

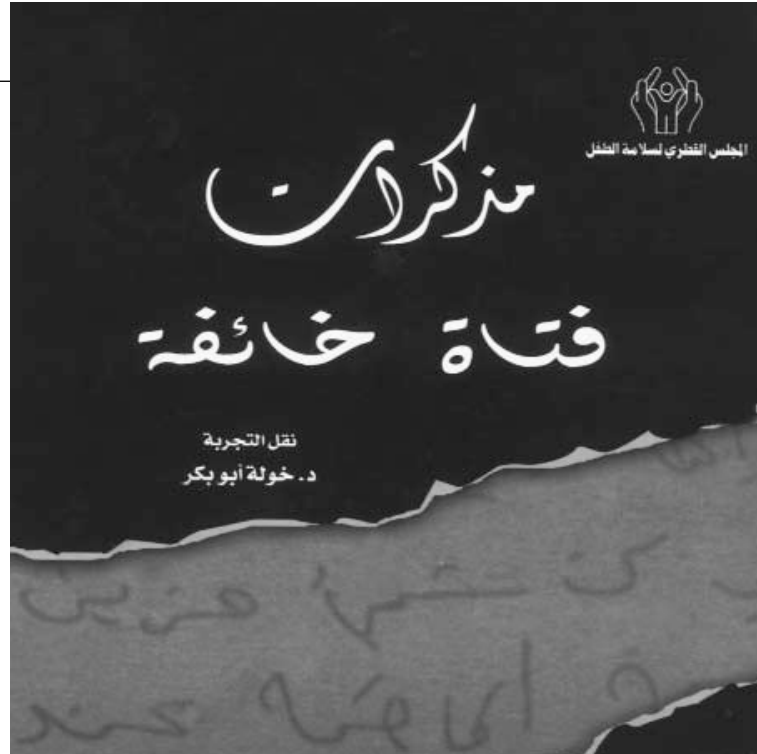
The Diary of a Frightened Girl

■ Reviewed by Mona Fayad

The Diary of a Frightened Girl is a booklet written by a “young frightened girl” who was unable to open up to anyone. She was very distraught because no one felt her anxiety, no one listened to her stifled cries for help, no one realized her agony and no one asked her what was wrong. Why did she want her mother to accompany her to her training sessions? Why did she give up her dream? No one bothered to find out.

In her preface, Dr. Khawla Abou Baker, the researcher, counselor and therapist – specialized in family matters and conflicts – addresses parents and educators. Through her booklet that is small in form, yet poignant in its message she asserts: “Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination that is practiced by someone who is older than and has power over his/her victims. The victim may be a girl or a boy, a woman or a man. This phenomenon is widespread all over the world and is prevalent in Arab society as well. The detrimental effects of sexual harassment touch upon all aspects of one’s life and can be extremely disruptive to one’s mental, psychological, and emotional well-being.

In order to help victims of sexual harassment understand what happened to them and cope with this phenomena



we have to provide children with proper sexual education that is practical, thought-out, gradual and clear and that goes hand in hand with their physical maturity. We also need to deal with the incident of sexual harassment as a real problem that has affected the victim gravely.

Book Review

Treatment ought to be carried out immediately so that the problem does not get worse.

The Diary of a Frightened Girl documents the agony of a young girl who was sexually harassed by her teacher. Consequently she suffered a lot throughout her childhood because of the abuse she was subjected to. Due to her fear, inexperience and ignorance she kept the issue of harassment to herself. This ominous secret, well hidden from people, had a lot of negative effects on her personality and frame of mind. Only when she grew up was she able to talk about her abuse and face her fears. Through therapy she started recalling in detail the harassment. Moreover, she documented the abuse in a diary, and by writing her recollections she was able to talk about her secret, come to terms with her fears and overcome her problem.

The purpose behind publishing these memoirs is to alert parents, educators and therapists to the behavioral and psychological manifestations conveyed by victims on the one hand; and, on the other hand, to raise the issue in the family, classroom and among various groups of children and youth in order to protect potential victims and encourage actual victims to open up and discuss their experiences of abuse.

Sexual abuse takes place in society and we all have to join hands to solve this problem. It is very useful to distribute this book in schools and encourage students to read it. It is bound to help students who are experiencing harassment to deal with their abuse more constructively – unlike the booklet's protagonist who suffered in silence.

What does this diary tell us? In the first few pages we come across a cheerful young girl who is leading a happy life. She is encouraged by her teacher to write so she keeps a diary in which she expresses how happy she is to be able to go to the sports club with her colleagues and friends. There the young girl and her girlfriends rehearse and train in sports to join professional tournaments. She treasures her extra curricular activity and is delighted to be a member given that her parents are poor and have gone through great efforts to enroll her in the club whose fees they can hardly afford. When she first started writing in her diary she admitted: "The club is the nicest place in the country." Yet all of a sudden, the young girl stops writing in her diary. The pause stretches from October 20th till April 25th. When she resumes writing her tone is withdrawn and frightened. She has a secret she wants to bury. It scares her and she wants to hide the diary so that no one can read what is in it and discover her secret.

In her diary the "young scared girl" documents how her sports teacher started molesting and sexually harassing her. She recounts how whenever they were alone he would

start rubbing his body against her. She adds that with time he started deliberately delaying her by asking her to stay on to be alone with her. Moreover, he befriended her family, visited them often, and became a regular guest at their table. He also relieved her parents of paying the club fees.

The young girl started hating his visits, yet was unable to convey her feelings to her parents given that she was the one who insisted on joining the club in the first place. When the teacher decided to give her private lessons and train her alone because he believed she had potential she became very troubled and anxious and she wished she would disappear so that he would no longer bother her. She started agonizing about meeting her teacher alone and preferred to spend time with her friends. Her teacher got annoyed and complained to her father that she was wasting her time playing with her friends instead of concentrating and training efficiently. Hence, she was reprimanded by her father.

In her diary the young girl recounts how her feelings evolve. She admits that she is incapable of expressing her feelings. Given that she is a polite and well brought up girl she is troubled by the fact that she is disobeying her father's wishes and refusing to comply with the requests of her teacher who represents law, order and authority. This dilemma is very difficult for a child to solve. On the one hand she wants to train and enter the tournament, yet, on the other hand she is unable to ward off her teacher's advances or report him to her parents who have befriended him and who respect and admire him.

She asks her mother to accompany her to the club while she trains but she refuses because she is too busy taking care of the younger children. The young girl starts feeling very schizophrenic, she has to censor and silence herself given that she is scared of telling her mother the truth. Besides, even if she confessed to her mother there is a very big chance that her mother would not believe her and might blame her instead. She admits: "I wish my mother would ask me what is happening? I am too embarrassed and scared to talk about it. I am angry with my mother." Her mother never stopped to ask herself why her daughter, all of a sudden, wants her to accompany her to the club.

This situation developed into a crisis as the young girl became increasingly burdened by the secret she was carrying. She was unable to sleep properly and was constantly frightened and angry. She was left with only one choice, to give up the one thing she enjoyed the most, namely going to the club to exercise and train for the tournament. Despite her yearning to realize her dream she gave everything up and withdrew her name from the tournament.

Translated by Myriam Sfeir