; it is really hard to get financial support. Since we are more focused on rape and incest, it is even harder for people to disclose it.

What are your future plans?

Our future plan is to take this awareness class all over Nepal and provide facilities to those who are already victim of sexual abuse.

Ultimately our plan in 20 to 30 years' time to close down Antardristi's safe house. This means by then we would be able to provide awareness to people and later they can defend and help themselves if something happens to them.

Do you have any suggestions or advice for women?

WOMEN, you are precious, Work hard and leave the legacy behind. I know we have different roles to accomplish in our lifetime, don't worry, play these roles as if you are playing sports, I bet you will enjoy it. Don't take it as a burden; feel proud that you can do everything so nicely and precisely. You are not "Jack of all, master of none" instead "You are Jack of none and Master of all". First love yourself and have faith in yourself. Never hurry in doing anything, keep on working in the right direction and track, everything will fall in the right direction.

It is not enough to just sit on a chair; you should come out into the wider world. Also try to be happy and try to make others happy by supporting the poor women in the streets or villages. Don't be money minded. You might choose the shortcut way to cheat the world but take care not to cheat yourself. We should use our skills, whatever they are, to have a positive influence on other people. We can have an impact on other people just by talking to them politely. We should all do this. Also money is not a big thing. We should also take the difficult path in life and not just take the easy way. We should not be oppressed. We should come out with our own feelings. First you need to love yourself so that you can love others. The main thing is that we, I mean all women, should come out from the four walls of our houses. That is the most important thing that I think.

Qualitative Analysis in Action

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