

Violence Against Children in Pakistan: Prevalence, Prevention, and Legal Responses

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Abstract

There is no denying the fact that violence against children is one of the issues that needs to be addressed, as it is directly related to the well-being of children in Pakistan. Therefore, this study assumes the extent of various forms of violence against children in Pakistan, how these may be dealt with, and the legal remedies for these issues. Children from other classes of society in Pakistan are exposed to this social ill of child abuse. The pattern of child abuses in Pakistan, its causes, prevalence, protection strategies, and legal responses are all called out in this study. A mixed qualitative and quantitative research approach which included the use of surveys focus group discussions and secondary data was used. Facts and figures collected show that the nature of abuse includes physical, sexual, psychological, neglect, etc which is common in most given communities where the majority of people are poor, there is a soft legal structure, and cultural practices of abuse are rather common. Laws on child protection are rarely enforced where such laws exist despite commitments and even within societies reporting such abuse is often viewed negatively. The study seeks to deploy better community-based primary prevention approaches, changes in the law, and health education campaigns. Policymakers should be alerted to the present research as it seeks to address deficiencies in preventative approaches and legislation that exist in Pakistan.

Keywords: Violence, Prevalence, Prevention, Legal Responses

Introduction

In Pakistan, child abuse is a widespread problem that affects kids from all socioeconomic groups. Even in the face of international and national pledges to uphold children's rights, violence against them is nevertheless all too common. This article investigates the frequency of child abuse in Pakistan, looks at the safeguards put in place, and talks about the legal solutions to this serious problem.

Prevalence

In Pakistan, there are various forms of violence against children, including neglect, and physical, sexual as well as emotional abuse. If we go by the findings of UNICEF, in Pakistan violence against children in any form is common with millions of children often facing it within the four walls of their houses or schools and communities. Physical violence is the most apparent and also most reported type of violence against children in Pakistan. It involves torture, beatings, and other forms of physical punishment. Saahil, a Pakistani NGO, found over 50% of children had experienced

physical violence inflicted by parents, guardians or teachers. It is a legal requirement that prohibits the use of corporal punishment last but not least to exit the Thun as it continues to be practiced in a lot of schools and can cause adverse adjunctive minds and bodies in the classroom. Sexual violence is another categorization of violence against children in Pakistan that occurs against their order or consent. There were close to 3,800 cases of childhood sexual abuse reported in Pakistan by Sahil's annual report in 2022. The only problem is that since some of the cases are never reported owing to the stigma that resides concerning such cases, fear of being punished for coming forth, and nobody believes the courts the figures given here are very small. Child exploitation including child pornography and trafficking is another growing concern with child sexual exploitation in particular more so in child and undeveloped areas. Even if it's less evident, psychological abuse can be quite detrimental. It includes threats, humiliation, intimidation, and verbal abuse. Physical or sexual abuse paired with psychological aggressiveness frequently results in significant emotional harm. According to World Health Organization (WHO) estimates, a significant proportion of Pakistani youth suffer from anxiety, depression, and other mental health difficulties as a result of psychological abuse.

Factors Contributing to Violence Against Children

Because traditional standards view violence against children as a form of discipline, it is frequently excused or justified. Corporal punishment is still widely believed to be effective in controlling and correcting children's behavior. Many families are obliged by financial constraints to give their children child labor, which exposes them to a variety of forms of violence. Poverty contributes to neglect by making it difficult for families to meet their children's fundamental requirements. Parents and other caregivers are often unaware of the damaging impact of violence on children's rights. Abuse is sometimes the result of ignorance that is passed down through generations. Pakistan has regulations in place to protect children from violence, but they are not being enforced properly. Corruption, a lack of funds, and insufficient training for law enforcement officers all contribute to the inefficient enforcement of these laws.

Prevention Measures

Pakistani communities, families, civil society organizations, and government institutions must work collaboratively to end violence against children. Among the most impactful preventive steps are advocating constructive parenting practices through education on the damaging effects of violence and the promotion of children's rights and non-violent discipline in various public awareness campaigns implemented by governmental and non-governmental bodies.

It is imperative to include communities in confronting violence. Local groups, religious leaders, and community heads influence perspectives and behaviors toward children. Similarly, community-based child protection committees can monitor for and promptly report violent incidents to ensure a timely response. Both national and local child protection mechanisms must be established and strengthened, embracing kid-friendly reporting avenues, optimized social services, and coordination among all stakeholders in child safety.

Legal Responses

Pakistan has made sincere efforts over the years to shield youth from harm through an array of lawful protections at domestic and international levels. However, enforcing such safeguards in practice has proved challenging to say the least. The nation has instituted a slate of statutes aimed at sparing minors from mistreatment. Most recently, the Juvenile Justice System Act of 2018 supplies lawful shelter for juveniles in opposition to regulations, while the Child Protection System Act of 2014 sketches mechanisms for safeguarding kids from cruelty and exploitation. On a more localized scale, the Punjab Destitute and Neglected Children Act of 2004 and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Child Protection and Welfare Act of 2010 serve as examples of provincial laws tackling the protection of young ones. Pakistan is legally required, as a signatory to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, to protect children from abuse in all of its forms. Pakistan has also ratified the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Sale of Child

Labor, Prostitution, and Pornography, as well as ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor. Unfortunately, it is difficult for child protection laws to be implemented successfully due to a lack of political will, corruption, and inadequate money, which is why these legislative frameworks are not strictly enforced. Long-running court proceedings, disproportionate charges, and fear of the consequences sometimes discourage victims from utilizing the legal system. In addition, the stigma associated with society and the pressure families face to report violent crimes deter families, resulting in underreporting and impunity for those who commit these crimes. The judiciary is necessary to protect children's rights and bring victims of abuse justice. But more juvenile-friendly legal choices are needed, and judges and lawyers must get specific training in handling cases involving teenagers. The establishment of child protection courts is one step toward ensuring the timely and careful handling of child abuse cases, as shown in some regions.

Objectives:

1. to evaluate the extent and prevalence of violence against children in Pakistan.
2. To suggest reforms in policies, community practices, and legal frameworks to better protect children from violence and promote their rights.

Significance of Study:

The study is significant as it contributes to knowledge about "Violence Against Children in Pakistan: Prevalence, Prevention, and Legal Responses". This research provides valuable information about the effects of violence on children in Pakistan. The study reveals the opportunities for further researchers to conduct more comprehensive studies on this topic. This study helps the children to increase their motivational level. In addition to raising public awareness and influencing policy formulation, this nuanced analysis suggests strengthening legal protections for children and developing grassroots preventative initiatives with the overall goal of significantly improving the welfare and protection of children across Pakistan.

Literature Review:

Child abuse is a persistent global issue that affects human cultures on a global scale. That comes out to 40 million mistreated children annually. It impacts people from all walks of life, wealthy or poor; CEOs and blue-collar workers; devotees of the ancient, sacred teachings of Allah, God Yahweh, and, for example, Buddha. Physical violence is the most obvious kind of abuse, even if it often coexists with child abuse; nevertheless, remember that mental and behavioral abuse can be just as harmful, if not worse. A new era of online vulnerabilities has been brought about by the tremendous global growth of digital technology during the past 20 years. This change has also led to an evolution in offensive abuse kinds and a worsening of offline abuses such as child protection (Beech et al. 2021). The practice of grooming minors online with the intention of abusing and using them sexually is a worrying development. Concurrently, there has been an increase in the number of instances of child sexual abuse that are broadcast live online and the proliferation of child sexual assault videos. The disturbing amount of information that is circulating on the internet and on dark webs includes millions of images of child sexual abuse (UNICEF, 2020). Furthermore, a plethora of thorough research from cultures around the world that shed light on psychological abuse and child neglect have brought attention to this complex topic. While many studies focus on the emotional and physical aspects of child neglect, a meta-analysis study offered an international overview of the frequency of psychological abuse. These studies identified a wide range of risk factors for children at the individual, family, and societal levels, such as gender, age, exposure to domestic violence, child labor, mother-headed single-parent households, parents with low levels of education, involvement from extended family, and poverty. Furthermore, particular rules in the legal structure deal with child sexual abuse. The Anti-Terrorism Act of 1997 categorizes child molestation as an act of violence and terrorism, making it a criminal offense (Raza et al., 2022). These actions highlight how seriously child abuse is taken in the justice system. Article 37(a) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child highlights that no child should be subjected to torture

or other cruel, barbaric, or degrading treatment or punishment to comply with international standards (Farmer, 2011). Pakistan has embraced this idea to shield its kids from abuse of this kind. However, there are several legal ambiguities and difficulties with putting child protection legislation into practice. For example, the Poor and Ignored Children of Punjab Act of 2007 allows for a certain level of punishment when it comes to correcting youngsters for legitimate causes. It is necessary to address these issues and ensure that the laws are consistently and strictly enforced to protect the welfare of children in Pakistan. The lack of changes to this law has led to ambiguities regarding its interpretation and implementation, which ultimately impedes the efficient implementation of child protection regulations. It is believed that community-based approaches are essential to putting an end to child abuse. Malik, Ahmed, and Khan (2020) look into the ways that community leaders, religious leaders, and local groups can work together to prevent child abuse. This study suggests that community involvement can help change cultural norms and provide abused victims with a support system. It is also suggested that violent situations be reported to and watched out for through neighborhood-based child safety groups.

Methodology

This study on "Violence Against Children in Pakistan: Prevalence, Prevention, and Legal Responses" uses a mixed methods approach.

Research Design

The study took a mixed-methods approach, using a survey, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. Researching the prevalence of child sexual abuse in Pakistan and identifying the underlying causes has allowed us to provide protection and pursue legal action. Furthermore, due to the nature of the study, this research seeks to go deeper into the underlying reasons for child abuse in Pakistan by utilizing secondary research techniques. This secondary data was gathered from several credible publications, research papers, and reports from regional non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Sahil, UNICEF, and the ILO. The chosen methodology will allow us to undertake a thorough and current investigation of Spousal Abuse in Pakistan. This contains an all-encompassing, detailed analysis and synthesis that characterizes the breadth of data on child abuse (including types and consequences), displaying global prevalence rates as well as specific age- or gender-prevalent variances in incidence by the most affected geographic locations. It systematically collected, categorized, and showed the data. Thus, judgments become more accurate and thorough as a result of the efficacy and number of facts in the selected publications or papers. Second, it was decided to apply this study methodology to go from the local incidence of child abuse in Pakistan to secondary data. It collects data from a variety of sources to provide relevant information to policymakers, nongovernmental organizations, and concerned individuals about the scope and nature of child abuse.

Population and Sampling

The study has a target group of children, parents, educators, community leaders, and social workers involved in child welfare from so many areas of Pakistan where NGOs are working for the promotion of safeguarding rights from across the country. For the quantitative survey, participants are selected using a stratified random sampling method to ensure that they come from different parts based on their socio-economic backgrounds and demographic profiles. This aimed to gather the thoughts, experiences, and understanding of child abuse from 150 people. Four focus groups with leaders and individuals of the community were held to examine the subtleties of the problem.

Data Collection Methods

To get quantifiable data, structured questionnaires were created and disseminated. Closed-ended questions about the frequency and kinds of child abuse, knowledge of child protection legislation,

and the efficacy of current preventative measures were all included in the poll. Parents, religious leaders, and community leaders participated in focus groups to talk about community-based strategies for reducing child abuse. Understanding cultural norms, community involvement, and regional difficulties in combating abuse against children were all aided by these talks.

Findings/Results

The findings of the study analyzed based on data given below:

Table 1: Secondary data from different sources

Category	Statistic	Source
Physical Violence	81% of children aged 1-14 subjected to violent	UNICEF
Sexual Abuse Cases	3,000+ reported cases	Sahil (Report)
Child Labor	12.5 million children engaged in child labor	(ILO)
Trafficking Victims	Significant number of children trafficked annually (Exact numbers are often unreported)	Various reports
Children in Hazardous Work	A significant portion of child laborers engaged in hazardous work	ILO
Child Protection Units	Limited in number and reach	Government and NGO reports

The data on child violence in Pakistan paints a clear picture of pervasive exploitation and abuse. UNICEF reports that 81% of children ages 1 to 14 experience physical abuse, which is frequently excused as a form of discipline in families and schools. Over 3,000 cases of sexual abuse are documented each year, but many incidents go unreported because of stigma and fear, as Sahil's reports indicate. Sexual abuse is still a widespread problem. According to the ILO, 12.5 million youngsters work, many of them in dangerous situations. This raises serious concerns about child labor. Although specific numbers are hard to come by, a significant number of youngsters are also impacted by child trafficking. Despite initiatives to address these problems, there are not enough child protection units or services to meet the needs of all vulnerable children.

Table 2: Data of child abuse cases in Pakistan

Type of Violence	Number of Cases	Gender Breakdown	Age Breakdown	Geographical Distribution
Total Child Abuse Cases	4,213	2,251 girls (53%) 1,962 boys (47%)	Most vulnerable age group: 6-15 years	75% Punjab 13% Sindh 7% ICT 3% KP 2% Balochistan, AJK, GB
Sexual Abuse Cases	2,021	-	Children as young as 0-5 years were also abused	-

In Pakistan, 4,213 incidences of child abuse were documented; of these, females accounted for 53% (2,251 cases) and boys for 47% (1,962 cases). The age range of 6 to 15 was the most susceptible to abuse. Seventy-five percent of the cases were in Punjab, the largest region with these occurrences. Sindh came in second with thirteen percent, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) with three percent, and Balochistan, AJK, and Gilgit-Baltistan with two percent. 2,021 occurrences were

related to sexual abuse alone, and sadly, cases involving abuse of children as young as 0–5 years old were also reported. These figures demonstrate the pervasiveness of child abuse in Pakistan's different regions and the obvious need for focused interventions.

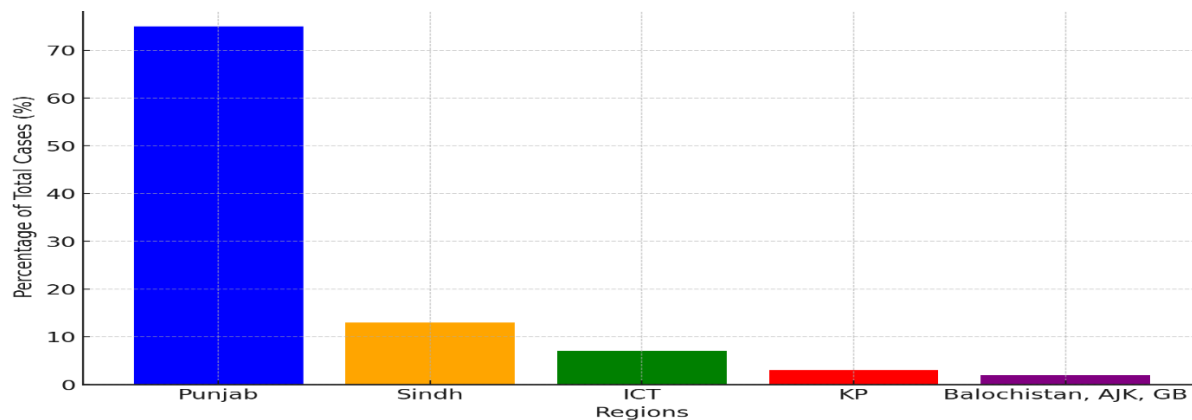


Figure:1

Here is the bar chart representing the distribution of child abuse cases by region in Pakistan .Punjab accounts for the highest percentage (75%), followed by Sindh (13%), ICT (7%), KP (3%), and Balochistan, AJK, GB combined (2%).

Table 3:Focus group discussion results

Focus group	Region	Participate	Key Themes Discussed	Challenges Identified	Suggested Prevention Strategies	Perception of Legal Protection
01	Punjab	4 community leaders, 2 parents	Prevalence of physical and emotional abuse	Lack of trust in legal system, fear of social repercussions	Community awareness programs, stricter law enforcement	2/5
02	Sindh	5 community leaders, 1 teacher	Impact of neglect and psychological abuse	Limited access to child protection services, weak enforcement	School-based education on children's rights, local support groups	3/5
03	KPK	3 religious figures, 3 community leaders	Religious and cultural views on child-rearing practices	Resistance to external interventions, lack of education	Collaboration with religious leaders, culturally sensitive training	2/5
04	Balochistan	6 community leaders	Barriers to reporting and seeking help	Inadequate legal protections, lack of child-friendly spaces	Anonymous reporting mechanisms, legal reforms	3/5

The focus group discussions that were held in Punjab, Sindh, KPK, and Balochistan, four different regions of Pakistan, provide important insights on the incidence of violence against children, the

difficulties in addressing the problem, and the efficacy of the laws and prevention tactics that are currently in place. A thorough analysis based on the supplied data is given below. Punjab (FG01): Participants expressed concern about the frequency of emotional and physical abuse in their communities as the topic of conversation focused on how widespread these forms of violence are. Sindh (FG02): Participants concentrated on the effects of psychological abuse and neglect, suggesting that these more subdued forms of violence are widespread but frequently disregarded. KPK (FG03): The group discussed how religion and culture approach raising children, and how some traditional contexts consider corporal punishment as appropriate. Balochistan (FG04): This group focused on the obstacles to reporting abuse, which are frequently caused by societal stigma and fear of negative consequences. As a result, cases of violence go unreported and go unresolved.

Table 4: Data collected from 150 respondents

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Children in my community frequently experience physical violence (e.g., hitting, slapping, beating) at home or in school.	35	50	30	20	15
Child protection laws are effective in preventing violence against children in Pakistan.	20	40	50	30	10
Fear of social stigma is the biggest barrier to reporting cases of violence against children.	50	60	20	10	10
Community awareness programs would be the most effective prevention strategy in reducing violence against children.	70	50	15	10	5

Physical violence prevalence: According to a sizable majority of respondents, children in their community commonly encounter physical violence at home or in school. To be more precise, 35% strongly agree and 50% agree with this statement, demonstrating a high level of concern regarding the occurrence of this kind of violence. However, a lesser percentage—20%—disagree, and 15% strongly disagree, indicating that although some people think it's a less prevalent problem, most people think it happens frequently. Effectiveness of Child Protection Laws: Opinions on how well child protection laws work to stop violence vary. Of those surveyed, 40% agreed and just 20% strongly agreed that these laws are successful. Nonetheless, a sizable 50% of respondents are undecided or strongly disagree, and 40% disagree, indicating a broad lack of confidence in the efficacy of these regulations as they stand. Fear of Social Stigma: A sizable majority of respondents—50% strongly agreeing and 60% agreeing—think that the largest obstacle to reporting incidents of violence against children is people's fear of social stigma. This raises a serious worry that cultural perceptions can discourage people from bringing up and addressing these kinds of problems. Community Awareness Programs: There is a lot of evidence to suggest that community awareness programs are a useful tactic for reducing child abuse. Just 15% are neutral and 15% disagree that these programs would be extremely beneficial, with a significant 70% strongly agreeing and 50% agreeing.

Discussion:

The issue of violence against children in Pakistan is urgent and has a big impact on the future and well-being of the country's youth. This study looks at the frequency of several types of violence against children in Pakistan, looks at ways to prevent it, and assesses the legislative solutions to these issues. In Pakistan, there are several ways that violence against children can take shape, such as neglect, physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. Millions of children in Pakistan face violence in one way or another, frequently from inside their homes, schools, or communities, according to UNICEF. Digital technologies have rapidly proliferated around the world during the past 20 years, bringing with them a new era of online hazards. This change has not only resulted in the emergence of new abuse types but has also made offline abuses worse, particularly when it comes to child protection (Beech et al. 2021). It's a concerning trend that children are being groomed online with the goal of abusing and using them sexually. Simultaneously, there has been a rise in incidents of child sexual abuse being streamed live online and child sexual abuse footage being widely shared. Millions of photos of child sexual abuse are part of the alarming amount of information that is floating around on the internet and in hidden webs (UNICEF, 2020). The report highlights how ineffective present child protection regulations are, with a sizable segment of the public doubting their efficacy. Fear of social stigma is a major obstacle to resolving abuse because it prevents victims from reporting it and from getting help. Programs for raising community awareness are emphasized as a possible preventative tactic, and respondents strongly endorse them. Regional disparities add to the complexity of the problem, with Punjab reporting the highest rates of abuse and other regions dealing with particular systemic and cultural difficulties. All things considered, the results demand that legal frameworks be completely reformed, that reporting procedures be improved, and that focused community-based interventions be implemented in order to better safeguard children and deal with the widespread problems of exploitation and abuse.

Recommendations:

On the bases of findings following recommendations drawn:

- It is advised to bolster community awareness initiatives in order to inform people about children's rights and promote reporting of violent crimes.
- Ensure that child protection laws are enforced, strengthened, and reviewed in order to increase their efficacy.
- Work together with community and religious leaders to advocate for child protection and involve them in preventative initiatives.
- Create child-friendly areas and increase access to reporting and support services, especially in rural areas.
- Keep an eye on the effectiveness of interventions, assess their effects, and adjust tactics as necessary.

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