

REVIEW ARTICLE

Situational Review Of Child Sexual Abuse In A Low Income Country

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ABSTRACT:

Child sexual abuse (CSA) is an issue of global concern. CSA has been estimated to, affect 2-62% of women and 3-16% of men as victims. The variation in percentage is dependent on the definition of CSA being used. WHO has estimated that globally nearly 40 million children upto 14 years of age, suffer from various types of abuses and require medical attention and social care. This review covers the available literature on child sexual abuse (CSA) in Pakistan since 1999, using search engines Google, Pubmed, Medline and PsychINFO. Data shows that incidence of CSA has been increasing, with mostly acquaintances being the perpetrators. Based on the results recommendations are given to improve the health and well being of survivors of CSA in Pakistan. The issue requires attention by society, law enforcement, public health community, health practitioners and leadership. Poverty and illiteracy are the primary determinants of CSA.

Key words: Child abuse, Child sexual abuse, Pakistan, Health policy, Suggestions.

INTRODUCTION:

Child sexual abuse is an issue of global concern. CSA has been estimated to, affect 2-62% of women and 3-16% of men as victims¹. The variation in percentage is dependent on the definition of CSA being used¹. World health organization estimated that globally nearly 40 million children upto 14 years of age, suffer from various types of abuse and neglect and hence, require medical attention and social care². The most distressing is child sexual abuse³. In one estimate during 1993, there were approximately 300,000 children who were reported to be sexually abused in the USA⁴. However, it is interesting to note that in 2003, the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System estimated that there were 78,188 victims of sexual abuse in the U.S.⁵. This disparity in numbers could be due to the definition of CSA being used. The USDHHS numbers come to be 1.2 per 1,000 American children⁶. In UK, during 2009, one in twenty children, between 11 to 17 years (4.8%) were sexually assaulted⁷. In south east Asia, 1 million were estimated as victims of CSA. This is attributed to poverty and illiteracy, resulting in sex trade and exploitation⁸.

Pakistan's population is 160,943,000², making it the most populated country in the WHO EMRO region. According to Pakistan Social and Living Standard Measurement Survey (2004-05), estimated population growth rate is 1.92. The same survey showed that adult literacy rate is 50. Pakistan is ranked 135 on human development Index rank in 2003 out of 177 countries⁹. Patriarchal system in South Asia and family honour deters families from acknowledging and reporting Child Sexual Abuse. Even though Pakistan has a active media, yet there is a want of focused stewardship to be directed towards child protection¹⁰. The stigma associated with CSA in the

Pakistani society arises with the prevalent fear of society and family rejecting the child and not the perpetrator. This further prevents the projection of CSA and the issue remains neglected¹¹. This societal attitude deters people from acknowledging the very existence of the problem^{12,13}.

Pakistan's high population growth rate and rapid urbanization have promoted child labor, resulting in a greater number of children working and living in the slums. These children are vulnerable to all forms of abuse including sexual exploitation, school dropouts and illiteracy¹⁴. The study shows that need for basics such as food, clothing, accommodation and money compels young boys into commercial sex. Moon⁸ also argues that CSA is increasing in South Asia due to sex trade. A study done in Pakistan estimated that most boys, who were forced into prostitution, were sexually abused before they entered the commercial sex trade. Children from the Afghan refugee community are particularly vulnerable because of the extreme poverty and a lack of parental protection and supervision¹⁴. Public places such as markets, parks, shrines, cinema halls were identified as areas where these children go to find 'clients' for sex trade. Exploiters are men from all socio economic backgrounds. Poverty and illiteracy are the primary determinants of child sexual abuse.

A large number of child abuse cases go unreported in Pakistan^{15,16}. The research estimates a high "hidden" burden of child abuse based on the increased prevalence of depression and PTSD among adults coming to psychiatric clinics. The patient history of such adults revealed that as children they were exposed to CSA. Another study¹⁷ concluded that major depression in adults is an extension of child hood depression and is reported amongst 65% of abused children. Khalid¹⁶ studied 100 psychiatric patients and found that a staggering number of thirty three had a history of CSA. The same local study¹⁶ conducted in Pakistan reported that phobic anxiety disorder, recurrent depression, conversion disorder, substance dependence and obsessive compulsive disorder are common in patients who were exposed to sexual abuse as children.

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Definition of Child Sexual Abuse:

Defining Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) is a difficult issue. Criteria vary worldwide and there is no universally accepted definition available. Hence, the scope and nature of any research changes according to the definition used, for instance, in a study done by Russell, when non-contact sexual abuse was incorporated, the prevalence of sexual abuse in women abused as a child was as high as 54%. However, when non-contact sexual abuse was excluded, the prevalence estimated was reduced to 38%¹⁷.

National Clearinghouse on Family Violence (1997)¹⁸ states:

Child sexual abuse (CSA) occurs when an adult or adolescent uses a child for sexual purposes. It involves exposing a child to any sexual activity or behavior. Sexual abuse is inherently emotionally abusive and is often accompanied by other forms of mistreatment. It is a betrayal of trust and an abuse of power over the child. Pakistan and child sexual abuse:

Pakistan has ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and its two discretionary protocols, including the Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. Pakistan has adopted the Stockholm Agenda for Action to Combat Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and also committed to the Second World Congress against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in Yokohama in 2001¹⁹. Pakistan has a National Plan of Action for Children and regularly reports to the UN convention committee. The country also has a National Plan of Action against Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation. However, one concern is that Pakistan has few child safeguard laws. Moreover, another study²⁰ argues that enforcement of the existent laws is weak, as they say that the very laws that criminalize prostitution fail to decipher between adults and children. This caveat in the law implies that children who are forced into prostitution are unfortunately treated as adults as per the country's legal system and are therefore, punished rather than rehabilitated, if they are convicted. Pakistan's legal system also places the onus of guilt and responsibility on the sexually abused rather than on those who force or persuade the children into prostitution²¹.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

This study was designed to review the available literature on child abuse in Pakistan. To identify the activities of various organizations working for child abuse prevention. Finally, based on the results, give recommendations for 'best practices' to improve the health and well being of survivors of child abuse in Pakistan. The study included review of published literature and web sources, since 1999 following the incident of mass child abuse and murder in Pakistan. Public and non-government

organizations working for child abuse in Pakistan were identified with the help of the literature search, through snow ball technique. PubMed, PsycINFO, and MEDLINE were searched using key words 'CSA' and 'Child Abuse in Pakistan'. A list of these organizations was made and their activities regarding addressing child abuse were assessed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Review of literature on CSA

Most of the literature that was reviewed, described the global scenario of child sexual abuse; very little data was available on the problem of child abuse in Pakistan. After critical analysis of the relevant literature, following were the main themes that emerged.

Definition

Pakistan has no legal definition of child abuse and neglect (CAN) and professionals generally rely on the definition offered by the World Health Organization. Mandatory reporting of Child abuse does not exist in Pakistan and hence, there is a dearth of data on prevalence of child abuse^{22,23,24,25,26}.

Policy interventions/ratifications

Pakistan has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Country has signed its two optional protocols. Pakistan has adopted the South Asia Strategy, the Stockholm Declaration and Agenda for Action and the Yokohama Global Commitment against Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. Pakistan reports on a regular basis to the CRC committee and has a National Plan of action. The central organization for child rights and welfare in the country is the National Commission on Child Welfare and Development (NCCWD). Pakistan designed a childfriendly Juvenile Justice System Ordinance in 2000¹³.

Efforts for addressing child abuse menace in Pakistan

Addressing the menace of Child sexual abuse in Pakistan requires integrated efforts: (1) working together of agencies providing legal advice to the neglected and abuse children and reinforcing laws regarding child rights, (2) organizations and researchers need to work on gathering baseline data about the burden of CSA in the country and (3) interventional agencies working towards improving the situation holistically^{27,28,29,30}. So far, in Pakistan most of the identified public and private organizations have focused their efforts towards protecting and reinforcing the rights of children. Which leaves a want for authentic baseline data, a surveillance data base and hence the evaluation of the actual prevalence of CSA which would assist in determining the targeted intervention.^{31,32}

The social welfare department has a referral system for the child abuse victims. This department is working in collaboration with NGOs and is accountable for CRC execution and evaluates the existing laws and services

for children. Labor department of Sindh has inspectors' teams. The role of these teams is to visit various organizations that employ child labour and to inspect the children who are working there. They look for any kind of abuse that may be taking place. However, the mandatory preceding notice of the inspector's visit to the organization, generally leads to under reporting and hence only an estimation of actual figures of CSA within those organizations is possible.^{33,34} Some private organizations are providing free of cost, legal support in cases of child abuse at work place by providing the services of lawyers and legal aid committees. They create awareness among school children regarding their rights. Help lines have been established by Government and NGOs for immediate notification of child abuse cases. However, the burden lies in raising awareness in general public for the existence of this service. It is alleged that these organizations contributed in bringing up Juvenile Justice System Ordinance (No XXII), which was enacted on July 1, 2000. The Ordinance provides protection to the children who are caught up in criminal litigation.^{35,36}

Burden and distribution of child sexual abuse in Pakistan

In 1999, a large number of boys were found to be victims of sexual exploitation. What was even more dreadful was the murder of one hundred children in Lahore. These children belonged to low-income families. Most families when interviewed after the event alleged that they had not asked their children where they were working. They were merely grateful for the money the child was bringing home.²⁰

A three month study, published in 2001, the local newspapers of Pakistan reported 46 cases of child sexual abuse in NWFP Province. These cases included individual sexual assaults, gang rapes, incest and exposure of children to pornographic materials.²¹ It is a criminal offence under the Pakistan Penal Code of 1860 to 'exploit a girl under the age of 18 years for purposes of prostitution, making the offence punishable by 10 years imprisonment or fine or both'. During the provincial interviews conducted by the United Nations in 2001 with 233 sexually abused and sexually exploited children, 74 boys and 32 percent girls were identified as victims of sexual abuse. Teachers, family members, neighbors, shopkeepers were reported as being the people responsible for sexually abusing these children. Exact age of 39 victims was unknown, however, they were under 18 years of age at the time when the abuse first began. First time abuse was most commonly reported among the 14 year old children.^{37,38}

Many reported cases were under 10 years of age. Five victims were five years old. Out of the reported 159 sexually exploited children, the highest percentage, that is, 28.9 % were from Baluchistan province, followed by

a 23.9% from Sindh province.

According to a five month survey done by an NGO in 2004, of the 260 total reported child sexual abuse cases throughout Pakistan, 153 were girls and 107 were boys.

In Punjab province, there were reported 171 cases, followed by Sindh province with 77 and the NWFP and Balochistan with 6 cases each. Among the offenders were fathers, acquaintances, teachers, police and total strangers. Major forms of abuse reported were: 85 cases of rape, 65 of sodomy, 77 of sexual assault, 8 rape-murders and 25 sodomy-murders.^{22,39}

There was an estimated 50 percent increment in cases of CSA in Pakistan between the years 2002 and 2006.²² 8,209 children were reported to have been abused. Of them 74 per cent (5,941) were girls and 26 per cent (2,268) boys. It is estimated that in 2002, 1.2 children were abused daily and this increased to four children per day in 2006.⁴⁰

Although the reported data do show an increasing pattern in CSA, there seems to be huge under reporting. More than eighty percent of the CSA cases go unreported.^{23,24} Women are more frequently abetting such crimes, posing difficulty in reporting and recording such cases leading to under reporting. Mostly the acquaintances were responsible for CSA, followed by the category of male strangers.²⁴ During five year period, 1,115 girls and 550 boys were gang raped. The report noted that about 210 victims were murdered after gang rape and 272 after rape or sodomy and molestation recorded the second most consistent increase among crimes, after kidnapping. Children between the ages of 11 and 15 years were most commonly victimized. Followed by the age group between six and 10 years. What is shocking is that most victims were abused at their homes. The report showed that 67 per cent of cases were reported in Punjab province, 24 per cent in Sindh, six per cent in federal areas, two per cent in the NWFP and one per cent in Baluchistan. During the period, the number of reported cases showed a decline in Baluchistan and the NWFP. This is thought to be under reporting.^{11,12,13} During 2006 till 2009, there were nearly 8,000 reported CSA cases (Table 1)

When comparing the literacy level of the exploited children it was noted that 31% were uneducated 1983.6% were educated below grade 5 level. Younger and less educated children were more prone to be victimized. Interestingly, other studies^{10,11,25} have discussed significance of level of education. Low education level of the parents also leads to neglect of children and neglected children may be more prone to child abuse.

Limitations of the study:

This study attempts to carry out a situation analysis of child sexual abuse in Pakistan, based on a review of documents, published reports from various agencies and organizations working in Pakistan. Some of the

unpublished data in different universities and organizations can be missing due to lack of availability and access. NGOs in Pakistan were identified using snowball technique. However, there is possibility that some organizations whose work is not accessible via the internet, may have been missed in this analysis. Visiting the office of each NGO working for the protection of child rights against CSA, would require extensive resources and was beyond the scope of this situational analysis. This was an observational study. Electronic literature search was carried out for the period between 1999 till 2011. The sites searched were Google, Pubmed, Medline and PsychINFO. The key words used were 'Child sexual abuse', 'CSA', and 'Child sexual abuse in Pakistan'. Boolean operator "AND" was used.

CONCLUSION:

This analysis highlights the need for a population survey. Magnitude and reasons of child abuse, information on adverse health and social effects of child abuse on the victim population in Pakistan need to be studied. Such studies are done worldwide to understand the long term effects of CSA. The best practices identified include evening schools and drop-in centers for working children with provision for basic health facilities, skills based education, training of a multi disciplinary team comprising of doctors, nurses, lady health visitors, police and social workers to be able to recognize CSA and an ombudsman for child sexual abuse. Economic reforms that help alleviate poverty affecting children are also needed. We need to make certain that the services offered by NGO's and government are socially acceptable to the people and are widely and easily accessible by them.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Applying trans-theoretical model approach To develop a model to assist the actions of NGO's and government, we can plan on implementing their actions to a larger scale with a centrally coordinated technique. Applying the trans-theoretical model of behavioral change, we see Stages faced when attempting to deal with child abuse:

- (a) Pre contemplation: the victim/guardian does not recognize child abuse as an issue and is not interested in change.⁴¹
- (b) Contemplation: the child/ guardian acknowledge's the problem and consider possible change
- (c) Preparation: the child/ guardian intends to modify and has made a plan
- (d) Action: the child/guardian follows through the plan
- (e) Maintenance: the child and guardian keeps the new action as part of her daily activity and is taking steps to prevent relapse ²⁶.

Public Health Prevention strategy:

Primary preventive actions

Create a better environment for the children through education and awareness. Educating the masses will help to reduce the demand for the sexual exploitation of children. Media is a very useful tool that can help facilitate. Radio and television programs could be scripted in such a way that is acceptable to the society and yet raises awareness. The HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns must also call attention to the children involved in prostitution.⁴²

Secondary Prevention


It is the instantaneous response to violence. Care must be given to the victim before taking to a hospital emergency department.

Tertiary prevention

Rehabilitation of the exploited children is crucial, thus there is a need to develop and execute comprehensive strategy to protect and help the child victims and to facilitate their reintegration into the society. As one agency trying to provide a complete array of services related to child abuse might not deliver as well as various organizations coming together and working together in addressing various challenges faced by child abuse.⁴³ Rehabilitation includes but is not limited to psychological support, emotional support, educational support and assistance in integrating into the society. Education takes a back seat when poverty is rampant.⁴⁴ Such is the case with Pakistan. In countries where child labor is existent, best is to regulate it with laws, rates and timings. This would encourage children to avoid commercial sex trade. (fig I).

Table 1:

Comparative table of prevalence of child sexual abuse in 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009.

| Year | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 |
|----------------------|--|------|------|------|
| Number of Cases | 2447 | 2321 | 1838 | 968 |
| Pattern of reporting |  Decreasing (due to under reporting) | | | |

Source of Data: Sahil- Nongovernmental organization in Pakistan. Sahil: (2007). Cruel Numbers 2007: Statistics on Child sexual Abuse cases. Sahil: (2008). Cruel Numbers 2008: Statistics on Child sexual Abuse cases. Sahil: (2009). Cruel Numbers January to June 2009: Statistics on Child sexual Abuse cases.

Fig 1:
Steps towards integrated community fighting Child sexual abuse menace. Community factors may be critical to the success of these programs.

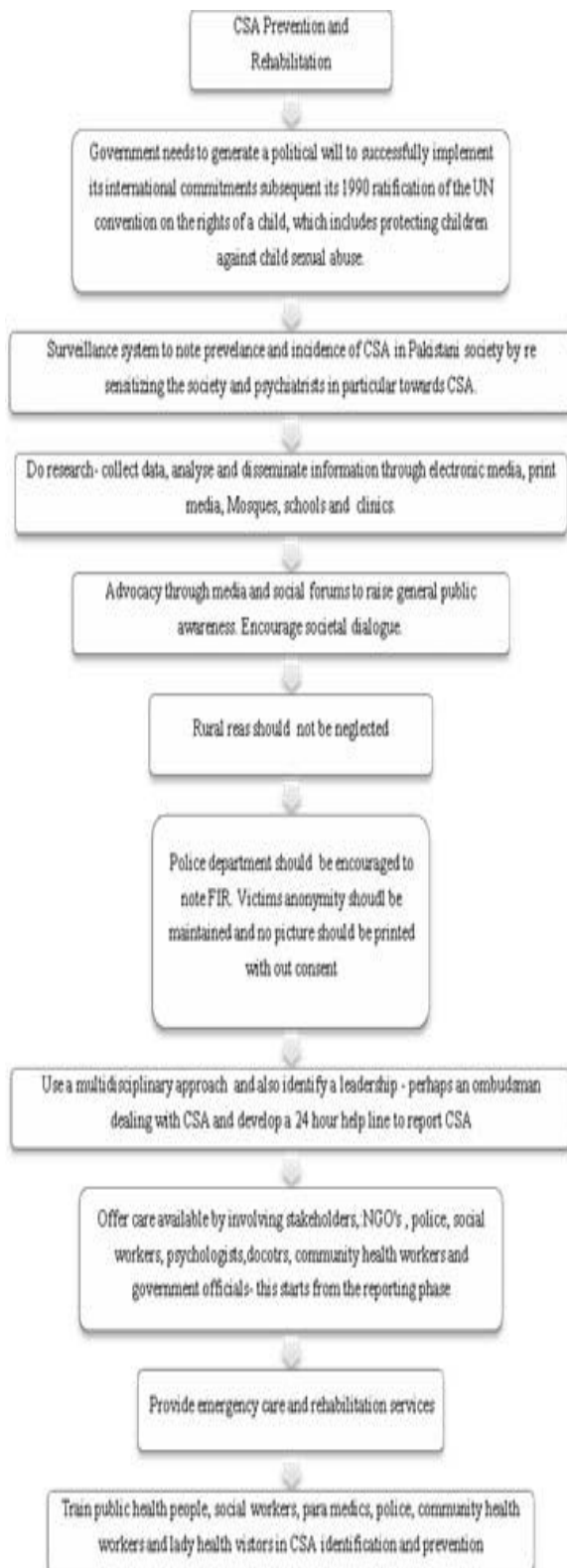


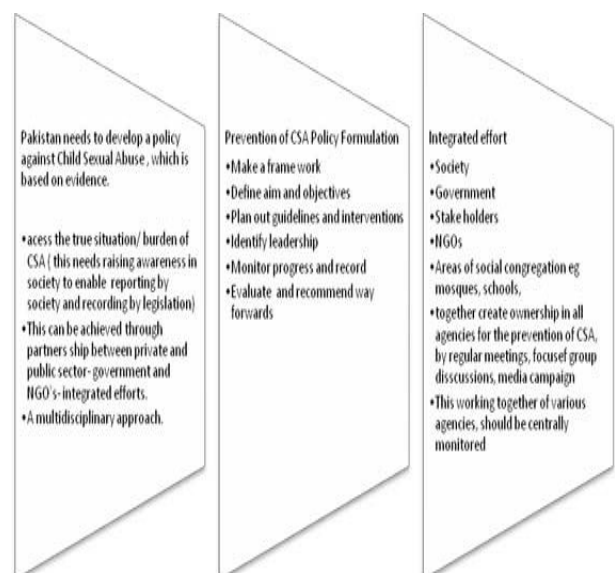
Table 2
Types of relationship between Abusers and Victims.

| Abuser | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 |
|--------------|------|------|------|
| Acquaintance | 3667 | 2986 | 1672 |
| Strangers | 900 | 650 | 435 |
| Relatives | 133 | 71 | 46 |
| Incest | 39 | 53 | 8 |

Source:

Sahil- Non governmental organization in Pakistan.Sahil: (2007). Cruel Numbers 2007: Statistics on Child sexual Abuse cases.Sahil:(2008). Cruel Numbers 2008: Statistics on Child sexual Abuse cases.Sahil: (2009). Cruel Numbers January to June 2009: Statistics on Child sexual Abuse cases.

Fig 2:
Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) prevention and policy suggestions- stepwise approach.



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