



Socioeconomic and Demographic Risk Factors of Child Sexual Abuse in Pakistan: A Case Study of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province

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ABSTRACT

Child sexual abuse is a harsh reality and a threat of harm to children. Pakistan's high population growth and increasing poverty has resulted in child labor on streets. Children are exposed to all forms of abuse including sexual exploitation. The main objective of this study is to find out the risk factors of child sexual abuse. The present study has been conducted in the capital city of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, Pakistan. The respondents have been selected from places where children are found most often, selling products, or wondering in search of jobs. Primary data was collected through semi-structured questionnaire using snowball sampling. The total response was found at 50, including Pakistani and Afghan refugees' children. According to the results 76% children are deprived of their parents' proper attention, 96% are very poor and just earning below Rs. 8000, 66% are in the age group of 8 to 12 years, 72% of the respondents have only one room in their house, 78% respondents are not enrolled in school; about 22 % sample respondents left the school early, 64% of the respondent having large family size (family members more than 6), and 98% of the victims were out of homes for earnings. It is concluded that the main risk factors of child abuse consist of poverty, child labor, large family size, school dropout, and low parental warmth. With respect to most of the variables, no significant difference was found between the two nationals.

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1. Introduction

Child sexual abuse is a harsh reality in most of the countries. Child abuse is threat of harm to children by someone even being in the role of a caretaker. Child abuse takes several specific forms; physical abuse i.e., assaults on children such as kicking, punching, or stabbing that produce pain, cuts, burn, broken bones, and other injuries; sexual abuse; emotional neglect e.g., failure of caregivers to meet children's needs for affections and emotional support; physical neglect e.g., failure to meet child's basic needs; and psychological abuse i.e., ridicule, humiliation, intimidation, terrorizing, or degradation (Papalia et al., 2017). The main risk factors of child abuse may consist of demographic variables, child characteristics, family relationship, parental characteristics, low maternal involvement, early separation from mother, poverty, large family size, low educational level, low parental warmth, parental psychiatric problems, and so on. The bad effects of abuse on children are loss of their self-esteem and lack of motivation, self-blame, anger and rage, suicidal thoughts, drug and alcohol abuse, passive and withdrawn behavior, depression, nightmare, aggressive and disruptive behaviors and feeling of insecurity. There is sometimes a threat that, in future, these abused children become abusers.

Pakistan's high population growth and increasing poverty has resulted in child labor on streets. Children are exposed to all forms of abuse including sexual exploitation. Street children

usually hang around busy markets, parks, shrines, cinema halls and other public places where abusers approach them directly or through pimps.

In recent years, Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) has become a subject of debate all over Pakistan. In a traditional and religious society, it is against the norms to discuss such issues openly. In spite, social media, print and electronic media is discussing the issue and highlighting its different aspects. Despite the traditional and religious restrictions on such activities where there are dire punishments in a Muslim society, the reports are showing that the problem is growing day by day. The data on child sexual abuse in Pakistan shows that in the year 2016, there was an increase of 10% in such cases as compared to the previous year. A report on child sexual abuse in Pakistan is showing that out of total child sexual victims (4139) during 2016, around 41.7% were boys and 58% were girls. The report is mentioning that out of total child sexual abuse (4139), about 76% cases were found in rural areas and 24% cases were in urban areas. The report mentioned that the highest number of cases were in Punjab (68%), followed by Sind (23.8%), Baluchistan (4%), Islamabad (3.7%), Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (3.4%), Azad Jammu and Kashmir (0.2%) and Gilgit-Baltistan (0.9%). Out of the total, 78% of cases were registered with the police (Wasif, 2017).

Child sexual abuse is against the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). According to MDG 3, it is required to promote gender equality and empowering women. One of the tasks identified is the elimination of child marriage. According to MDG 6, the country is required to combat HIV/AIDS and other diseases. The prevalence of such diseases and controlling Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is a task needed to be fulfilled. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, emphasis is given to MDG-3 & 6, with first and the third priority respectively.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan represents Pashtun society having strict cultural traits, where millions of Afghan refugees are also living. The area is a hub of war affected people. Addressing CSA in such a society is a deficient area of research especially with respect to their economic aspects as determinants of the problem.

The aim of the research is to bring the issue of CSA in the mainstream of academics and to draw the attention of the academicians to the importance of the issue. The specific objectives focus on identifying the risk factors of child sexual abuse in a traditional "Pashtun" society of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It is imperative to identify the demographic and socioeconomic risk factors that lead to sexual abuse of children in the study area.

The paper is organized in the following way. Section 2 discusses different aspects of CSA appeared in the literature: causes, determinants, and the incidence. Section 3 introduces the methodology and data used in the study. Section 4 highlights the empirical findings while Section 5 analyzes and concludes the study and suggests some policy measures.

2. Child Sexual Abuse: A Review

The literature on Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) is covering many aspects of the issue; kinds of CSA, the causes, impacts, incidence and prevalence, and methodologies applied to analyze the problem, etc. Child sexual abuse (CSA) is an issue of human rights, a health issue (Roosa, Reinholtz, & Angelini, 1999) and is one of the development constraints (Antai, Braithwaite, & Clerk, 2016).

Global data on CSA shows that about 73 million boys and 150 million girls under the age of 18 are facing the problem in one form or the other (Pinheiro, 2006). Globally, commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) is a multi-billion-dollar industry. The figure in this industry for the third world stands at 10 million children (Foreman, 1990). Child sexual abuse is growing in sub-Saharan Africa (Antai et al., 2016). South Africa has the highest rate of CSA in the world (Andersson et al., 2004). Sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, and sexual violence are often used interchangeably, depending on the context and the legal requirement (Pinheiro, 2006). It covers all acts; indecent exposure, contact and non-contact abuse including penetrative abuse (Richter & Higson-Smith, 2004). The research shows that there is not a standard definition of CSA in the literature thus research in this area is very challenging (Antai et al., 2016). CSA, according to WHO, is the involvement of a child in sexual activity which he does not comprehend, nor does he give consent. It is important to consider the age of the child. The age of adolescence is

considered from 10 to 19 years. Most of the period of adolescence falls below the age of 18 years (Antai et al., 2016). CSA is classified into three main categories; Contact abuse (using the body as a sexual object with that of a child), Non-contact abuse (different acts like forcing child to watch pornography, practice masturbation etc.), and penetrative abuse (rape, oral or anal intercourse or using an object) (Castle & Diallo, 2008; Richter & Higson-Smith, 2004). High level of poverty (UNFPA, 2005) is one of the causes of CSA. Sexual abuse of child as domestic worker is common (Stöpler, 2007). The places where the incidence takes place more frequently are; homes (Anderson et al., 2007; Taft, Gabriel-Nelson, & Powe, 2006), schools (Aid, 2010) and displacement situations (Amnesty, 2005; Pitche, 2005). Other determinants of child sexual abuse are: exposure to intimate partner violence (IPV), wife beating, poverty, younger children, and residence in households with 3 to 5 children (Antai et al., 2016). The impacts of CSA on Child's personality are always negative resulting in criminal behavior (Fitzpatrick et al., 2010; Fry, McCoy, & Swales, 2012), alcohol and drug use (C. P. Carr, Martins, Stingel, Lemgruber, & Juruena, 2013), relationship problems (Whiffen & MacIntosh, 2005), self-blame, shame, and anger (Collins, O'Neill-Arana, Fontes, & Ossege, 2014), and difficulties in social relations (Lueger-Schuster et al., 2014; Lueger-Schuster et al., 2014). The consequences of CSA are; gynecological complications (Speizer et al., 2009), infections (Meursing et al., 1995), unwanted pregnancies and abortions (Neelofur-Khan, 2007), anxieties and depressions (Stavropoulos, 2006), and suicides (Behrendt & Mbaye, 2008). Khan (2018) mentioned that antenatal depression is recorded at 15-20% in developed countries while its prevalence is recorded very high (80%) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan.

For studying the impacts of CSA on the victim, two aspects; incidence i.e. number of cases occurred and prevalence i.e. population experiencing the incident, are important. Studies show that only 5-6% of the cases are reported (Boney-McCoy & Finkelhor, 1995), while most of the victims never disclose their cases (Artime, McCallum, & Peterson, 2014; Paine & Hansen, 2002; Putnam, 2003; Ullman, 2003). Male victims are high in number of concealing the facts, while female victims are less (Artime et al., 2014; O'Leary, Cooney, & Easton, 2010). Further, the literature shows that boys' sexual abuse is under reported than that of girls (Antai et al., 2016). Blakemore, Herbert, Arney, and Parkinson (2017) mentioned that the research on CSA occurring in institutions is very limited. The literature mentioned that institutional CSA mainly takes place in; Schools' day care (Phasha, 2008), Religious institutions (A. Carr et al., 2009; Flynn, 2008), Foster care & home care (Benedict, Zuravin, Somerfield, & Brandt, 1996; Hobbs, Hobbs, & Wynne, 1999), and Sporting institutions (Brackenridge, Bishopp, Moussalli, & Tapp, 2008; Hartill, 2014; Leahy, Pretty, & Tenenbaum, 2008).

In the literature, both, qualitative and quantitative methods are being used to analyze the issue of CSA. For example, quantitative analysis of survey data (Bottoms, Shaver, & Goodman, 1996), qualitative analysis of interviews (Bode & Goldman, 2012; Farrell, 2009; Isely, Isely, Freiburger, & McMackin, 2008), and case studies (Farrell & Taylor, 2000) are being discussed. The researchers also use the material based on the information called "grey literature" that includes NGOs' reports, and newspapers articles etc. (Antai et al., 2016). For example, Wasif (2017) collected the data from 86 newspapers: local, national, and regional. The data is also collected through reports of national surveys, international development agencies, and program reports (Antai et al., 2016). O'Leary et al. (2010) collected data on CSA occurring in institutions. Different techniques of analysis have been applied, for example, Multivariate logistic regression based on stepwise regression has been used by Antai et al. (2016) to find out the social determinants of child abuse.

The deficient areas of research about child sexual abuse are found in aspects like, community perception about CSA, good practices in monitoring and evaluation, in defining CSA, insufficient research in some countries, and scarcity of information regarding statistical data on forms of CSA (Antai et al., 2016) The issue lack attention in strict traditional societies where it is against the traditional norm to bring the topic in discussion. The present study is an effort to cover such a society in Pakistan.

3. Data and Methodology

3.1. Theoretical Underpinnings

When studying the risk factors of child sexual abuse, researchers typically draw from ecological systems framework to guide their analysis. The ecological systems theory, developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner, suggests that child development is influenced by multiple nested

systems (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem). The paper might explore how factors from each of these systems contribute to the risk of child sexual abuse, such as family dynamics, community influences, cultural norms, and historical context. Moreover, the theoretical background of this endeavor is based on the social learning theory, which emphasizes the role of observational learning and social modeling in shaping behavior. The paper might investigate how exposure to abusive behaviors or attitudes, either in person or through media, can increase the likelihood of child sexual abuse perpetration.

3.2. Study Area and Sampling Technique

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan, one of the border areas of the country has gone through many turmoils including Afghan Russian war and war on terrorism. Millions of refugees crossed the border and had been settled in the province particularly in Peshawar, the capital city. Socio-economic and political structure of the area had been affected badly, leaving behind poverty, unemployment, drugs, and violence. Doing research in such an area on an issue cited above, is a challenging task.

The total area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is 74,521 square km. and the total population of the province, according to 2017 census was 35.53 million. The name Khyber is taken from the famous Khyber Pass situated on the border of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pakhtunkhwa means the land of Pathans or Pashtuns. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is occupied mainly by Pashtun. The main language spoken in the province is Pushto. Peshawar is the provincial capital and largest city of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). Peshawar is situated 15 km. from the east end of Khyber Pass. Population in district Peshawar in 2017 population crossed 4 million (Govt. of Pakistan, 2018). Administratively, Peshawar city is in Peshawar District. People from all walks of life and from all areas of the province visit Peshawar city for employment, education and for administrative needs. The surge in the city population is due to military operations and natural disasters in the province, and militancy in neighboring Afghanistan. Peshawar is connected to Afghanistan via the Khyber Pass. The present study has been conducted in Peshawar city. The respondents have been selected from famous places where children are found most often, selling products, or wondering in search of jobs. These areas are main bus terminal of the city connecting different parts of the province called Haji camp in Hashtnaghari; Board Bazaar, the busiest vegetables and fruit market; and Qissa Khwani Bazaar, the oldest traditional market of the city.

Since data collection on CSA from such a traditional society is a difficult task, therefore extra careful measures have been taken. The children were offered chocolates to speak up and to identify the other affectees. The present study has used random sampling method to collect data through questionnaire. Primary data was collected through semi-structured questionnaire from a sample using snowball sampling. The total response was found at 50, both male and female including Pakistani and Afghan refugees' children.

3.3. Analytical Technique

Before data collection, the variables have been classified. The classification of the variables was based on respondents' demographic and socio-economic factors; gender, age, nationality, education, school dropout, current working status, family type, parental relations, number of abused children, indemnity given by the abuser, age group of the abused child and age group of the abuser, and the relation with the abuser. For analysis, the respondents have been classified according to their nationality as there are children on the streets belonging to Afghan origin as well. Since Russian war, Afghan refugees are living in the study area. As the respondents have been selected randomly, we found a group of Afghan children in the selected sample. This group of respondents provided strength to the results of our research as to make a comparison between the two nationality holders. For analyzing the results, SPSS has been applied on the variables.

4. Results and Discussion

There are various factors that lead to a situation causing the abuse. Such factors may be the age where a victim is so young to understand the situation. In a joint family system, there are more than one family where children are often neglected. People living in very small houses with one or two rooms may be vulnerable to such situation. In the study area, it is generally perceived that Afghan children are street vendors, thus are easily subject to abuse. The results are presented in the following tables:

Table 1: Key Attributes of the Respondents

Variables	Response (%)	Variable	Response (%)
Nationality		Family Size	
Pakistani	54.0	Below 6	36.0
Afghani	46.0	7 - 10	46.0
Gender		More than 10	18.0
Male	88.0	Family System	
Female	12.0	Single	76.0
Age (in years)		Joint	24.0
Below 8	2.0	Number of Rooms in House	
8 -12	66.0	0	10.0
13-17	32.0	1	72.0
		2	18.0

The results in Table 1 present the key attributes of the sampled children. It reveals that most of the local children (54%) were the victims while 46% of Afghan children suffered from the incident. It is generally perceived that female are usually the target of the abuser, however the results are contrary. About 88% respondents are male. In Pashtun society, female is often confined to her home no matter what her age is. Another reason may be that approaching female respondents is against the social norms of the area and were not easily accessible. The results show that most of the respondents (66%) are in the age group of 8 to 12 years. The children in the next age group i.e. from 13 to 17 are also vulnerable. Such victims are 32% of the sampled population. The results further show that most of the respondents belong to the nuclear family (76). With respect to nationality, 59% Afghans were living in a joint family set up compared to Pakistanis (43%). However, most of the respondents found having large family size (7 to 10 members). This problem often is aggravated by the space where parents and children live together. This figure stands very high as 72% of the respondents have only one room in their house. The key socioeconomic variables are presented in the following table:

Table 2: Socioeconomic Characteristics of Sexually Abused Children

Variables	Response (%)	Variables	Response (%)
Current working status		School Enrollment	
Playing in the town	2.0	Early School Leaving	22.0
Begging on the street	8.0	Not Enrolled	78.0
Selling	38.0	Monthly Income (in	
Washing cars	4.0	PKR)	68.0
Collecting garbage	48.0	Below 5000	28.0
		5001-8000	4.0
		8001 - 11000	

Source: Survey (2020)

The socioeconomic profile of the respondents show (Table 2) that majority of the sample respondents are collecting garbage in the streets (48%) while 38% sample respondents are street vendors. About 8% are begging outside in different areas away from their homes. Car washing is another profession in the study area where children are often working. About 4% of the respondents are earning their livelihood as car washers. Overall, 98% of the victims were out of homes for earnings. Their family income status show that 96% are very poor and just earning below Rs. 8000 which is not enough for a family. The results show that majority of the sample respondents are not enrolled (78%). About 22 % sample respondents left the school early. Among them, 42% were Afghan children. It has been found that they left the school while in class 5th or grade below. The main reason of leaving the school was the daily expenses and fee which they could not bear. In other words, 100% respondents are not attending school. According to the Economic Survey of Pakistan (2019-20), the school dropout in the country is 22.7%. It is evident from the results of table 2 that majority of the sexually abused children are living in miserable socioeconomic conditions.

Brooks-Gunn and Duncan (1997) supports the results of our study that children of early school passing through poverty driven conditions suffer most. Embleton, Lee, Gunn, Ayuku, and Braitstein (2016) mentioned that street children are vulnerable. However, Coren, Hossain, Ramsbotham, Martin, and Pardo (2014) argued that whether street children remain connected with their families or not, they are at high risks.

There are many factors that cause such incidents. The following is a sketch showing some key determinants of the abuse.

Table 3: Factors Responsible for Sexual Abuse

Variables	Response (%)	Variable	Response (%)
Proper attention from the Parents		Reasons of Sexual abuse	
<i>No attention/ affection given.</i>	76.0	For Money	77.0
<i>Affection given.</i>	24.0	<i>For Food</i>	23.0
Age of the Respondents at the time of abuse		Knowledge about pornography	
<i>between 6 and 8 years</i>	31.0	No knowledge	100.0
<i>between 8 and 10 years</i>	23.0	Have Knowledge	0.000
<i>between 10 and above</i>	15.0	Compulsion for work by Mother	46.0
<i>Cannot Remember</i>	31.0	Father	24.0
		Both parent	28.0
		Guardian	2.0
Parents Divorced	16	Step Parents	14
Death of Mother/Father	12		

Source: Survey (2020)

Lack of parents' affection and attention may be one of the causes of a child deprivation thus leaving him at the mercy of outside world. Majority of our respondents are deprived of their parents' proper attention (76%). This figure stands comparatively less severe (42%) in Afghanis than Pakistanis (58%). Large family size as mentioned above, with added responsibilities in a poor financial setup keeps them occupied, thus having little time to take care of their children.

The data shows that majority of the respondents (31%) are in the age group of 6 to 8 years when they were first time abused. Moreover, 31 percent of the sexually abused children even did not remember the age when they were sexually abused. Overall, about 54% respondents have been exploited when they were under the age of 10 years. If we add children those who have forgotten the age in which they were abused, assuming them too young, this figure stands as high as 85%. Another important aspect of the CSA is, the way these children are being trapped. Majority of our respondents unfold this fact that they had been trapped by offering money (77%). The remaining 23% were abused for food in exchange. All the sample respondents were not aware about the pornography. Majority of the sample respondents (46%) revealed that their mothers forced them for work which is contrary to the general perception that the guardians not parents usually send the child out to earn something. Divorces of parents, death of either parents, or step-parents are other common causes of early childhood tragedies that may lead to vulnerability. This data stands as 16%, 12% and 14% respectively. The results of the present study are supported by Gamble (2010) who pointed out that poverty, lack of education and broken family are the few causes of such incidents. Early intervention as suggested by Murray et al. (2014) can help to address the issue. However, assessment, measurement, and treatment are the challenges as the problem is not so simple having varying degree of intensities.

Characteristics of the abuser is another determining factor to address the issue. Due to lack of information about the abuser, we rely on specific information available. These information were asked from the respondents and are given below.

Table 4: Key Characteristics of the Abuser

Variables	Response (%)
Age of the Abuser (in years)	
<i>Below 20</i>	54.0
<i>21-30</i>	8.0
<i>31-40</i>	38.0
Identification of the abuser	
<i>stranger</i>	76.0
<i>Not stranger</i>	34.0

Source: Survey (2020)

It is evident from the results of table 4 that majority of the abuser were in the age group of less than 20 years (54%). It has been revealed that in majority cases, the abusers were strangers (76%). However, the identity of those who were either their relatives or living in the vicinity, had not been identified.

5. Conclusion

Child sexual abuse is a threat to the life and career of children. It is a socioeconomic issue as it is mainly caused by poverty in developing countries like Pakistan. Pakistan's high population growth and increasing poverty has resulted in child labor on streets. Children are exposed to all forms of abuse including sexual exploitation. Street children usually hang around busy markets, parks, shrines, cinema halls and other public places where abusers approach them directly or through pimps. There is sometimes a threat that in future, these abused children become abusers. The problem is much aggravated in the presence of war in the region. Due to Afghan war, Pakistan, on one hand is facing the economic and security issues and, on the other hand, it is handling the issues of Afghan refugees. Our results show that although the percentage share of victimization is less among Afghan children compare to the locals, however, the difference between the two sets of nationality holders is insignificant with respect to many variables under consideration. It is evident from the results of the study that the main risk factors of child abuse consist of poverty, family relationship, child labor in busy markets, and large family size. The time and finances were the constraints of the present study. In future, there is need of an in-depth study with added variables.

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