

Child Abuse Cases in Pakistan: A Five-year Analysis

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Author's Contribution

¹ Conception of study

¹ Experimentation/Study conduction

¹ Analysis/Interpretation/Discussion

^{2,5} Manuscript Writing

⁴ Critical Review

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Abstract

Objectives: To analyse the number of child abuse cases in Pakistan over the course of five years (2012-2016) along with multifactorial impact of demographic variables on the situation.

Subjects & Methods: It was a cross sectional study done by collecting the data from the non-profit organization working for child rights, Sahil. After the data collection, the cases were distributed according to various factors such as gender and age. Graphical demonstration for clear distribution of cases has also been done.

Results: Over the time, cases have gradually risen from 2788 in 2012 to 4139 in 2016. The highest number of these cases were reported in Punjab and lowest in Gilgit Baltistan with predominantly higher percentages in girls (61%) than boys (39%). 70% of all these cases had involvement of perpetrators known to child or child's family. However, regardless of the situation's adversity, a large number of cases still remain unreported and very few of the reported cases result in court convictions.

Conclusion: Children in age group 11-15 are most likely to be the child abuse victims, with biggest threat from their relatives/acquaintances.

Keywords: Child abuse cases, five-year analysis.

Introduction

Child Sexual Abuse – an issue rendered “immoral” and a “taboo.” An issue most likely to never get addressed amidst its “sensitivity.” A crime against humanity yet treated as a non-existent sentiment. Child Sexual Abuse falls into the category of those crimes that happen every day but are talked about once in a decade. It's one of those crime that have the fewest chances of ever getting justice. Why? Because society has developed an illusion that something as heinous could never exist. And even if does – it should not exist and the best way to keep thinking like that is to never actually acknowledge its existence. This is particularly true for Pakistan. Child rape is an anathema. Pakistani people don't like hearing about it. It's a “sensitive” topic and in the light of all the sensitiveness, staying quiet – ironically, just like the child victims, is the best solution for Pakistani people. Although, over the course of years with better recognition of the events, as a result of mass media campaigns, the overall scenario has gradually shown a positive side in Pakistan.³

Unlike the physical abuse or trauma, where personal experiences or extent of punishment may cloud the definition, the definition of what actions constitute child sexual abuse is rarely debated. Child sexual abuse is generally defined as any sexual activity with a child without their legal consent.¹ The age of legal sexual consent varies greatly among different countries or even states of the same country. The dilemma of reporting sexual assaults resulting from post-traumatic stress is the major contributing factor towards a very low number of reported cases unlike the actual number of cases.⁴

Subjects and Methods

In the following report, an in-depth analysis of child abuse cases in Pakistan from 2012-2016 is done. For this purpose, data has been collected via Sahil- a non-profit organization working for child protection in Pakistan since 1996. A detailed account of the methods and analysis of data collected will be further delineated in the following section.

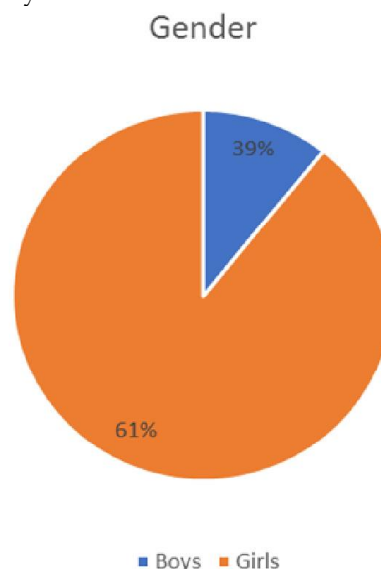
The study was conducted in all the provinces of Pakistan including Gilgit-Baltistan and Federal territory through scanning numerous newspapers on a daily basis for the reported abuse cases.

Results

The total number of cases from 2012-2016 were 17205 with the highest number reported in 2016 and least in 2012. A surge in cases could also be a result of increased awareness among public and inclination towards reporting of such incidents.

1. Gender:

61% of these victims were girls and 39% were boys. Despite the widely held view of public regarding just a handful abuse cases against boys, these stats are contradictory.



2. Age:

The reported cases broadly ranged from as young as 5 years up to 18 years. However, majority of the reports did not mention the age of victim, followed by highest number of people in 11-15 years age group, showing that children are most vulnerable around puberty.

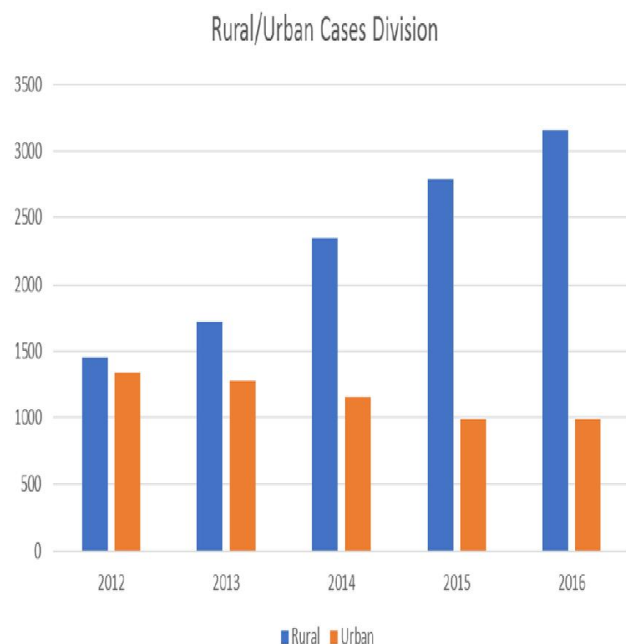
3. Place of Abuse:

Among the option of 13 closed places given, the greatest percentage of crimes happened at acquaintance's place making a total of 45% followed by victim's place (38%). These statistics indicate peak negligence of public towards accepting that most child abuse cases are committed by people known to family or the victim themselves.

The highest cases for open spaces were reported in fields (~50%), suggesting escalated number of cases in rural areas throughout years.

4. Rural/Urban Division of Cases:

As indicated earlier, there has been a steady increase of cases in rural areas over the years. During the five-year span (2012-2016) child abuse cases per year have nearly doubled from 1450 to 3154 in rural whereas a slight decrease from 1338 to 985 cases per year in urban vicinities.



Issue of child abuse cases still tend to be veiled, owing to the conservative cultural and traditional practices and lack of social security and empowerment of the victims.² Despite an average of 9 abuse cases daily, lack of scrutiny and lawful negligence regarding this issue has worsened the situation over time giving the offenders confidence regarding their actions.

Conclusion

In the light of these findings, it is imperative that child sexual abuse should be considered as a matter of major public health concern which is preventable and therefore be placed on the national agenda. The biggest advantage for perpetrators is this conservative society's reluctance. Empty denunciations of 'vulgarity and obscenity' made for political by some quarters only drive the real problems further underground. And the shameful part is that we allow this horrendous act to fester through our silence. Evident through the data obtained that despite substantial number of cases, only a handful offenders were convicted with some even acquitted later due to lack of evidence.^{5,6}

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