



Socio-Cultural Factors Associated with Child Physical Abuse: Pragmatic Facts from Malakand, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Child abuse is one of the most serious problems in the world. The issue of child abuse is a major concern for governments around the globe, as it has a profound effect on society. As a result of this problem, many media houses, scholars and people from all walks of life are engaged in trying to understand and examine the problem of child abuse, especially in terms of causes and measures. The present study will provide beneficial and purposeful information on child physical abuse and the feasible relationship with cultural factors. Therefore, this study aims to highlight the major problems faced by children in the form of physical abuse in Malakand district. The purpose of the present study is to fulfill the research gap in Malakand District about the consequences of physical abuse of children who have experienced numerous or all types of physical abuse. The study was based on the interviews from the volunteers about Physical punishments in Malakand.

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1. Introduction

Child abuse is a worldwide problem which affects children negatively. "Child abuse refers to all forms of physical or emotional abuse, sexual abuse, negligence or carelessness, commercial or other abuse that impairs a child's health, sustainability, development or self-esteem in any particular or potential situation Caused by damage" (Fayaz, 2019). It may also be defined as "Actions or omissions intended to cause immediate harm to the victim. The abuser perceives the harm caused as the goal of their actions" (UNICEF, 2009). According to (WHO,2009) Physical abuse of a child is any act that causes physical harm to a child". The forms of injuries include shaking, fractures, burns, severe beatings, attempts to suffocate or drug use for a child or adolescent (Christian, 2012). In other words, the physical abuse of children involves the abandonment of physical acts against the child that protect the child from physical abuse. These include kicking, poisoning, pushing, throwing, hitting, dragging and burning (C. L. Robinson, Bernstein, Romero, & Szilagyi, 2019). In Pakistan, children are subjected to severe physical abuse, such as severe beatings, shaking, burning, attempted fracture or strangulation or drug use by their parents, teachers, or relatives for disciplinary purposes. Sometimes, physical injuries can be devastating, causing children to run away from home (Zahra Shaheen Premani, 2021). Globally, nearly 1.5 to 500 million children are victims of abuse each year. In the United States, there are over 3 million registered cases, with 1 in 4 females and 1 in 7 males being sexually harassed, while Physical negligence (64.1%), physical abuse (16%) and emotional negligence (6.6%) was reported (Mehnaz, 2018). About 64% of the children who are subjected to severe violence are from South Asia. Violence against children might be seen in the home, school, workplace and the wider community (Zafar, Naeem, Zehra, & Khalid, 2020). Around the world, nearly about 215 million children are involved in physical abuse in the form of domestic labour.

These include shaking, scalding, slapping, hitting and burning.(Zainab & Kadir, 2016). In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), more than half of the children reported physical and drug abuse to their parents and nearly about 85% of children are facing punishment from their parents at working places (Khan et al, 2020).

2. Literature Review

Child abuse is now a common problem all around the world. Abuse happens at each socio-economic level, on all ethnic and social lines, and inside all religions. Physical abuse is characterized as wounds caused by a guardian for a child which can take many structures(Marc & Barthès, 2016). Physical abuse of children is known as a global phenomenon that has serious implications for physical and mental health, Children's well-being and development throughout life and through the expansion of society as a whole (Mansoori, et al., 2021). These include hitting, kicking, pushing, throwing, dragging and dropping, shaking, suffocating, burning and poisoning any part of the body or abusing them by some weapon (such as a stick or belt)(Y. Robinson, 2019). In 2010 over 754,000 cases of child maltreatment were reported out of the total nearly about 18% are victims of child physical abuse and maltreatment. Nonetheless, under-revealing and one-sided detail shows that public insights don't misjudge the predominance of actual physical abuse with different evaluations recommending that many children are survivors of abuse (Rodriguez, 2014) Another study shows that child physical abuse is a common and serious issue among the children of age seven and above nearly about children of age 11 and 18 years are abused 5.9% and 12.5% in US accordingly (Javed, et al., 2020). Mostly it is used for disciplinary purposes. Sometimes a child is killed by physical punishment in order to correct the child's misbehavior. From time to time physical punishment leads to fatal abuse (Islam, et al., 2017).

Child abuse varies across cultures and has changed over the years. Some even see it as different in parts of a culture and race. Children in different cultural, social and structural places do not understand and react to their abuse (Massarweh, 2019). Most societies allow severe corporal punishment of children by parents, teachers and others (Thomas Jr, 1972) . About 80% of children in Pakistan are victims of physical abuse by their family members, especially their parents and other relatives on cultural grounds. Only for disciplinary purposes Children are subjected to severe physical abuse, such as beatings, burnings, strangulation and other forms of abuse by their parents and teachers(Zahra Shaheen Premani, 2021). In Pakistan, in 2018 the physical abuse of children increased by 11% compared to the previous years, according to researchers more than 10 % children are experiencing some form of severe or manner abuse on daily basis (Iqbal & Saqib, 2020). Domestic violence is also a form of physical abuse that can lead to serious injury. Children who experience domestic violence are significantly worse than those who do not. Worldwide, almost 275 million children are victims of domestic violence (Pingley, 2017). But every year about 50,000 children are seriously injured in Pakistan and have to be hospitalized. From total of 30 million of children, 8 million under the age of fifteen are involved in child labour. The factors that lead to child abuse and maltreatment are cultural, Characteristics of parental abuse and educational deprivation(Malik, 2020). Other factors include poverty, low parental education and low socioeconomic status. Size and family structure are related to higher child maltreatment. While children belong to low economic ground and extended family experiencing physical abuse more as compared to those who belong to high economic status and living in nuclear families(Haque et al., 2019).

Violence has been a part of the history of mankind and as a result suffering has become an inexhaustible legacy of destruction and in some cases has led to the demise of dynamic civilizations. Violence between nations and within families has always been an indication of the misuse of force to control, exploit and oppress others(Al-Mahroos, 2013). Many harmful cultural practices are maintained because many people think it is the best thing for their children (Afruca, 2009). Contradictory studies of different types of abusive families have been showing that physically abusive parents communicate and interact with their children more often than careless parents, but they have much more negative and direct rate of verbal as well as physical aggression towards their young children (Pollak, et al., 2000). Children with low socio-economic status has significantly higher rates of child abuse in all categories and in both standards of appreciation(Sedlak et al., 2010). Abuse is generally proven at a higher rate than ignored, over-representation of girls in sexual abuse cases may, in part, lead to gross gender differences exceptions to American Humane Association data. There is also evidence that reports of black children are more common than white children(Powers, 1988).

In Pakistan child abuse and maltreatment is considered a societal norm. Reporting is a mandatory system and data on physical abuse is available but due to cultural norms, Shame, guilt and honour have become a barrier to other forms of abuse in the country, such as sexual exploitation (Zafar et al., 2020). Parents' attitude towards physical punishment is positive. 90% of respondents think that children should be physically punished. The rate of physical exploitation was higher in rural areas and had lower socio-economic status while in urban areas the rate was lower and higher socio-economic status (Akmatov, 2011). Severe corporal punishment (e.g., flogging, burning, rubbing) clearly constitutes physical abuse, but for low levels of physical and emotional torment, the line between socially accepted behaviour and abuse varies across cultures (Pekarsky, 2020).

3. Methods and Procedures

The present study is qualitative in nature. Thus, in depth interviews were conducted. Primary data for this study was collected in first month of 2023 through interview guide. Purposive sampling technique was used and 12 participants were taken and the data obtained through their interviews were analyzed thematically. The participants included teachers, parents and religious entities because they all play a huge part in a child's developmental phase. Interviews were taken in Pashto and Urdu languages which were further translated into English for documentation purposes. The importance of the legal actions regarding such violence was emphasized by each interviewer with further guidelines which were suggested by these participants.

4. Analysis and Discussion

Every action or activity that prevails in the society exhibits different factors. Similarly, physical abuse resulted from various factors which involve misbehavior of the children, tolerance level of the teachers, elders or parents, brought of the teachers, elders or parents, sensitivity of the parents/teachers about child development, ability of the children to learn or adopt what his or her parents/teachers are saying, ethics and character of the child. In this regard a respondent answered;

There are many reasons for which a child should be beaten. Sometimes he or she does not want to study or do homework. Sometimes they make noise at home when the guests are around. Most often they go and play or meet with some bad character children. Sometime I beat them due to late coming and using unethical words with their friends. So, punishing or applying some force is necessary otherwise they will be uncontrollable.

The above response indicates that factors and reasons of physical punishments vary according to behavior and actions of the child and the person who give punishment. It not only depends on the situation but also on the mood of the person like teacher/parent/elders. If the person is in good mood, he or she can ignore any big mistake even but if his or her mood is not good he or she can beat the child even on small mistake. Another respondent shared her views that;

Sometime I do not feel well and the children make noise so I must stop them either by hand or stick.

This answer indicates that mood swing is also a factor of physical punishment. In this regard parents or the person who has direct link with children like teachers/elders/parents must know about the children behavior and must have better tolerance level. If the person doesn't have such tolerance level, he or she should stay away from children as every time physical abuse can have negative impacts on the minds of the children. Another factor is the upbringing of someone, which shows his or her attitude toward children. In this context a respondent replied that;

It is not new for us whenever we committed any mistake we faced punishment sometime a slap and sometimes beating by our elders. But that put impact on our personality now we know how to behave with someone. However, today the children are very sensitive and we often think that we should avoid physical abuse but it indispensable. If we will not say something or not frighten them, they will not learn good characters and our society will be full of mischievous and annoying children.

Actually surrounding environment and brought up have deep impacts on one's personality and attitudes. The above reply indicates the if someone have faced physical abuse in the childhood for better development and good attitude he or she will definitely use such force on his or her children. Previous studies also reveal that physical abuse is the cause of the surrounding environment (Heekes, Kruger, Lester, & Ward, 2022; Jaffee et al., 2004). Surrounding environment, tolerance and acceptability are the main factors responsible for the physical punishment in our society. The study area i.e. Malakand district is among the areas where physical punishments or physical abuse for the betterment of the child are routine matters. Guardians argue that we also faced such punishments and now we have good characters so it is necessary for the education and learning of the children. However, educated people have different points of view, in this regard a teacher responded that;

Obviously, different factors are involved in the physical abuse such as sometime a child do not listen to advise, sometime they ignore their routine work or study, sometime the child is disobedient or recalcitrant, sometimes they fight with fellows and so on. However, it does not mean we start beating them. We can deal with them with examples and can show them by our practical behavior. Words can have more positive impact on children minds rather than stick or hand.

This indicates that physical abuse and its use is also dependent on the mentality and education of the person. Many scholars recommend psychological treatments and consultancy for the children who are disobedient and annoying. Previous studies recommend that teachers or parents who are overwhelmed with personal issues and believed that physical abuse is an effective measure in managing attitude of the child likely to use physical punishment at school or home (Heekes et al., 2022; Mahlangu et al., 2021). Another factor is the education system of Pakistan which is inequitable and reflected in our two level education system that is public schools and private schools. In private Schools physical abuse and physical punishments are often restricted or prohibited. However, in public schools it still exists and is used as common practice for discipline. Public schools are often overcrowded and under resourced. In these situations, the teachers feel disempowered and use physical abuse as a tool for maintenance of discipline. In this context a teacher from public school responded that;

"Kogh seekh pa zor samegi" it means that "A slumped iron can be straightened by force". Dealing with children is very difficult task especially when you have to deal with more than 50 students at one time. Some children are very arrogant they do not listen to you and deteriorate the environment of the class. Then it is necessary to use stick or any physical power. Their behavior will itself make you angry then you have left with no choice.

It indicates that many teachers from the public schools administer physical force or physical punishments for both major and minor offences like absentee from school, not performing homework, not replying answers to questions, talking or disrupting during lesson in the class. So many teachers and parents believe that administration of physical punishment and physical force is an effective tool of correcting misbehavior and maintaining discipline in the school. Previous studies also highlighted that transgressions that result in physical punishments at schools included not doing homework, late coming, not listening to teachers, making noise and giving wrong answers to teacher's answers (Mahlangu et al., 2021; Romano, Bell, & Norian, 2013).

Other factors include poor performance by the students at schools face physical abuse both at school and home with the purpose to improve his or her academic performance. Previous studies also recommend that children subjected to physical abuse may engage in aggression bad attitude with other fellows that disturb the discipline of the school. In addition, low socio-economic class, ethnicity and race of learners are the prominent factors of the physical abuse in the schools of Malakand division. In this regard a respondent replied;

Family background specifically low socio-economic status is linked with experience of physical punishment at schools. I observe that children who lack financial resources, experience physical violence, and those who do not receive love and affection from parent or elders are likely to misbehave and as a result face physical punishment at school. The respondent highlighted a very basic factor based on his experience and observation. Such factors are less studied in our society and therefore require further research and studies to evaluate complexes and more

factors associated with physical abuse of the children. Understanding factors associated with physical punishment may provide useful insights and much needed evidence to inform or educate our society about prohibition of the physical abuse and physical punishments of children.

5. Results

Our results indicate that most of the interviewees were aware with the problem and experienced themselves the problem of physical abuse. The number of selected responses and nature of the participant was in consistency with previous studies (Ashraf & Holden, 2022; Siraj, 2010). Previous studies also recommend that physical abuse of children is a common problem of all societies but its complexities are very difficult to understand (Ashraf & Holden, 2022; Heekes et al., 2022). With regard to the current study, the research community has its own social and cultural structure. The area is mainly dominated by traditionalism where majority of the subject respondents were of the opinion that the lives of the people are governed by the normative and traditional values of Pakhtun social structure. Pakhtun-wali (traditional codes or way of life) dominates lives and thus it is believed that a child shall respect and obey the orders of their elders and shall work with them in the field, market or any place they deserve (Siraj, 2010). The responses and factors identified by the participants are in consistency with previous studies (Annemarie, 2007; Ferguson, 2013). Participants' responses and previous literature suggest that surrounding environment and brought up have deep impacts on the personality and attitudes. The responses also indicate that if someone has faced physical abuse in the childhood for better development and good attitude he or she will definitely use such force on his or her children. Previous studies also reveal that physical abuse is the cause of the surrounding environment (Heekes et al., 2022; Jaffee et al., 2004). Surrounding environment, tolerance and acceptability are the main factors responsible for the physical punishment in our society. The study area i.e. Malakand district is among the areas where physical punishments or physical abuse for the betterment of the child are routine matters.

6. Conclusion

Child abuse is a growing concern for Pakistan as it has been seen not just in the rural regions but also the urban areas of the country. The abuse in the region of Malakand, KP has been stated in this study which shows that according to parents, teachers and religious scholars the punishment via slaps and beating with sticks is a part of routine. However, severe punishments are also to be seen like being electrocuted on different regions of the body. According to all the participants, the punishment has been stated as a routine work which is quite alarming for our society and needs to be addressed as soon as possible. Children who are abused can experience abuses ranging from injuries, bone fractures, and in some cases death. Children are more likely to be physically abused if their parents are single, young and living in poverty. The suggestions made by the people were: including subjects of awareness in educational sectors to help children understand the importance of fighting and dealing with physical abuse, policies and laws should be formulated and implemented by governmental sectors along with that all individuals must be exposed to awareness programs which create a perception of necessary actions to be taken against it in order to eliminate this deadly disease from our community.

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