
Evaluating the Effectiveness of Child Protection Policies in Educational Institutions of Pakistan

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Abstract

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of Child Protection Policies (CPPs) in educational institutions of Pakistan by examining the relationship between the presence and implementation of these policies and the incidence of child abuse or neglect in schools. It further investigates the mediating role of teachers' and administrators' awareness and training on child protection policies. Data were collected from 100 teachers and school administrators using a convenience sampling technique from various educational institutions in Pakistan. A structured questionnaire based on validated scales was used to measure the study variables. All variables were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale. Statistical techniques including reliability analysis, correlation, and regression analysis (Baron and Kenny mediation approach) were employed using SPSS to test the proposed hypotheses. The findings reveal that the presence and implementation of child protection policies have a significant positive impact on reducing the incidence of child abuse or neglect in schools. Additionally, CPPs significantly enhance teachers' and administrators' awareness and training. The results further indicate that awareness and training play a crucial mediating role, strengthening the relationship between policy implementation and child protection outcomes. This suggests that policies are more effective when supported by trained and aware educational staff. The study is limited by its cross-sectional design and reliance on self-reported data, which may be influenced by social desirability bias and underreporting. Furthermore, the sample size and focus on selected institutions may limit generalizability across all regions of Pakistan. Future research should adopt longitudinal and mixed-method approaches and include diverse educational settings to provide more comprehensive insights. This study contributes to the limited empirical literature on child protection in Pakistan by providing a comprehensive analysis of how policy implementation influences child safety outcomes through awareness and training. It highlights the critical role of capacity building and institutional support in translating policy frameworks into effective practice, offering valuable implications for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders in strengthening child protection systems.

Keywords: Child Protection Policies, Child Abuse, Educational Institutions, Awareness and Training, Pakistan, Policy Implementation, School Safety

Introduction

Child protection has emerged as a critical global priority, particularly within educational institutions where children spend a substantial portion of their formative years. Schools serve not only as centers for academic instruction but also as environments that shape children's psychological, emotional, and social development. However, despite their protective role, schools may also become spaces where children are exposed to various forms of abuse and neglect. Child

maltreatment is widely recognized as a global public health issue, with severe and long-lasting consequences for victims, including mental health disorders, poor academic outcomes, and reduced life opportunities (Gilbert et al., 2009; Stoltenborgh et al., 2015). These consequences highlight the urgent need for robust and effective child protection mechanisms within educational institutions. Globally, the prevalence of child abuse remains alarmingly high, cutting across cultural, economic, and geographic boundaries. Research suggests that millions of children experience physical, emotional, or sexual abuse annually, often within environments that are expected to provide safety and support (Finkelhor, 2009; Stoltenborgh et al., 2015). Schools, in particular, play a dual role: they can act as both protective environments and potential sites of harm. While they offer opportunities for early identification and intervention, they may also perpetuate abusive practices such as corporal punishment or fail to respond effectively to reported cases (Walsh et al., 2012; Mathews et al., 2017). This duality underscores the importance of structured policies and institutional safeguards to ensure child safety. In developing countries such as Pakistan, the issue of child protection is further complicated by socio-cultural norms, limited institutional capacity, and weak enforcement of legal frameworks. Evidence indicates that violence against children often remains underreported due to stigma, fear of retaliation, and lack of awareness among stakeholders (Zakar et al., 2016). Corporal punishment, for instance, continues to be practiced in many schools despite legal prohibitions, reflecting a significant gap between policy formulation and actual implementation (Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2020). Moreover, systemic challenges such as inadequate monitoring mechanisms and lack of trained personnel further exacerbate the vulnerability of children within educational settings (Khan & Munir, 2020).

To address these challenges, child protection policies (CPPs) have been introduced as formal frameworks aimed at safeguarding children within institutional environments. These policies typically include procedures for identifying, reporting, and responding to abuse, as well as preventive strategies such as awareness campaigns, monitoring systems, and staff training. Research suggests that well-designed and effectively implemented child protection policies can significantly reduce the risk of abuse by creating clear reporting channels and fostering a culture of accountability (Finkelhor, 2009; Walsh et al., 2012). However, the mere existence of such policies is not sufficient; their effectiveness depends largely on the extent of their implementation and the commitment of institutions to enforce them (Mathews & Kenny, 2008). A critical factor influencing the effectiveness of child protection policies is the level of awareness and training among teachers and school administrators. Teachers are often the first point of contact for children and are uniquely positioned to identify early signs of abuse. However, studies consistently show that many educators lack adequate knowledge and training to recognize and respond to child maltreatment (Kenny, 2004; Briggs & Hawkins, 2005). This lack of preparedness significantly limits their ability to act effectively, resulting in missed opportunities for early intervention. Furthermore, teachers may face barriers such as fear of legal consequences, uncertainty about reporting procedures, and lack of institutional support, which further discourage reporting behavior (Kenny, 2001; Walsh et al., 2010).

Empirical evidence strongly supports the importance of training as a mechanism for improving child protection outcomes. For instance, training programs have been shown to significantly enhance teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and reporting behavior regarding child abuse. Experimental and quasi-experimental studies indicate that structured training interventions improve educators' ability to recognize and respond to child maltreatment cases (McGrath et al., 1987; Gün et al., 2022). Additionally, systematic reviews highlight that professional development programs increase reporting rates and improve compliance with child protection protocols (Walsh et al., 2012; Mathews et al., 2017). These findings emphasize that awareness and training act as

critical mediating variables in translating policy frameworks into practical outcomes. In addition to training, institutional support and organizational culture play a crucial role in determining policy effectiveness. Teachers operate within complex institutional environments where administrative support, workload, and organizational norms influence their actions. Research indicates that insufficient resources, lack of administrative backing, and high emotional demands significantly hinder teachers' ability to engage in child protection practices (Glouchkow et al., 2022; Briggs & Hawkins, 2005). Moreover, a supportive school climate that prioritizes child safety and encourages reporting is essential for the successful implementation of child protection policies (Mathews et al., 2017). Another important dimension in evaluating child protection policies is the measurement of their effectiveness, particularly in terms of reducing the incidence of abuse and neglect within schools. While a decrease in reported cases may indicate improved safety, it may also reflect underreporting due to persistent barriers such as stigma and lack of trust in reporting systems (Finkelhor, 2009). Studies suggest that actual prevalence rates of child abuse are often significantly higher than reported figures, highlighting the limitations of relying solely on official statistics (Stoltenborgh et al., 2015; Gilbert et al., 2009). Therefore, comprehensive evaluation requires the inclusion of both quantitative indicators and qualitative assessments of institutional practices. Furthermore, school-based prevention programs have been identified as effective tools for enhancing children's knowledge and self-protection skills. Meta-analytic and systematic review evidence indicates that such programs significantly improve children's ability to recognize and respond to abusive situations (Walsh et al., 2012). However, the effectiveness of these programs depends on their integration within broader institutional frameworks, including teacher training and policy implementation (Finkelhor, 2009). Without such integration, prevention efforts may remain fragmented and less impactful.

Despite the growing recognition of child protection as a policy priority, there remains a significant gap in empirical research, particularly in the Pakistani context. Most existing studies focus on prevalence and awareness, with limited attention to the effectiveness of child protection policies and the mechanisms through which they influence outcomes. This gap is especially critical given the socio-cultural and institutional challenges faced by Pakistan's education system (Zakar et al., 2016; Khan & Munir, 2020). Additionally, international research emphasizes that policy effectiveness is often context-dependent, requiring localized empirical investigation (Mathews & Kenny, 2008). In response to this gap, the present study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of child protection policies in educational institutions of Pakistan by examining the relationship between the presence and implementation of such policies (independent variable) and the incidence of child abuse or neglect in schools (dependent variable). Additionally, the study investigates the mediating role of teachers' and administrators' awareness and training on child protection policies. Prior research confirms that awareness and training significantly influence reporting behavior and intervention effectiveness (Walsh et al., 2012; Mathews et al., 2017). Thus, incorporating this mediating variable allows for a deeper understanding of how policies translate into real-world outcomes. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing empirical insights into the effectiveness of child protection policies within the Pakistani educational context. It also offers practical implications for policymakers, educators, and institutional leaders by emphasizing the importance of training, awareness, and institutional support in ensuring child safety. Strengthening child protection systems in schools is not only a legal and ethical obligation but also essential for fostering safe learning environments and promoting sustainable educational development (Gilbert et al., 2009; Finkelhor, 2009). Moreover, evidence suggests that effective institutional frameworks combined with trained personnel can significantly reduce risks and improve child well-being (Stoltenborgh et al., 2015; Walsh et al., 2012).

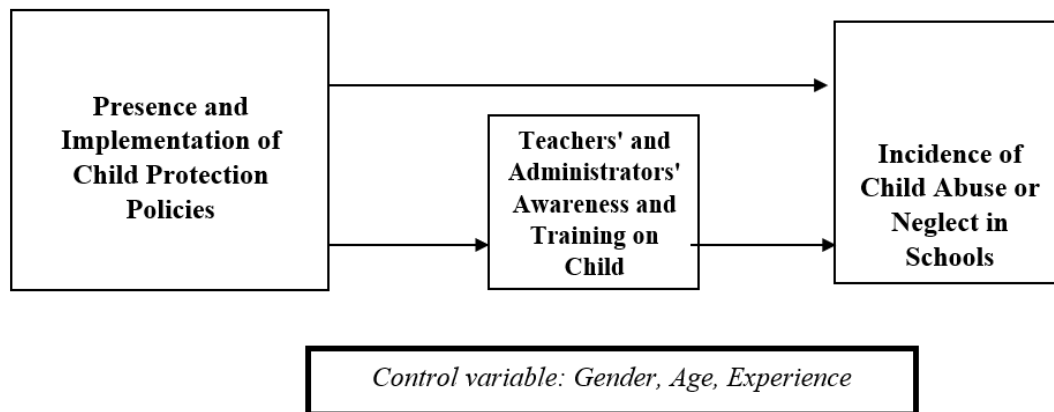


Figure 1: Research Model

Literature review

Presence and Implementation of Child Protection Policies

Child protection policies (CPPs) are formal institutional frameworks designed to safeguard children from abuse, neglect, and exploitation by establishing structured mechanisms for prevention, reporting, and response. The presence of such policies reflects an organization's commitment to child safety; however, research consistently emphasizes that their effectiveness depends more on implementation than mere existence. Studies show that institutions with clearly operationalized policies supported by guidelines, monitoring, and accountability are more effective in preventing abuse (Mathews & Kenny, 2008; Finkelhor, 2009). Implementation is a multidimensional process involving policy awareness, procedural clarity, and institutional enforcement. Research highlights that schools often struggle with translating written policies into actionable practices. For instance, Bayucca (2020) found that while teachers were generally aware of child protection policies, implementation remained weak due to lack of strict monitoring and enforcement. Similarly, international evidence suggests that policy effectiveness is significantly enhanced when schools establish clear reporting protocols and institutional support systems (Walsh et al., 2012; Mathews et al., 2017).

Another critical factor is the gap between policy formulation and ground-level execution, particularly in developing countries. Weak governance structures, limited resources, and lack of trained personnel often hinder effective implementation. Studies indicate that in such contexts, policies exist in theory but are not fully operationalized, reducing their impact on child safety outcomes (Zakar et al., 2016; Khan & Munir, 2020). This implementation gap highlights the importance of institutional readiness and resource allocation in ensuring policy success. Moreover, organizational culture plays a vital role in shaping policy effectiveness. Schools that foster transparency, accountability, and child-centered values are more likely to implement policies effectively. Research shows that institutional commitment and leadership significantly influence the extent to which policies are enforced and sustained (Mathews et al., 2017). Without such commitment, policies may remain symbolic rather than functional. Finally, continuous evaluation and policy adaptation are essential for maintaining effectiveness. Emerging research suggests that child protection policies must evolve to address new challenges, including digital risks and changing patterns of abuse. Regular monitoring, feedback mechanisms, and policy revisions are necessary to ensure long-term effectiveness (Finkelhor, 2009; Walsh et al., 2012). Overall, the literature clearly indicates that while the presence of CPPs is important, their real impact depends on effective implementation, institutional support, and continuous improvement.

Teachers' and Administrators' Awareness and Training on Child

Teachers and school administrators are central actors in the implementation of child protection policies, as they are often the first to detect and respond to signs of abuse. Their awareness and training significantly influence the effectiveness of child protection systems. Research consistently shows that educators' knowledge of child abuse and protection procedures is a key determinant of reporting behavior and intervention outcomes (Kenny, 2004; Mathews et al., 2017). However, empirical studies reveal that many teachers have insufficient knowledge of child protection policies and lack confidence in handling abuse cases. For example, Tekel and Yildirim (2024) found that teachers' awareness levels regarding child abuse and neglect were generally moderate to low, indicating substantial knowledge gaps. Similarly, Kaunain et al. (2025) reported disparities in teachers' knowledge, attitudes, and practices, emphasizing the need for structured training programs. These findings suggest that lack of awareness remains a major barrier to effective policy implementation.

Training programs have been widely recognized as essential tools for improving awareness and response capacity. Experimental evidence shows that training significantly enhances teachers' ability to identify and report child abuse cases. For instance, Gün et al. (2022) demonstrated that teachers' knowledge and reporting intentions improved substantially after receiving targeted training. Similarly, pre-service training programs for educators have been shown to increase knowledge levels and preparedness for handling child protection issues (Goldman & Grimbeek, 2012). In addition to improving knowledge, training also helps address psychological and institutional barriers to reporting. Teachers often face challenges such as fear of parental reactions, lack of procedural clarity, and insufficient administrative support. A recent study found that teachers exhibited only moderate awareness levels and faced significant barriers, including fear and lack of institutional backing, which hinder reporting behavior. These findings highlight that training must be complemented by supportive institutional environments.

Furthermore, awareness and training act as a mediating mechanism between policy implementation and outcomes. Research indicates that even well-designed policies fail when educators lack the skills and knowledge to implement them effectively (Walsh et al., 2012; Mathews et al., 2017). Continuous professional development, refresher training, and institutional support are therefore essential for sustaining awareness and ensuring compliance with child protection protocols. Overall, the literature underscores that teachers' and administrators' awareness and training are critical for the success of child protection policies. Without adequate capacity building, policies remain ineffective, emphasizing the need for comprehensive training programs and supportive institutional frameworks.

Incidence of Child Abuse or Neglect in Schools

The incidence of child abuse or neglect in schools represents a key outcome variable for evaluating the effectiveness of child protection systems. Child abuse includes physical, emotional, and sexual harm, as well as neglect, all of which have severe consequences for children's development and well-being (Gilbert et al., 2009). Schools, as primary social institutions, play a crucial role in both the occurrence and prevention of such incidents. Research indicates that the true incidence of child abuse is often underestimated due to widespread underreporting. Global studies suggest that prevalence rates are significantly higher than officially reported figures, highlighting gaps in detection and reporting systems (Stoltenborgh et al., 2015; Finkelhor, 2009). In school settings, underreporting is particularly common due to stigma, fear, and lack of trust in institutional mechanisms. Several factors contribute to the incidence of abuse within educational institutions. Weak policy implementation, lack of supervision, and insufficient training are among the primary contributors. In developing countries, systemic challenges such as cultural acceptance of corporal

punishment and weak enforcement of child protection laws further increase risks (Zakar et al., 2016). These findings emphasize the need for strong institutional frameworks to reduce abuse incidence. At the same time, schools can serve as protective environments when effective policies and practices are in place. Evidence from systematic reviews shows that school-based child protection programs significantly improve children's knowledge, self-protection skills, and reporting behavior. However, the effectiveness of such programs depends on their integration with broader institutional policies and teacher training initiatives (Walsh et al., 2012)

Importantly, the relationship between policy implementation and abuse incidence is complex and often mediated by awareness and training. Studies indicate that improved training leads to increased reporting, which may initially appear as a rise in incidence but actually reflects better detection (Mathews et al., 2017; Walsh et al., 2012). Over time, however, effective policies contribute to a reduction in actual abuse cases. In conclusion, the incidence of child abuse or neglect in schools is both an indicator of institutional failure and a measure of policy effectiveness. Reducing this incidence requires a comprehensive approach that integrates policy implementation, awareness, training, and institutional support. The literature clearly demonstrates that without these elements, schools may fail to provide safe environments for children.

H1: Presence and Implementation of Child Protection Policies has a significant positive effect on Incidence of Child Abuse or Neglect in Schools.

H2: Presence and Implementation of Child Protection Policies has a significant positive effect on Teachers' and Administrators' Awareness and Training on Child.

H3: Teachers' and Administrators' Awareness and Training on Child has a significant positive effect on Incidence of Child Abuse or Neglect in Schools.

H4: Teachers' and Administrators' Awareness and Training on Child mediates the relationship between Presence and Implementation of Child Protection Policies and Incidence of Child Abuse or Neglect in Schools.

Research Methodology

Data were collected from different employees (teachers and school administrators). The selection of participants for data collection was executed using convenience sampling methods. Data were gathered through online soft copy via WhatsApp, FB, and Email, in addition to hard copy. A covert letter was included with questionnaires that clarified to the participants the aim of the research. It also advised participants that their answers to this questionnaire are handled with confidentiality and anonymity. Their responses are utilized solely for academic purposes. A total of 150 questionnaires were distributed, of which 118 were returned, with 100 being deemed useful.

Table 1 presents the distribution and demographic characteristics of the 100 respondents who participated in this study on evaluating the effectiveness of child protection policies in educational institutions of Pakistan. The sample comprised 33% male and 67% female participants, indicating a higher representation of female educators and administrators. Regarding marital status, 32% were single and 68% were married, reflecting a diverse mix of personal backgrounds. The age distribution showed that 30% of respondents were aged 18–25, 40% were 26–40, and 30% were 41–60, while no respondents were above 60, suggesting that the majority of participants are in their early to mid-career stages. In terms of employment status, 90% were permanent employees and 10% contractual employees, highlighting that most respondents are long-term members of their institutions, which may influence their familiarity with child protection policies. Experience levels varied, with 60% having 0–5 years, 8% with 6–10 years, 12% with 11–20 years, and 20% with 21–30 years of professional experience, while no participants had over 30 years of service. Overall, the sample provides a balanced representation of gender, age, marital status, employment

type, and professional experience, enabling a comprehensive assessment of how child protection policies are perceived, implemented, and practiced in educational institutions.

Measures

The study utilized validated constructs from prior literature to measure the key variables: Presence and Implementation of Child Protection Policies, Teachers’ and Administrators’ Awareness and Training on Child Protection Policies, and Incidence of Child Abuse or Neglect in Schools. All variables were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 represented “strongly disagree” and 5 represented “strongly agree.”

1. Presence and Implementation of Child Protection Policies (Independent Variable)

The presence and implementation of child protection policies were measured through items adapted from Mathews and Kenny (2008), Walsh et al. (2012), and Zakar et al. (2016).

The alpha reliability for this construct in the present study was 0.841, indicating strong internal consistency.

2. Teachers’ and Administrators’ Awareness and Training (Mediator Variable)

Teachers’ and administrators’ awareness and training on child protection policies were assessed using items derived from Kenny (2004), Tekel and Yıldırım (2024), and Gün et al. (2022).

The alpha reliability for this mediator variable was 0.859, indicating good reliability and consistency of responses.

3. Incidence of Child Abuse or Neglect in Schools (Dependent Variable)

The incidence of child abuse or neglect was measured using items adapted from Gilbert et al. (2009), Zakar et al. (2016), and Che Yusof et al. (2022).

The alpha reliability for this dependent variable was 0.872, reflecting excellent internal consistency.

Table 1: Distribution and Characteristics of Sample

Variable	Categories	No	(%)
Gender	Male	33	33
	Female	67	67
	Total	100	100
Marital Status	Single	32	32
	Married	68	68
	Total	100	100
Age	18-25	30	30
	26-40	40	40
	41-60	30	30
	Over 60	0	0
	Total	100	100
Work status	Permanent Employees	90	90
	Contractual Employees	10	10
	Total	100	100
Experience	0-5	60	60
	6-10	8	8
	11-20	12	12
	21-30	20	20
	Over 30	0	0
Total		100	100

Every item was scored using a Likert scale of 1 to 5, where 1 meant "Strongly Disagree" and 5 meant "Strongly Agree."

Controlling element / Controller Variable

The study's control variables included age, gender, and Experience, according to a prior Khan study conducted in 2022. The study utilized the following coding for variables: Age (1 = under 25 years, 2 = 26-30 years, 3 = 31-40 years, 4 = 41-50 years, 5 = 51-60 years, and 6 = over 60), gender (1 = male, 2 = female), and section (1 = public, 2 = private).

All study variables were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 represented strong disagreement and 5 represented strong agreement.

Results

One-way ANOVA was utilized to address the variation in Incidence of Child Abuse or Neglect in Schools according to the demographic variable examined in this study. The findings of the One-Way ANOVA (refer to table 2) indicated that the average Incidence of Child Abuse or Neglect in Schools value did not significantly differ based on Gender, Age, and Experience.

Table 2: One-way ANOVA

Sources of variation	ICANS	
	F statistics	p-value
Gender	.310	.798
Age	1.999	.155
Experience	.877	.478

ICANS= Incidence of Child Abuse or Neglect in Schools

Statistical Tools: Means, standard deviation, correlations, Reliabilities and multiple regression analysis also using SPSS 22 version.

Results

Table 3: Means, Standard deviation, correlation and Reliabilities

	Mean	SD	1	2	3
PICPP	3.73	0.74	(0.841)		
TAAT	3.86	0.99	0.568**	(0.859)	
ICANS	3.55	0.99	0.688**	0.899**	(0.872)

PICPP=Presence and Implementation of Child Protection Policies, **TAAT**= Teachers' and Administrators' Awareness and Training, **ICANS**= Incidence of Child Abuse or Neglect in Schools

The data in Table 3 demonstrates that Presence and Implementation of Child Protection Policies is strongly positively correlated with Incidence of Child Abuse or Neglect in Schools (0.688, $p = .000$), thus fully validating hypothesis 1. Then, there is a positive correlation between Presence and Implementation of Child Protection Policies and Teachers' and Administrators' Awareness and Training (0.568, $p = .000$), which supports hypothesis 2. Teachers' and Administrators'

Awareness and Training is positively correlated with Incidence of Child Abuse or Neglect in Schools (0.899 $p = .000$), which supports hypotheses 3 and 4 respectively.

Regression Analysis

The present study employed the Baron and Kenny (1986) mediation condition. To determine the variable's primary effect and mediating effect, regression analysis was utilized. Table 4 contains the outcome of the regression analysis. The outcome indicates that Presence and Implementation of Child Protection Policies has a highly positive and significant impact on Incidence of Child Abuse or Neglect in Schools ($\beta = 0.899$, $R^2 = 0.289$, $p = .000$), leading to the acceptance of Hypothesis 1. Considering the pronounced beneficial and noteworthy influence of Presence and Implementation of Child Protection Policies on Teachers' and Administrators' Awareness and Training ($\beta = 0.818$, $R^2 = 0.223$, with $p = .000$) Hypothesis 2 has been accepted. The outcome also shows that Teachers' and Administrators' Awareness and Training significantly and positively influences Incidence of Child Abuse or Neglect in Schools ($\beta = 0.911$, $R^2 = 0.955$, $p = .000$). Thus, hypothesis 3 is accepted.

Table 4: Regression Analysis

Predictor	Teachers' and Administrators' Awareness and Training			Incidence of Child Abuse or Neglect in Schools		
	B	R ²	▲R ²	B	R ²	▲R ²
Direct effect						
PICPP	0.818***	0.223	0.244***	0.899***	0.289	0.299***
Indirect effect						
TAAT				0.911***	0.955	0.961***
PICPP X TAAT				0.888***	0.866	0.877***

N = 100. PICPP = Presence and Implementation of Child Protection Policies, TAAT = Teachers' and Administrators' Awareness and Training * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$. ns = not significant

According to Table 3 mediating regression analysis findings, Teachers' and Administrators' Awareness and Training mediates the association between a Presence and Implementation of Child Protection Policies and Incidence of Child Abuse or Neglect in Schools ($\beta = 0.888$, $R^2 = 0.866$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.877$, with $p = .000$) and thus Hypothesis 4 is accepted. In the present study, the association between a Presence and Implementation of Child Protection Policies and Incidence of Child Abuse or Neglect in Schools is partially mediated by career commitment.

Discussion and Implications

Child protection within educational institutions remains a critical global concern, particularly in contexts like Pakistan where schools serve as primary environments for children's academic, social, and emotional development. The literature emphasizes that merely having child protection

policies (CPPs) is insufficient; their effectiveness depends largely on implementation, institutional commitment, and the awareness and training of teachers and administrators (Mathews & Kenny, 2008; Walsh et al., 2012). Schools that integrate clear reporting mechanisms, accountability structures, and supportive institutional frameworks are better positioned to prevent and respond to cases of abuse and neglect (Finkelhor, 2009; Mathews et al., 2017). Moreover, teachers and administrators play a pivotal role as the first line of defense in recognizing and addressing maltreatment. Awareness and professional training equip them with the knowledge and skills necessary to identify abuse, navigate reporting procedures, and intervene effectively, thereby acting as a critical bridge between policy and practice (Gün et al., 2022; Kenny, 2004).

The implications of these findings are multifaceted. Policymakers and educational leaders must prioritize the operationalization of CPPs, ensuring that policies are not only documented but actively enforced through monitoring, evaluation, and continuous feedback. Professional development programs, refresher training, and workshops tailored to educators' needs should be institutionalized to enhance awareness, confidence, and reporting behavior (Walsh et al., 2012; Mathews et al., 2017). Additionally, cultivating a child-centered organizational culture that promotes transparency, accountability, and institutional support is essential to sustain protective practices. Such a holistic approach can contribute to the creation of safe learning environments, foster students' well-being, and reduce the long-term psychological and social consequences of abuse and neglect (Gilbert et al., 2009; Stoltenborgh et al., 2015).

Limitations and Future Research

While this study contributes to understanding the role of child protection policies, awareness, and training in educational institutions, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the research relied primarily on self-reported measures, which may be subject to social desirability bias or underreporting due to fear or stigma (Finkelhor, 2009). Second, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw causal inferences about the long-term impact of policies and training on child protection outcomes. Third, the study was conducted within a specific sample of educational institutions, which may limit the generalizability of findings across diverse regions or school types in Pakistan. Future research should address these limitations by employing longitudinal or mixed-method designs to capture changes in policy effectiveness and reporting behavior over time. Incorporating multiple data sources, such as student feedback, administrative records, and observational assessments, can provide a more comprehensive understanding of child abuse incidence and policy impact (Stoltenborgh et al., 2015; Gilbert et al., 2009). Additionally, comparative studies across urban and rural schools, public and private institutions, and varying socio-cultural contexts can offer valuable insights into context-specific barriers and facilitators of effective child protection. Finally, future investigations could explore innovative approaches, including digital reporting systems, community engagement strategies, and policy adaptations to emerging risks, to strengthen child protection frameworks and ensure safer educational environments for children (Walsh et al., 2012; Mathews et al., 2017)

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