

# AN ANALYTICAL STUDY ON THE PSYCHO-SOCIAL EFFECTS OF CHILD ABUSE

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## Abstract

A cycle of child abuse pervades our society and affects the well-being and future of our children in varying proportions regardless of developed, developing, or underdeveloped countries. Psychological abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect are the few common types of child abuse in our society. Child abuse is a global problem that affects all races, cultures, economic and educational levels without discrimination. As a vulnerable and subordinate segment of society, children face many forms of abuse in different countries across the world. The purpose of this research study is to examine in depth the psychosocial impact of child abuse. The researcher has used a non-probability purposive sampling method to collect raw facts and figures for the research. Three different towns of Karachi, *Orangi town (Baloch Goth, Chisti Nagar, Ghabool Town, Hanifabad, Iqbal Baloch Colony, Madina Colony, Mominabad, and Mujahidabad)*, *Korangi town (Baloch Goth, Chisti Nagar, Ghabool Town, Hanifabad, Iqbal Baloch Colony, Madina Colony, Mominabad, and Mujahidabad)*, and *Shah Faisal town (Al-Falah Society, Azeem Pura, Drigh Colony, Drigh Road, Golden Town, Green Town, Iqbalabad, Khoso Goth, Natha Khan Goth, Punjab Town, Raita Plot, and Shah Faisal Colony)*, have been chosen as the universe for the investigation. Child abuse is a cultural part and norm in Pakistan. The results of this study show that desperation, unemployment, poverty, high inflation rate, lack of money, lack of basic necessities of life, limited income of the head of the family, intergenerational transmission of aggression and violent behavior, social and Communal tension, social isolation, family structure etc. are the main causes of child abuse in Pakistan.

**Keyword:** child abuse, poverty, Neglect, sex, stress, discrimination

## Introduction

Children are the future and essence of society. Children symbolize the opportunity of development, novelty and optimistic change. They shape the world in the future. Children build on the foundations lay by previous generations, and can create a happier, more sympathetic future. Their blamelessness, curiosity, and boundless potential remind us to capitalize in their welfare, education, and caution. When we endorse children's privileges, provide them with excellence education, confirm their care & security, and cultivate their aptitudes and ambitions, we protected their forthcoming and create a just, affluent and encourage the development of a just society.

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Recognizing the importance of children is a salutation of our communal obligation to cover the way for a healthier world in which every child can embellishment and participate completely to the improvement of humanity. There is no consensus on the definition of child abuse. On many occasions there is great ambiguity in its definition. There are three terms (physical, verbal, and emotional) commonly used interchangeably for abuse. In 1999, WHO held a discussion on prevention and protection of child abuse and defined the following definition of child abuse.

*“Child abuse constitutes all forms of physical and or emotional ill treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship or responsibilities, trust or power”* (World Health Organization, 1999).

Child abuse can be committed by anyone such as parents, siblings, friends, classmates, relatives, domestic workers, employers, teachers, neighbors, colleagues etc., or at schools, colleges, universities, workplaces, war, or during famine etc. (S.C. Boos, 2014). Abuse has a major impact on a child's psychological personality. No society can deny its spread and negative aftershocks. Abuse is not affected by region, race, country, religion, or gender. It is found in all socioeconomic classes (Ami Rokach & Shauna Clayton, 2023). Most caregivers of affected children in developing countries do not officially report cases of abuse due to respect for the family and the cultural values of the society because traditionally everywhere the abused child's respect, social status, and position (at home, school, and in relatives). Harmful events such as violence, abuse, harassment, abuse, maltreatment, and cruel behavior of society and people have significant and long-lasting effects on children's personality development (Iqra Mushtaque, 2023). Children can experience many long-term psychological (Improved fear, fault, shame, panic, self-blame, guilt, confusion, Mental Health Disorders (MHD) such as nervousness, behavioral problems, attachment, post-traumatic symptoms, anxiety, aggressive attitude, gloominess, sadness, depressive disorders, helplessness, Poor self-esteem, Suicidal thoughts, mental illness, Physical developmental delay, physical ailments) and social (Inferiority, Mistrust of adults or difficulty developing associations with others, Self- destructive attitude, substance abuse, feelings of isolation, social anxiety, the feeling of stigma, divorce, eating disorders, negative attributions, personality disorders, learning difficulties, including poor language and cognitive development, enduring bodily injury or death, abusive, destructive or criminal attitudes or other behavioral issues, drug and alcohol abuse, high-risk sexual attitudes, sexual problems as consequences of abuse (Alexander, P. C., 2011). Abusive attitudes towards children are a major global public health confront that includes a variety of forms of abuse and neglect. It is a significant risk factor for serious children psychosocial outcomes. The consequences of child abuse vary widely. Shortage of knowledge of serious lifelong results has hold back prevention policies and programs. Psycho-social disorders in abused children such as major depression, anxiety disorder, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), substance abuse,

personality disorder, less-self-confidence, shyness, fear, self-blame, etc. can lead to problems more likely (Safia Niazi et al., 2022). A large body of research indicates that children exposed to childhood abuse have profound negative psycho-social effects because many victims of child abuse are not fully perfect and confident regarding their psycho-mental health (Cigdem, 2019). On the other hand, it is important to note that not all child abuse sufferers experience mental health and adjustment problems in adulthood (Cashmore & Shackel, 2013). Furthermore, Victims of CA may exhibit a variety of symptoms both after the abuse occurred and over the years. Not only does the child go through physical trauma and pain, but the psychological, logical and emotional pain causes long-term damage to the victims (Yu Jin., 2023). Children with child abuse have difficulty discussing complex topics due to latent stress and are unable to articulate most things due to fear and anxiety with their caretakers (Olson., 2021). Child abuse sufferers are sensitive to the reactions of others. The dynamics and nature of child abuse are extremely difficult to disclose to children because children do not understand the dynamics of abuse (McKay., 2021).

There is no official data on any type of child abuse in Pakistan. There is no government agency that can calculate or predict the number of children affected by child abuse and its adverse psychological effects on children. An unofficial report revealed that around 15 to 25percent of children in Pakistan are victims of sexual abuse (Akash., 2023). In economic hub of Pakistan (Karachi) approximately 88.7percent of children are the victim of different types of physical abuse, while in Islamabad and Rawalpindi the percentage of victimized children of abuse is about 17percent of 300 schools (1 out of 5 boys & 1 out of 7 girls). It is also unveiled that the 72percent of the victims were under the age of 13. A study has found that 80percent of children are abused by their close acquaintances. About 20,000-40,000 children in Pakistan engage in prostitution because of their very low socioeconomic status, family conflicts, frustrations, and sexual abuse by acquaintances, or unstable psycho-social mental health (Aisha Mehnaz., 2018). The most common type of CA is commercial sexual exploitation of children in Pakistan (S. Khan., 2023). Underreporting of CA cases leads to underestimation of its prevalence and the negative impact it has on the lives of its victims. CA is most likely to hinder the personality development of the victim. About 3,445 cases of CA were reported in national and local newspapers from Pakistan in 2017, including more than 1,000 cases of rape and adultery (Haider Ali., 2018). The same author has also pointed out that there has been a 9% increase in murders after sexual assault. Incidents of sexual abuse receive more attention, while incidents of minor abuse are easily suppressed due to stigma. Child abuse is associated with loss of dignity and respect in Pakistani society. There are detrimental effects on the victim's social identity, social life and psychological well-being. There has been little research on CA from a psychosocial perspective in Pakistan emphasizing the need to spread awareness about its existence and effects (Adil., 2017).

Therefore, the present research analysis the effects of both psychological and social forms of child abuse. Based on the above introduction and stated aims and objectives, the following hypotheses were proposed. 1) Child mal-treatment impacts child's personality of both girls and boys, socially and psychologically, 2) child abuse is a cause of depressive and aggressive social entity which

people relieve through exploitation of a child, and 3) a large number of young girls and boys of age up to 18 faces abusive behavior severely or mildly by the most trusted person or strangers either at home or at any other place. This research includes incidents of child abuse in different areas of Karachi. The present research study is designed to analyses the psycho-social impact of child abuse.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Much has been said and written about child abuse globally. Child abuse is not an only a single entity, but an expression that used to mention a variety of events by supervisors, ranging from volatile aggression to overly punitive discipline or reckless neglect (World Health Organization., 2022). The literature highlights that child abuse has been in practice for a long time but it is estimated that its incidence, frequency, and intensity augmented with the arrival of the Industrial Revolution (Greeley., 2022). Various forms of abuse such as beatings, infanticide, mutilation, abandonment and other forms of abuse against children are also reported from ancient civilizations (Kingsley et al., 2014). Furthermore, the historical record is replete with reports of malnourished, emaciated and malnourished children who were neglected by their families and became targets of social abuse. It is only recently that the frequency and incidence of child abuse (Devender et al., 2023) in families in the Western world has been appreciated because child abuse is one of the most common, serious and critical psycho-social issue in today's world. Every day, numerous boys and girls are enduring various forms of abuse that destroy the entire personality of them. Though a lot of children are not subjected to various forms of physical or sexual abuse, they are still victims of psycho-social violence. Abusive behavior with children is globally classified as a community health, human rights and social problem with momentous consequences (G.S.VENUMADHAVA, 20017). Child abuse is an important issue that has been around for decades and is a cause of unease even in the present day. The World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have revealed that an average of four out of five children between the ages of 2-14 experience some form of (aggressive punishment) abuse in their homes (Mayra et al., 2023). Global, rates of abuse against children are statistically far above the ground. It is estimated that 1 billion children between the ages of 2-17 are victims of any form of abuse annually (Hillis et al., 2017). Similarly, recent statistics from the World Health Organization (WHO) (2020) indicate that one in two children between the age's bracket of 2 and 17 experience some form of abuse (WHO, 2020). CA is a witness free crime. Apparently the perpetrator hides the sign of abuse, and victim (child) afraid from the perpetrator because usually the victim (child) is completely dependent on the perpetrator. Investigation, examination, analysis and treatment of the (child) victim are very difficult because the symptoms of abuse are not visible due to "witness-free crime"(Akash et al., 2023). In all societies, the responsibility of raising children rests with the society and the family. The family is responsible to provide food, shelter, and clothes, while society creates the circumstances to secure the child in every aspect including abuse. That's why, children live with their caretakers at their families, and trust them, whereas society expects families to best raise and nurture children and keep them safe at every step of life and children will grow up into adulthood

with honor and responsibility. It is an interesting fact that in the past era, people give preference to live in joint family system, and this system had very deep rooted (Frances Gardner et al., 2023). Children grew up under the supervision of many elders. Therefore, the ratio of child abuse was very low, but due to industrial revolution, economic thirst, luxuries life, and poverty people moved from rural to urban and joint family system to nuclear family system. This is the reason why the current social system (nuclear family system and economic thirst) fails to nurture children without suffering any form of abuse. According to UNICEF (2009) children in every society are exposed to abuse which they bear the psycho-social effects of throughout their lives (Abdulla Saeed Al-Mohannadi., 2020). Child abuse is a traumatic experience with potentially lasting effects on children's psychosocial behaviors. The types of violence against children prevalent in western countries range from sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and emotional abuse, while Sub-Saharan African countries used child labor, physical abuse, and sexual abuse frequently with their children (National Children's Alliance., 2023). This, unluckily, is also an ordinary practice in America. It is estimated that more than 600,000 children in the America experience some form of abuse per annum. In 2021, 600,000 children were victims of unique incidents of abuse. The real number of potentially abused children in 2021 is likely to be underestimated due to the on-going COVID-19 pandemic (Badoe, E., 2017). Ghana (Sub Saharan country of Africa) ranks with countries with a recent history of armed violence (Sierra Leone and Congo) due to its high incidence of sexual abuse with children (Baidoo J. R., 2014). In South Africa, 15-17 year olds children have a lifetime prevalence of 34percent physical abuse, 16percent emotional abuse, and 20percent sexual abuse (Martin, E. K., & Silverstone, P. H., 2013). In Mali, Ghana, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Benin, the incidence of child trafficking is increasing rapidly, which has a direct impact on the psychological and social lives of children. Children are becoming victims of suicide due to this act of abuse. In Nigeria, Togo, Cote d'Ivoire and The Gambia children are pressurize for exploitative labor, which is a type of child abuse, and this activity put the long-lasting effects on psycho-social health of children. Children are the weak and dependent segment of the society. They are not able to speak out for their rights so they silently bear all the types of abuse that they are face but the effects of all types of abuse are for the rest of their lives. An official survey of India unveiled that about 53percent of the children are victimized of any form of abuse annually. The number of abused children has increased steadily in the last decade. Officially 8804 cases of child abuse were reported in 2014 and in 2015 the numbers of child abuse cases were approximately 14930. The results of a research of Kerala (city of India) revealed that 35percent boys and 36percent girls less than eighteen years were sexually abused. Children aged 5-12 years were most likely to be abused due to their physical and mental immaturity (Paul., 2021). Different forms of abuse have a momentous impact on a child's psycho and social personality development. Children's psychological and social health deteriorates due to child abuse, exploitation; abuse and neglect lead to children thinking about dying. Abused child want to commit suicide. Death from HIV/AIDS disease, learning issues, displacement, , homelessness and poor parenting skills in later life, sexually transmitted diseases (STD's), mental health problems, physical and psychological

injuries etc., all these negativity is develop due to abuse among the child (Agathis, N.T et al. (2023).

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Study Design**

The researcher gathered data from 200 respondents from January 15, 2019 to January 15, 2020 to create rationality, validity, and correctness in the results.

### **Survey Instrument**

An in-depth written study of key subjects and rules was conducted to plan the assessment tool. The researcher had prepared a questionnaire with 102 questions. The questionnaire had five sections. The first part consisted of collecting the demographic profile of the respondents (age, income, race, religion, literacy level, social class, mother tongue, etc.). The second part focused on provoking the respondents regarding whether they faced any type of abuse at any time in their lives. In the third part of the questionnaire, the researcher emphasized collecting information about the psychosocial effects of child abuse. The fourth part of the questionnaire highlighted the facilities, policies, laws against perpetrators, and punishments of abuses, provided by the government to the victimized children of abuse. The last part of the questionnaire concentrated on the suggestions, opinions, and future plans of the respondents.

### **Data Analysis**

After gathering the raw facts and figures, the researcher used simple frequency distribution tables and percentages to scrutinize the data using the chi-square technique.

### **Purpose of the Research**

The primary objective of this quantitative research study was to investigate the psychosocial effects of child abuse

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Child abuse is the intentional, non-accidental injury by parents, caregivers, employees, or others that results in short-term or long-term harm to a child's physical, psychological, or mental development, disability, or death. A malfunction may occur. The present study was an attempt to explore the psychosocial consequences of child abuse. Research has shown that all forms of child abuse have profound negative effects on social and psychological health. In more specific terms, studies have revealed that socially abused and psychologically abused children have lower self-confidence, higher rates of hopelessness, and higher rates of worry than non-abused children. The present study thus reinforces the findings of previous researchers. This further clarifies, supports and reinforces Bowlby's (1969, 1973, and 1989) theoretical claims that protected attachment is an essential resource for psychological health and that its lack results in psychological difficulties in children.

**Table 1: Effects of abuse on children's personality**

<b>Effects of abuse on children's personality</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Lack of self-esteem	63	31.5%
Hate gathering	5	2.5%
Want to live alone in their room	7	3.5%
Aggressive	68	34%
Feel fear out of home	57	28.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

34percent of respondents reported that they were aggressive after the incident of the abusiveness, whereas 31.5percent of respondents said that they felt a lack of self-esteem in their personality after that incident, while 28.5percent of respondents explain that 28.5percent of respondents explained that they did not want to go out of their homes because they were afraid to go out, and 3.5percent of respondents mention that they wanted to live alone in their rooms because they were afraid of everyone, even their family members. Only 2.5percent of respondents reported that they were hated gatherings because they believed that gatherings were a major cause of abuse. Kingsley (2014) also supports in their article that psycho-social effects decline the self-esteem, abused children hated gatherings, preference to live alone, aggressive attitudes, and feel fear out-side the home as compared to non-abused children. He also argued that previous studies have shown, child abuse typically results in low self-esteem and negative self-concepts in children. According to (Chang et al., 2008) maltreatment causes children to develop distorted self-concepts, disturbed socialization with peers, difficulty trusting others, low self-esteem, and decreased effectiveness in understanding complex roles. Furthermore, Erickson & Egeland (1987) highlighted that abuse is inherently related to lack of support and nurturing which directly affects the child's personality.

**Table 2: Child abuse a cause of depression and aggressive social existence that people overcome through child abuse**

<b>child abuse a cause of depression and aggressive social existence that people overcome through child abuse</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	188	94%
No	12	6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

Society is the foundation of everything. It determines various ways of an individual's life, like where we grow up, how we are affected, whom we encounter, what we do, and How we involvement in life. Every society is diverse from another. There are many civilized and uncivilized societies in the world. Hunter-gatherer, pastoral, horticultural, agricultural and feudal systems are the some types of pre-industrial societies of the world. If the society provides resources and opportunities to every member of the society, no one will try to get their happiness and peace through criminal activities. But if there is an imbalance in resources and opportunities, people will try to adopt unethical attitudes and behaviors. Results of the study support this above mentioned text because 94percent of the respondents stated that child abuse is a cause of depression and aggressive social existence that people overcome through child abuse, while only 6percent of the target population stated that child abuse is not the cause of depression and aggressive social existence that people overcome through child abuse, but some people are naturally comfortable with child abuse.

**Table 3: A large number of children up to the age of 18 experience severe or mild abuse at home or elsewhere by a highly trusted person or by strangers**

<b>A large number of children up to the age of 18 experience severe or mild abuse at home or elsewhere by a highly trusted person or by strangers</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	198	99%
No	2	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100%</b>

99percent of the respondents disclosed that A large number of children up to the age of 18 experience severe or mild abuse at home or elsewhere by a highly trusted person or by strangers, while only 1percent of the respondents revealed that a large number of children do not experience severe or mild abuse at home or elsewhere by a highly trusted person or strangers until the age of 18. This finding confirms an earlier finding by the United Nations (2022) that children under the age of 18 are abused. This includes all forms of physical and emotional abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, negligence, and commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development, or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power.

## CONCLUSIONS

The analytical study on the psycho-social effects of child abuse provides valuable insights into the profound and lasting impact that such maltreatment can have on the well-being of individuals. This comprehensive examination has illuminated the intricate interplay between the psychological and



social dimensions of child abuse, emphasizing the need for a holistic approach to addressing its consequences. One of the key findings of the study is the pervasive nature of the psycho-social effects of child abuse across the lifespan. The trauma experienced during childhood can manifest in various ways, influencing mental health, interpersonal relationships, and overall life satisfaction. The long-term repercussions underscore the urgency of effective intervention strategies to mitigate the negative outcomes associated with child abuse. The study has also shed light on the intricate connections between child abuse and mental health outcomes. Individuals who have experienced abuse during their formative years often exhibit heightened vulnerability to mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Understanding these linkages is crucial for developing targeted therapeutic interventions that address the unique needs of survivors. Furthermore, the socio-economic ramifications of child abuse have been explored, revealing a concerning cycle of adversity that can perpetuate across generations. Children who experience abuse are more likely to face challenges in education, employment, and overall socio-economic status, contributing to a cycle of poverty and disenfranchisement. Breaking this cycle requires not only addressing the immediate effects of abuse but also implementing preventive measures and support systems to break the intergenerational transmission of trauma. The study highlights the importance of a multi-disciplinary approach to tackling the psycho-social effects of child abuse. Collaboration between mental health professionals, social workers, educators, and policymakers is essential to develop comprehensive strategies that encompass prevention, intervention, and support for survivors. Integrating trauma-informed care into various systems, such as healthcare, education, and social services, is crucial for creating a supportive environment that recognizes and responds to the unique needs of individuals who have experienced abuse. In conclusion, the analytical study underscores the imperative for a nuanced and compassionate understanding of the psycho-social effects of child abuse. It is not merely a singular event but a complex and enduring challenge that demand a multifaceted response. By addressing the psychological and social dimensions concurrently, society can work towards breaking the cycle of abuse, fostering resilience, and promoting the well-being of those who have experienced this profound adversity. The findings of this study provide a foundation for informed policies, interventions, and advocacy efforts aimed at creating a safer and more nurturing environment for all children.

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