

# The Role Of Education And Awareness In Combating Child Sexual Abuse: Cultural And Social Challenges In Pakistan

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## Abstract

*Cultural influences and a lack of awareness exacerbate the problem of child sexual abuse in Pakistan. The study highlights the interplay between cultural dynamics, gender issues, and social stigma. The chi-square and tau-b tests were used to determine the strength, level, and direction of association among variables. We collected the data from 264 respondents using <sup>1</sup>a simple random sampling procedure. Analysis of the logistic regression model revealed that the model was statistically significant according to the results of the omnibus test ( $\chi^2 = 25.204$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). Furthermore, the logistic regression model indicated that a change in parental marital status, such as a divorce, increased the likelihood of having cultural attitudes related to CSA by almost two times ( $EXP(B) = 1.965$ ). The findings revealed a positive ( $Tau-b = 0.070$ ) and nonsignificant ( $P = 0.161$ ) association between divorce rates and knowledge of CSA. The results revealed a highly significant and positive association between the independent variable, i.e., awareness of CSA, and cultural attitudes toward CSA. The study found a significant and positive association between knowledge of child sexual abuse (CSA) and religious factors that contribute to the social stigma surrounding it. The study concludes specific cultural practices and beliefs that increase the risk of child sexual abuse. We recommend culturally profound meditation and policies to raise stakeholder awareness and safeguard vulnerable children.*

**Keywords:** Cultural influence, Child Sexual abuse, Taboo, Stigma, Awareness.

## Introduction

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is a form of child abuse that involves the exploitation of a child for sexual satisfaction in multiple ways. The range of exposure ranges from inadequate exposure or touching to rape and sodomy. Therefore, the effect of the incident on the victim also varies

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depending on the nature of the incident, including the severity of the abuse, the situation, and the preexisting conditions of the child's life. There are a variety of factors that can lead to CSA, including parental unawareness, cultural barriers, a lack of deterrent measures, a child's relationship with an offender, and a range of circumstances that are likely to increase a child's vulnerability. Awareness and research on this topic started in Western countries almost three decades ago with the conceptualization of sexual abuse and suggested models (Meinck et al., 2023). Child sexual abuse is a hidden but very stressful problem in every civilized society. Similarly, a study on violence against children worldwide revealed that an estimated 150 million girls and 73 million boys have experienced sexual abuse (United Nations, 2006, p. 65). A report highlighted that in Pakistan, the situation of child sexual abuse is very frightening because it is less recognized and less common, as people are reluctant to disclose the details of this problem. Despite its presence in Pakistani society since 1947, the country's national independence has improved, and people still view it as a taboo subject and consider discussing sexuality immoral (Avais et al., 2020). A thorough review of the literature reveals that in 2017, the Pakistani government released a census report revealing that nearly 80 million people, or nearly 39% of the population, are under the age of 18. (Murtaza & Manj, 2022).

### **Perspective on violence against children: understanding Drivers and contexts**

Even though VAC is now a well-known worldwide issue, there is more potential for improvement at the national level. The governments of the countries where we conducted the study served as our anchors, particularly the Ministries in responsibility of the welfare and well-being of children. This made sense from the perspective of a study on the causes of violence since efforts to identify and modify the institutional and structural elements that may be protecting people from violence or encouraging it are more likely to succeed within these spheres of influence. Following data conversations, teams from all over the world came to the conclusion that although the risk factors that children face in their homes, schools, and communities are concerning, they cannot be comprehended in a vacuum without taking into account a kid's social ecology—that is, how the child interacts with and functions in various situations. Applying a national perspective to the data and evidence that already existed was a potent tool that produced national interpretations of how risk and protective factors are, in reality, frequently closely linked to institutional and structural factors, and in some cases, causally related to them – factors that we collectively referred to as the drivers of violence. One factor contributing to violence, for instance, is gender inequality in all four of the country settings. Gender inequality appears to be a factor that most directly influences men's and women's social roles, which are frequently reinforced by institutions and laws within a specific community. Gender norms, which are unique to each national context, are present at the community, interpersonal, and occasionally individual levels, where they are identified as risk factors. Boys and girls observe and experience these differences and expectations, and, over time, these practices contribute to the power and resource imbalances that frequently determine the treatment of men and women in their communities and households. In this manner, gender inequality, which serves as a catalyst for violence, has a significant impact on interactions at the community, interpersonal, and individual levels. (Dao, 2012; Rojas, V, 2011; & Fortson et al., 2016).

### **Securing Children's Rights and Combating Sexual Abuse in Pakistan: A Complex Task**

However, the socioeconomic and political situation in Pakistan has always presented great hurdles for the implementation of the constitutional rights of children (Ahmad et al., 2018). From a financial perspective, Pakistan has not capitalized on its children's needs. The Pakistani

government's development planning processes do not allow for child-specific planning. As a result, child-specific programs suffer from several problems in execution and implementation. An analysis of budgetary allocations shows that the total allocation for child-specific programs has persisted at approximately 190,813 million Pakistan rupees, that is, 0.74 percent of the total public expenditure of the Federal Government in 2013–2014, which is the latest available analysis of child-related budgeting commissioned by a Pakistani NGO network, Child Rights Movement, with financial support from Save the Children. According to this analysis, as of 2013–2014, among different federal units, Punjab had 31,120 million Pakistani rupees in child-specific programmes, whereas the corresponding allocations in Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), and Baluchistan were 101,654, 10,876 and 14,444 million Pakistani rupees, respectively. (Steven et al., 2023).

Research reveals that historical and cultural factors have shaped the concept of "child sexual abuse" in Pakistan. It has only recently gained public recognition as a form of child abuse. CSA is complex and emotional, often leading to conflicts for victims and survivors, affecting them and their communities. The definition of a child aligns with the age of consent. International laws, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, clearly define a child's age as up to 18 years. Discrepancies in the definition of a child's age responsibility have a direct impact on the synchronization of laws and social interventions (Holt et al., 2023). The NGO 'SAHIL' reports that more than 2000 children, both female and male, experience sexual abuse in Pakistan annually (Imdad, 2019). Pakistan is the land of pure people, but purity disappears when we see a series of cases of child sexual abuse, from Kainat Somroo in 2007 to Zainab Ansari in 2018. Incidents such as abduction, rape, and brutal killings of children in Pakistan are a matter of great concern for everyone inside and outside the country. On the one hand, it is establishing a sense of insecurity and uncertainty in the minds of people, especially the young generation, and on the other hand, the failure to stop this evil from rising at a high rate is putting a question mark on the performance of state institutions before citizens and the international community. It is time to ensure that every child can awaken from a smile and that all parents can sleep with a satisfied mind. We cannot allow innocent children to fall into the hands of monsters, nor can we tolerate any form of victimization (Khushhal et al., 2017). A series of studies highlights that Pakistan is a developing country located in South Asia. Islam is a very solid faith in Asia, and religiously biased countries protect children (Hutchinson et al., 2015). Another study reported that developing countries globally have trouble implementing effective social policies and social work interventions for child protection, notwithstanding their desire to protect children (O'Leary and Squire, 2012).

Pakistan as compare to other Asian countries like Indonesia, a mostly Muslim country in Asia, state that they will protect children against CSA; however, in the country, there is partial knowledge of CSA, poverty as a risk factor for CSA, taboos about addressing CSA, a lack of focus on CSA occurring within the family, and limited prevention and intervention programs (Wismayanti et al., 2019). An orientation toward institutional care in Indonesia prevents social workers from providing child protection to families and children in the community (O'Leary et al., 2019). However, in mainland China, there is underreporting of CSA and a less than adequate child protection system (Xie et al., 2017). There are criminal sanctions against CSA, but the punishments for perpetrators in China are less severe than those in other regions, and there are no special units available for investigating CSA and protecting victims after abuse has occurred (Xie et al., 2017). Pakistan, a developing Muslim country, faces similar challenges in addressing CSA and providing adequate child protection through effective social work practices and social policies.

### **Sexual Violence Against Children: Addressing Vulnerability and Legal Gaps in Diverse Contexts**

Sexual violence can occur at home, school, roads, bush paths, religious institutions, or community, and can be committed by various individuals including parents, guardians, neighbors, friends, and strangers. (World Health Organization, 2020). Disadvantaged children, such as children living on the streets, disabled children, and orphans, tend to be more vulnerable in the community (Palermo et al., 2014). The risk of sexual violence surges in emergency contexts; during the pandemic period, armed conflict, natural disasters, and other humanitarian emergencies made women and children vulnerable to sexual violence (The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, 2020). Across the lifespan, only 13.8% of females and 15.1% of males reported sexual violence by a stranger, while most victims of sexual violence knew their perpetrators (Black et al., 2011). The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), the Ministry of Interior, and UNICEF specifically conducted a study to analyze implementation gaps in child-related protection laws in Pakistan, and they found that the current laws do not guarantee full defense of the child. Either the laws are insufficient, or their application is imprecise (Vissing, 2023). Research shows police lack understanding of child rights and protection issues. NGO Rozan offers training on violence against women and children, human rights, gender issues, and child safety. Provincial governments also offer limited training, often for police in provincial capitals. (Arshad et al., 2023). Future studies must explore the impact of racial and cultural identity on disclosure rates, as there is currently no or very limited research on this topic. Adding diversity variables to male CSA research results would definitely make them more useful for other people. This is especially true since most of the related research has focused on men's later-life outcomes and has used samples that are not very diverse in terms of racial and cultural identity, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status (Alaggia & Millington, 2008; Easton et al., 2014; Easton et al., 2017; Kia-Keating et al., 2010).

### **Research Objectives**

1. To investigate the role of formal education, media and community awareness in increasing knowledge to reduces the risk of CSA.
2. To find association between cultural factors such as stigma, taboo, poverty, male domination, woman empowerment and power dynamic, with awareness of child sexual abuse.
3. To assess the impact of cultural awareness on attitudes towards child sexual abuse.
4. To identify culturally embedded practice and dynamics that exacerbate the risk of CSA.
5. To analyze the influence of marital status, family structure and Awareness of CSA with cultural attitudes by logistic regression method.

### **Research Methodology**

#### **Study design**

This study focuses on the influence of cultural factors and social challenges on vulnerable children to child sexual abuse (CSA) in Islamabad, Pakistan. The research was conducted using the positivist paradigm and quantitative method, with Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) as the measure of reliability.

#### **Sampling technique**

The study used multistage sampling to select three sectors (F8, G8, and G10) and one union council (Chak Shahzad) to examine the prevalence of CSA in these areas. The respondents

completed a structured questionnaire to provide quantitative data, which contained demographic information about the respondents and different questions about cultural factors, and awareness. A self-administered questionnaire was used as a data collection tool and closed-ended questionnaires were used to collect specific, quantitative data.

### **Participants**

Stakeholders were selected as research participants, with a total of 264 stakeholders chosen from the targeted areas. These stakeholders include social workers, educators, trainers, health care provider, and law enforcement officials, all of whom play key roles in addressing child sexual abuse (CSA).

### **Data Analysis and collection methods**

The data were collected and statistically analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), focusing on demographic variables and chi-square, univariate, and bivariate analyses to determine the perceptions of respondents regarding factors related to CSA. Univariate analysis used percentages of various data categories to make the data comparable. Bivariate analysis involved indexed and cross-tabulated the dependent variable (cultural factors responsible for child sexual abuse) with the independent variables. The frequency distributions and percentages obtained from the cross tabulations were given across the independent variables and compared with respect to the dependent variables. Logistic regression was used to analyze the relationship between one or more independent variables (predictors) and a binary outcome variable (response). The logistic regression model proposed by Karen (2001) was used to measure the variables on two item scales, i.e., 0 and 1. The variables were measured as per the following: Marital Status (unmarried 0 and 1 married), Family types (nuclear family 0, and 1 joint family), and Awareness of Child Sexual Abuse (less awareness 0, and more awareness 1)

### **Ethical approval**

Researchers in social sciences have an ethical obligation to their colleagues, study population, and society. It is crucial to consider ethical issues from the beginning of a research project to preserve the dignity and humanity of respondents (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2009 & Oliver, 2010). Ethical approval was obtained from the Hazara university Mansehra department of sociology (F.NO: HU/Soc/2023/98), and the Institutional Review Board has granted permission to conduct the research study titled “Empowering Protection: The Vital Role of Education and Awareness in Combating Child Sexual Abuse Amidst Cultural and Social Challenges in Pakistan”.

### **Results**

The conceptual framework for this study was designed while considering the rights-based model promulgated by the Christian Blind Mission and Care International. It comprises three independent variables (awareness, marital status, and family type) one dependent variable (cultural factor) and three background variables (residences, age and education).

### **The Critical Role of Education and Awareness in Preventing Child Sexual Abuse**

The significance of children's education is demonstrated in Table 2. It is imperative to comprehend the critical role of parents in providing comprehensive sexuality education (CSE)

to their children, which is essential for the protection of sexual abuse and the development of self-esteem. As stated by most respondents, 98.5 percent consider that education is essential for children to safeguard themselves from sexual abuse and that they are aware of sexual abuse. Conversely, only 1.5 percent of individuals dispute this assertion. Child sexual exploitation is a severe issue that necessitates immediate attention. 95.5 percent of the 264 respondents state that the issue was severe, while only 4.2 percent disagreed with this assertion. Most respondents reported that child sexual abuse is presently on the rise in society. Only 33 percent of respondents said that there was sufficient awareness regarding child sexual abuse in our community, while the majority, 67.0 percent, said that there was no awareness regarding child sexual abuse in our community. The prevalence of child abuse in our society is exacerbated by the lack of awareness among our children regarding sexual abuse. Many respondents, 68.2 percent, have not received any formal education, while only 31.8 percent have.

Numerous organizations are engaged in the enhancement of formal education in our society and the provision of appropriate training to prevent child sexual abuse. Of the 264 respondents, 53.4 percent are aware of the signs and symptoms that may indicate sexual assault in children's. A total of 46.6 percent were unaware of any indicators or symptoms that could indicate that a child was experiencing sexual abuse. Out of a total of 264 respondents, 42.8 percent have either participated in or worked to prevent child sexual abuse. The majority, 57.2 percent, did not engage in the prevention of child sexual assault. Additionally, the table indicates that many 56.4 percent is aware with the legal framework and regulations that are in place to safeguard children from sexual assault. This statement was unfamiliar to a total of 43.6 percent of the respondents. Of the respondents, only 44.3 percent engaged in discussions with their children regarding the issue of child sexual abuse. Nevertheless, most respondents, 55.7 percent, have not discussed the issue of child sexual abuse, which is a contributing factor to the increasing number of victimized children in our community. The subject of child sexual abuse is of paramount importance, as parents are obligated to provide their children with both positive and negative contact. Table 2 indicates that 91.3 percent of the respondents said that the media played a more significant role in raising awareness about child sexual abuse. Only 8.7 percent of respondents denied the assertion.

### **Child Sexual Abuse Risk Factors: The Role of Cultural factors, Stigmas, Gender Dynamics, power structure and Divorce**

Child sexual violence against children is a critical issue that is often exacerbated by systemic vulnerability and legal gaps, transcending cultural and geographical boundaries. In numerous communities, the prevalence and response measure are impeded by the deep-seated stigma and silence surrounding this subject. According to Table 3, the divorce rate has the potential to elevate the likelihood of child sexual abuse, as indicated by most respondent's 73.5 percent, while 26.5 percent of respondents rejected this statement. Many respondent's 61.0 percent said that male dominance in society can lead to an increase in child sexual abuse, while 39.0 percent denied this assertion. A total of 62.5 percent of respondents said that the risk of child sexual abuse can be intensified by a lack of women's empowerment in society, while 37.5 percent of respondents rejected this assertion. Most respondent's 73.1 percent agreed with the statement that cultural factors contribute to the stigma of child sexual abuse, while 26.9 percent denied it. The social taboo surrounding child sexual abuse is attributable to cultural beliefs, according to a total of 70.8 percent of the respondents, while 29.2 percent of the respondents negated this statement. Additionally, 43.6 percent of the respondents reported that child sexual abuse was exclusively a concern for impoverished families, while many 56.4 percent were opposed to this assertion. Additionally, 68.6 percent of the respondents said that cultural hierarchies and power

structures contribute to the increased risk of child sexual abuse, while 31.4 percent rejected this assertion.

Additionally, Table 3 indicates that 63.3 percent of respondents said that cultural barriers could elevate the likelihood of child sexual abuse, while 36.7 percent of respondents rejected this assertion. The statement that cultural factors create shame about child sexual abuse was denied by 26.9 percent of the respondents, while 73.1 percent reported that this was the cause. Table 3 indicates that 53.4 percent of respondents contend that religious factors create the social censure of child sexual abuse, while 46.6 percent deny this assertion. Addressing CSA in Pakistan is impeded by legal, family, state, religious, and sexual/gender barriers. Pakistan maintains the rights of children from a legal perspective; however, it fails to allocate the requisite funds for human development. Pakistan is a patriarchal and religious society that is characterized by gender inequality, which serves as a hindrance to the resolution of CSA. Effective interventions with CSA are also impeded by religious and cultural stigmas (Habiba et al., 2016).

### **Cultural Influences on Awareness of Child Sexual Abuse: Key Associations**

The awareness and perception of juvenile sexual exploitation are significantly influenced by cultural factors. The portrayal of children in media and local narratives can either empower or marginalize their experiences, which can affect the rates of awareness and reporting. Table 4 portrays the association between awareness and cultural factors. The table's highly significant ( $P < .001$ ) and positive (Tau-b = .258) association indicated that only poor households who were at risk of child sexual abuse were conscious of CSA. In the same vein, we discovered significant ( $P < .01$ ) and positive (Tau-b = .258) association between cultural views that contribute to the social stigma surrounding child sexual abuse and awareness of CSA. The associations between the assumption that cultural hierarchies and power structures contribute to increasing the risk of child sexual abuse and awareness of CSA were deemed significant ( $P < .05$ ) and positive (Tau-b = .116). The research demonstrated that there were highly significant ( $P < .001$ ) and positive (Tau-b = .250) association between the certainty that cultural barriers can increase the risk of child sexual abuse and awareness of CSA. We discovered that religious factors, the social stigma of child sexual abuse, and awareness of CSA are significant ( $P < .05$ ) and positively (Tau-b = .063) associated. In the same vein, a significant ( $P < .05$ ) and positive (Tau-b = .131) association was discovered between the assumption that male dominance in society can increase child sexual abuse and awareness of CSA. In addition, the study's findings indicated that there were significant ( $P < .01$ ) and positive (Tau-b = .157) association between the certainty that a lack of female empowerment in society can increase the risk of child sexual abuse and awareness of CSA. The findings indicated a positive (Tau-b = .070) and nonsignificant ( $P > .05$ ) association between divorce rates and awareness of CSA. In the same vein, the associations between the assumptions that cultural factors contribute to the stigma of child sexual abuse and awareness of child sexual abuse were determined to be positive (Tau-b = .117) and nonsignificant ( $P > .05$ ). The cultural factors that generate shame in child sexual abuse and awareness of CSA were found to have nonsignificant ( $P > .05$ ) and positive (Tau b = .063) association.

### **Logistic Regression: Influence of background and independent variables (marital status, family type, and awareness of child sexual abuse) on cultural factors and beliefs related to child sexual abuse (dependent variable)**

The variance in the dependent variable (cultural attitudes toward CSA) was significantly influenced by the independent variables of marital status, type of family, and ACSA, as illustrated in Table 5. Before indexing the items to the aforementioned variables, we conducted a Cronbach's alpha test to assess the scale's internal consistency. The variables were assessed

on a two-point scale for the presence or absence of characteristics, with values of 0 and 1, respectively.

The omnibus test results indicated that the logistic regression model was highly statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 25.204$ ,  $P < .001$ ). Consequently, the interpreter variables can differentiate between the cultural factors that are associated with CSA. The Cox & Snell R square (.091) demonstrated a robust relationship between the group variable and the prediction variable. In addition, the classification variables (Nagelkerke's and Cox & Snell R square values) exhibited a range of one to fourteen percent variations. The cultural factors of CSA were predicted by the categorization variables, as evidenced by the Wald test results for each variable. Additionally, the model demonstrated that the probability of cultural beliefs being the cause of CSA increases when the family transitions from a joint to a nuclear structure ( $\text{EXP (B)} = 3.607$ ). The results demonstrate that the social inclusion rate of victims of child sexual abuse from nuclear families is lower in the study area than that of victims from joint families, as evidenced by the minimum value of EXP B. Furthermore, the logistic regression model demonstrated that a change in the marital status of parents, such as a divorce, increased the probability of cultural factors being liable for CSA by nearly twofold ( $\text{EXP (B)} = 1.965$ ). Similarly, the probability of cultural factors being liable for child sexual abuse increased by twofold ( $\text{EXP (B)} = 2.014$ ) as awareness of CSA decreased from a high level to a low level.

The logistic regression model's equation is as follows:

$$Y = a + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + b_3X_3 + b_4X_4 + b_5X_5$$

The cultural determinants were as follows: CSA = 0.226 + 1.283 (type of family), 0.676 (marital status), and 0.700 (ACSA).

## **Discussion**

Empirical studies have shown that CSA is a global issue that affects all genders, ages, social contexts, and abilities, without any particular group or geographical location being immune to the negative impacts. The incidence of CSA has been identified in numerous continents, such as Africa, Europe, Australia, the United States, Pakistan, Canada, and Asia, as a result of subsequent research (Barth et al., 2013; Collin-Vezina et al., 2013; Finkelhor et al., 2014; Gillani, 2009; Lalor & McElvaney, 2010; Molnar et al., 2001; Pereda et al., 2009; Stoltenborgh et al., 2011). The information pertaining to the reporting of CSA cases differs from different countries. According to literature that is specific to Pakistan, the absence of reporting is pervasive, and the prevalence rates of CSA cases are likely higher than those identified through research and governmental systems (Singh et al., 2014). There is a lack of reporting and disclosure of CSA for a variety of reasons. Underreporting is influenced by a large population of children in need of supportive resources, a lack of accountability at the systems level, family systems, social norms, and the associated stigma of CSA (Carson et al., 2013). Additionally, Singh et al. (2014) observe that the absence of social awareness, training, funding, and programmatic support for the safety of children in relation to CSA invariably affects social systems that are designed to support children. High rates of under-reporting are also observed in the context of sibling maltreatment (Tener et al. 2020).

One of the primary sources of frustration is poverty, while the inability of parents to effectively fulfil their obligations is another. Deprivation results in the exchange of females, forced marriages, and juvenile marriages, which serve as an alternative compromise. Forced labour and child trafficking are considerable outcomes of this phenomenon. Because most of the population lives below the poverty line, many children in Pakistan are employed in auto



workshops or industrial zones. Consequently, the probability of child sexual exploitation is raised because the majority of parents subject their children to industrial zones. The exceedingly high rates of child labour provide an opportunity for those who exploit children. The high prevalence of deprivation in Pakistan has resulted in a significant number of individuals being unable to afford the costs of education. As a result, education is restricted, and parents place their children in labour zones to generate income. These conclusions are additionally verified by additional research. In Pakistan, child exploitation (CSA) is frequently linked to child mobility, poverty, insufficient education, a lack of legal norms, child labour, and other similarities that are also prevalent in other South Asian countries (Capaldi et al., 2024). CSA is the least-reported offence in Pakistan. This is perhaps not unexpected, given the sensitivity of the issue within most of the Pakistani society, which has often resulted in minors being prohibited from discussing abuse. Taking deliberate measures to address CSA is considered prohibited (Hyder & Malik, 2007; Taufiq Meghani et al., 2014). The families of the abused are generally apprehensive about reporting the incident for fear that they will be stigmatised for the rest of their lives, suffer discrimination, social segregation, and be chastised for the act (Hyder & Malik, 2007; Khan et al., 2014; Taufiq Meghani et al., 2014). Asian societies are collectivist in nature and prioritise the inclusion of the group's requirements over those of the individual (Harrison & Gill, 2019). Consequently, the pressure to withhold information is a result of the desire to safeguard the family from the stigma that is associated with reporting the crime (Back et al., 2003). The media in Pakistan became vocal following the murder of six-year-old Zainab in 2017. The family's decision to disclose images of her victimised body spiralled the media and public out of control. This was only resolved following the establishment of new legislation to safeguard children's and the imposition of the death penalty on the perpetrator (Cherry, 2018). In Pakistan, there has been a gradual rise in the reporting of CSA. This seems to have been the outcome of the increasing public consciousness of CSA, which is partially attributable to the punishment of offenders, the recent responsiveness of police and courts, and the ongoing media coverage (Ali, 2018; Shinwari, 2015; Shujaat & Mirza, 2015). It seems that Pakistan may have a prevalence rate of CSA that is comparable to that of other countries, such as its neighbour India, as awareness increases and disclosures are made. Regrettably, a substantial number of incidents persist in going unreported (Choudhry et al., 2018; Sahil, 2018).

The preceding statement exemplifies the complex and advantageous interdependence of cultural barriers, power structures, social taboos, and cultural hierarchies. Many Pakistani parents are hesitant to participate in discussions about sexual assault. He believes that it is a social and cultural prohibition. As a result, the abuser is able to continue to commit sexual abuse against their child, as the majority of parents opt not to report the incident. These results are in compact with Bourgaize et al. (2021), who determined that the CSA is the least reported offence in Pakistan. Given the sensitivity of the issue in the preponderance of Pakistani societies, this is not particularly noteworthy. This sensitivity has frequently led to the prohibition of children from discussing sexual abuse. Intentional measures to address CSA are deemed unlawful. Additionally, the primary causes of child sexual abuse in Pakistan are power dynamics, cultural hierarchies, and structural inequalities, which are substantial hurdles. i.e., In 2019, Kasur cases were reported; however, the families of the abuse victims chose to remain silent and refrained from initiating legal proceedings. This functions as an illustration of the structural-power dynamic. The government in Pakistan perpetrates a significant number of inequities against abused families. Kasur was the most significant child abuse scandal in the media in 2019, as per a research study. This case involved the coercion of over 280 children into producing pornography. The bereaved families were compelled to remain silent because of the apprehension of the videos becoming public and the threat of capital punishment that the individuals responsible were facing (Abid, 2019). This has resulted in an annual increase in the

reporting of CSA in Pakistan. CSA remains a largely unreported crime due to its prohibited nature and the prevalence of denial. The lack of national studies and the limited availability of localised research studies make it challenging to ascertain the true scope of the issue. The limited studies that are currently available suggest that a significant number of children who are presently living in poverty are more susceptible to CSA and sexual exploitation due to their daily living and working conditions or their presence in a detention center. The disclosure of abuse would be nearly impossible for these children, who are particularly vulnerable, as they are under the control of adults and adolescents, including their siblings. The disclosure rates of CSA are also low in other countries, and the disclosure of abuse is often delayed for many years (McElvaney, 2015). It is estimated that up to 80% of children do not disclose CSA during their childhood (Paine & Hansen, 2002). A positive association was observed between religious factors that contribute to the social stigma surrounding child sexual assault and knowledge of CSA. The findings indicate that the religious factor has a statistically significant positive t-value. Previous research has supported these findings (Habiba et al., 2016). Pakistan's constitution is predicated on Islamic laws, as it is a predominantly Muslim nation. The protection of marginalised, vulnerable, and feeble individuals should have been the outcome of the implementation of laws. Rather, we observe a subpar record in terms of child violence prevention measures and allied facilities for child protection. The Constitution specifically addresses child protection issues; however, these poor outcomes persist. For instance, Article 11 (3) prohibits the employment of minors under the age of 14 and slavery and forced labour. Currently, there is only one children's court in operation, which was established under the Punjab Destitute and Neglected Children's Act 2004 (10) in Lahore (Niaz, 2018; Shujaat & Mirza, 2015). Furthermore, there are numerous other legal provisions that have failed to safeguard children to date, such as the National Commission on the Rights of Children Bill, 2009, the Child Protection (Criminal Laws Amendment) Bill, 2009, and the Charter on the Child Rights Bill, 2009 (Niaz, 2018).

The resolve of CSA in Pakistan is impeded by legal, familial, state, religious, and sexual/gender barriers. Pakistan recognises the legal rights of child; however, it fails to allocate adequate financial resources for human development. In addition to legal constraints, Pakistan is confronted with societal stigma, masculine predominance, and gender inequality. Pakistan is distinguished by gender inequality and a patriarchal social structure. In the religious, social, and rural-urban spectrum, patriarchal subordination is pervasive. A multitude of cultural factors, including the subject matter, power structures and hierarchies within the culture, and the prospective viewpoints of neighbours and acquaintances regarding sexual assault, can influence feelings of humiliation. Religious prohibitions regarding sexuality may prevent children from disclosing information, as they endeavour to describe the situation "down there" without employing prohibited terminology. Furthermore, children are frequently not adequately informed about their bodies and acceptable sexual behaviour. When children are compelled to engage in specific behaviours, such as having artefacts perforated or engaging in sexual activity with a person of the same gender, they may experience dishonour. Offenders frequently exploit children's shame to intimidate them and threaten that they will "get in trouble" if they disclose their transgressions, which include consuming alcohol, entering a prohibited area, or posing for pornographic photographs (Simmel et al., 2023). The incidence of child maltreatment in Pakistan is on the rise because of a variety of factors. This may be inclusive of mothers who have been subjected to physical and sexual abuse, families from impoverished socioeconomic backgrounds, mothers who are oblivious of children's legislation, mothers who are stigmatised, and mothers who have experienced dishonour. For instance, any form of violence directed at mothers has traumatic repercussions for their families and offspring (Granich, et al., 2023).

In Pakistan, females are kept at home to safeguard them from intruders, which leaves them vulnerable to intrafamilial CSA, as a result of gendered discrimination and a lack of awareness about CSA. The preponderance of CSA worldwide is believed to be committed by a close family member. It appears that CSA in Pakistan is indiscriminate of class and affects all sectors of society, as is the case worldwide, based on the limited data available. The most vulnerable age group in Pakistan appears to be boys between the ages of six and fifteen. It is possible that this is due to the fact that they are able to venture outside, and in certain instances, destitution may motivate them to pursue employment, thereby increasing their susceptibility to maltreatment. The cause for the apparent increased risk among girls in Pakistan between the ages of 0–5 and 16–18 remains unclear. However, it is important to bear in mind that this information is based solely on reported cases, and CSA is at least as extensively under-reported in Pakistan as it is in other parts of the globe (Gekoski et al., 2016).

### **Conclusion**

The study highlights the importance of education and awareness in preventing child sexual abuse (CSA). Despite many respondents acknowledging the need for education, there is a significant gap in awareness and proactive engagement within communities. Factors such as lack of formal education, limited discussions within families, and cultural stigma hinder open dialogue. The study also finds the link between awareness of CSA and cultural factors like gender dynamics, cultural hierarchies, and societal taboos, indicating the need for comprehensive strategies to effect meaningful change.

### **Recommendations**

Limited research exists on child sexual abuse (CSA) in Pakistan, necessitating further investigation into its incidence and prevalence. Research on sibling maltreatment is crucial. Early implementation of CSA delivery programs in Pakistani institutions was proposed, but the optimal content remains ambiguous. The content development and implementation of these programs are analyzed, and the structure and procedures are customized to suit the unique school environment. Further research is needed to evaluate program effectiveness and conduct a systematic review of the nature of child sexual abuse and the effectiveness of school-based abuse prevention in Pakistan.

### **Key Practitioner Messages**

- To raise awareness about child sexual abuse (CSA), implement educational programs, community workshops, media collaboration, support systems for families, advocate for policy change, and involve religious and cultural institutions.
- focus on recognizing signs of abuse, understanding consent, and fostering open communication about sexual health.
- addressing the root causes of CSA and prioritizing human development and gender equality can help create a more supportive environment.

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## Tables

**Table 2: The Critical Role of Education and Awareness in Preventing Child Sexual Abuse**

Attributes Percentage	Attitudes	Frequency
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Is it important to educate children about their rights 98.5%	Yes	260
and how to protect themselves from sexual abuse? 1.5%	No	04
Is child sexual abuse is a serious problem 95.8%	Yes	253
that requires immediate attention. 4.2%	No	11
Is enough awareness about 33.0%	Yes	87
child sexual abuse your community? 67.0%	No	177
Have you received any formal education or training on 31.8%	Yes	84
how to prevent child sexual abuse? 68.2%	No	180
Are you familiar with the signs and symptoms that may 53.4%	Yes	141
indicate a child was being sexually abused? 46.6%	No	123
Are you familiar with the laws and legal measures in place 56.4%	Yes	149
to protect children from sexual abuse? 43.6%	No	115
Have you ever participated in or supported initiatives 42.8%	Yes	113
aimed at preventing child sexual abuse? 57.2%	No	151
Have you discussed the topic of child sexual abuse with 44.3%	Yes	117
your own children or the children you are responsible for? 55.7%	No	147
Is media should play a more significant 91.3%	Yes	241
role in raising awareness about child sexual abuse? 8.7%	No	23

**Table 3 Child Sexual Abuse Risk Factors**

<b>Attributes Percentage</b>	<b>Attitudes</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Is divorce rate can increase the risk of child sexual abuse? 73.5%	Yes	194
26.5%	No	70
male dominance in society may potentially increase the prevalence of children's sexual abuse. 61.0%	Yes	161
39.0%	No	103
lack of woman empowerment in society can contribute to the risk of child sexual abuse? 62.5%	Yes	165
37.%	No	99
cultural factors contribute to the stigma child sexual abuse? 73.1%	Yes	193
26.9%	No	71
Do cultural factors contribute to the social taboo surrounding child sexual abuse? 70.8%	Yes	187
29.2%	No	77
Are only poor families at risk of child sexual abuse? 43.6%	Yes	115
56.4%	No	149
cultural hierarchies and power structures contribute to increase the risk of child sexual abuse? 68.6%	Yes	181
31.4%	No	83
cultural barriers can increase the risk of child sexual abuse? 63.3%	Yes	167
36.7%	No	97
cultural factors create shame in relation to child sexual abuse? 73.1%	Yes	193
26.9%	No	71
religious factors create social stigma in child sexual abuse? 53.4%	Yes	141
46.6%	No	123

**Table 4 Cultural Influences on Awareness of Child Sexual Abuse: Key Associations**

<b>Cultural Attributes Statistics</b>	<b>Attitude</b>	<b>Awareness of CSA Total</b>	
		<b>More</b>	<b>Less</b>
		<b>Awareness</b>	<b>Awareness</b>



		CSA	CSA		
Are only poor families at risk of child sexual abuse?	Yes	87 (75.7%)	28 (24.3%)	115(100)	X2=17.546
	No	75 (50.3%)	74 (49.7%)	149 (100)	
		P<.001			Tau-b= .258
cultural factors contribute to the social taboo surrounding child sexual abuse?	Yes	125(66.8%)	62(33.2%)	187(100)	X2=
	No	37(48.1%)	40(51.9%)	77(100)	P<.05
					Tau-b= .175
cultural hierarchies and power structures contributed to increasing the risk of child sexual abuse?	Yes	118(65.2%)	63(34.8%)	181 (100)	X2=3.562
	No	44(53.0%)	39(47.0%)	83(100)	P<.05
					Tau-b=
cultural barriers can make the risk of child sexual abuse?	Yes	118(70.7%)	49(29.3%)	167(100)	X2=16.563
	No	44(45.4%)	53(54.6%)	97(100)	P<.001
					Tau-b=
religious factors create the social stigma in child sexual abuse?	Yes	95(67.4%)	46(32.6%)	141(100)	X2=4.614
	No	67(54.5%)	56(45.5%)	123(100)	P<.05
					Tau-b=
male domination in society can increase child sexual abuse?	Yes	107(66.5%)	54(33.5%)	161(100)	X2=4.520
	No	55(53.4%)	48(46.4%)	103(100)	P<.05
					Tau-b=0.131
lack of woman empowerment can contribute to	Yes	111(67.3%)	54(32.7%)	165(100)	X2=6.480

the risk of child sexual abuse?	No	51(51.5%)	48(48.5%)	99(100)P<.05
Tau-b= .157				
divorce rate can increase the risk of child sexual abuse?	Yes	123(63.4%)	71(36.6%)	194(100)
X2=1.282				
sexual abuse?	No	39(55.7%)	31(44.3%)	70(100)
P>.05				
Tau-b= .070				
cultural factors contribute to the stigma in child sexual abuse?	Yes	125(64.8%)	68(35.2%)	193(100)
X2= 4.667				
child sexual abuse?	No	37(52.9%)	33(47.1%)	70(100) P>.05
Tau-b= .117				
Do cultural factors create shame during child sexual abuse?	Yes	122(63.2%)	71(36.8%)	193(100)
X2=1.035				
sexual abuse?	No	40(56.3%)	31(43.7%)	71(100)P>.05
Tau-b= .063				

**Table 5 Influence of independent variables (marital status, family type, and awareness of child sexual abuse) on cultural factors and beliefs related to child sexual abuse (dependent variable)**

Independent Model Summary	Variables	Unstandardized Coefficient		EXP B	Wald Test	Sig Value	Omnibus Test			
		B	Std. Error	Chi-	Sig	Cox & Nagelkerke				
		R Square								
<b>Marital Status</b>		.676	.382	1.965	3.121	.047				
<b>Family Type</b>		1.283	.333	3.607	14.811	.000				
<b>Child Sexual Abuse awareness</b>		.700	.316	2.014	4.907	.027	25.204	.000	.091	.140
<b>Constant</b>		.226	.394	.798	.327	.567				