

VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN



Introduction

Most of us would probably agree on the common definition of violence—the exertion of physical force so as to injure or abuse someone physically, emotionally, sexually or a combination of any or all of these. We see and experience it, directly or indirectly, in our homes, schools, communities, workplaces, playing fields, and battlefields. Violence can result in death, injuries and disabilities. One might observe various forms of violence in everyday life. The focus here, however, is on the violence against children. Approximately one out of two children between the ages 2 to 7 year experience some form of violence every year around the world. Children aged 11–15 years globally have been bullied by their peers and 120 million girls are estimated to have suffered some form of forced sexual contact before the age of 20 years.¹

Violence can result in death, injuries and disabilities, children who are exposed to violence are at increased risk of mental illness and psychological disorders. They are vulnerable to high-risk behaviors—alcohol, drug abuse, smoking and unsafe sex. Abuse exposes children to chronic diseases such as cancers, diabetes and heart disease; infectious diseases like HIV; and social problems including educational under attainment, further involvement in violence, and crime.²

Bullying is an important form of violence, a lot of children face bullying at school like name calling, teasing, threatening and social exclusion. Children often feel helpless and unable to fight back. Bullying can be done directly or indirectly or through electronic devices. Child marriage is also a form of violence, children mostly girls are forced to marry at a very young age.

Violent discipline is also practiced. Children are subjected to corporal punishment at schools, homes and day care centers. According to Frechette, Zoratti & Romano, corporal punishment is a method

¹<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-children>

²https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/149798/978924108018_eng.pdf

of discipline often described as the use of physical force with the intent of inflicting pain on a child, but not injury, with the purpose of correcting a child's behaviours.³ Today, the most commonly used methods of corporal punishment involve spanking, slapping, shoving a child roughly, and hitting them with certain objects, such as a hair brush, a belt or a stick. Corporal punishment is practiced in schools and families for disciplining children.

Violence against Children in Pakistan

Violence against children in Pakistan is common. It is estimated that more than eight children are subjected to sexual abuse every day. According to Sahil (organization in Pakistan that works exclusively on child sexual abuse and exploitation) child sexual abuse cases per day shot up in the first half 2020. An estimated 1,489 cases of child abuse were reported between January and June 2020 from all four provinces, Islamabad Capital Territory, Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan. The statistics show that of the total number of cases, 53% of the victims were girls and 47 % were boys.⁴ Children who have experienced violence are more likely to perpetuate the circle of violence, passing on patterns of violence to their future generations.⁵ Therefore, ending violence against children is not only important for children's rights, but also for healthy communities and societies.

The crimes against children in Pakistan have seen a 200 per cent rise in March 2020, the month when the coronavirus outbreak hit the country, according to a study conducted by Sustainable Social Development Organization (SSDO). The study comes soon after a report by the country's human rights commission, warning that the ongoing coronavirus pandemic will worsen the condition of the poorest sections.⁶

³<https://digitalcommons.sacredheart.edu/cgi/viewcontent>.

⁴ <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/713669-eight-children-sexually-abused-every-day-in-pakistan-in-first-half-of-2020-report>

⁵<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2753994/>

⁶ <https://www.business-standard.com/article>

Child Sexual Abuse

The sexual abuse of children is a unique phenomenon; the dynamics are often very different to that of adult sexual abuse and therefore abuse of this nature cannot be handled in the same way. Child sexual abuse involves any sexual activity with a child where consent is not or cannot be given. Child sexual abuse includes sexual contact that is accomplished by force or threat of force, regardless of the age of the participants. Nevertheless, physical force/violence is very rarely used; rather the perpetrator tries to manipulate the child's trust and hide the abuse.

It refers to all sexual contact between an adult and a child, regardless of whether there is deception or the child understands the sexual nature of the activity. Sexual contact between an older and a younger child also can be abusive if there is a significant disparity in age, development, or size, rendering the younger child incapable of giving informed consent.⁷

Violence against children includes all forms of violence against people under 18 years old. For infants and younger children, violence mainly involves child maltreatment (i.e. physical, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect) at the hands of parents and other authority figures.⁸ Sexually abused children may also show a range of behavioral and emotional reactions, like having a lot of nightmares, sleeping problems, aggressive behavior, not wanting to be left alone with a particular individual.⁹

Many children may engage in a post-traumatic play as they will try to act it out by continuously running away from a "BAD MAN" or they might show others signs like of stress, tantrums and withdrawn behavior. The child may also engage in age-inappropriate sexual behavior with other children.

⁷<https://www.enoughabuse.org/gtf/what-is-child-sexual-abuse.html>

⁸<https://www.who.int/health-topics/violence-against-children>

⁹<https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/sexual-abuse/effects>

Cases and Statistics

Reported crimes against children are on the rise in Pakistan. Incidents of child sexual abuse increased by 14pc in the first half of 2020 compared to the same period the year prior, according to a report by the Sahil. The major categories in the cases included abduction (331), rape (160), sodomy (233), gang rape (69) and gang sodomy (104). Thirteen boys and twelve girls were murdered after sexual abuse while four boys and one girl were murdered after gang rape.¹⁰The organization, which has worked on child protection against sexual abuse since 1996, blamed the corona virus pandemic for the increase in cases, arguing that children were home and more than 55pc of their abusers were acquaintances.

Some of Child Sexual Abuse Reported in 2020:

- An eight-year-old boy was found at an under construction house in Mandi Bahauddin
 - A 14-year-old girl was strangled to death after being raped in the Manawan area of Lahore.
 - A six year old girl has reportedly been brutally murdered after being raped in Bajaur
 - A 10-year-old girl in the limits of Golra police station Islamabad was allegedly raped by a man.
 - A five-year girl was raped and killed in Karachi.
 - A 14-year-old mentally challenged boy had been sexually assaulted in the Dhok Hayat Khan area of Gujjar Khan.
 - A 13-year-old boy in Burewala city of Punjab was allegedly gang-raped by four men
 - A 5-year-old girl in southern Pakistan was raped, hit on the head and set on fire.
 - An Eight-year-old boy raped, murdered in Karachi.
 - A seven year old was raped in Shujabad.
- These are some of the cases that were reported and which received media attention.

¹⁰<https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/713336-child-sexual-abuse-cases-shot-up-in-first-half-of-2020-in-pakistan-report>

Legislation against Child Sexual Abuse

The agenda of Sustainable Development Goals 2030 envisages a world which invests in its children and in which every child grows up free from violence and exploitation. The agenda expressly includes several targets to end all forms of violence against children. These SDGs targets include elimination of all forms of violence against all women and girls. Stress on the immediate and effective measures to secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers. These targets stress the world to end child labour in all its forms, and to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children. The agenda 2030 is grounded in human rights standards and requires that the goals be implemented in a manner that is consistent with the rights and obligations of states under international law.

The obligations relating to children's right to be protected from violence are articulated under several international instruments—most notably the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography. Most developing countries, including Pakistan, have ratified the Optional Protocol.

Pakistan ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on 12 November 1990. According to the convention every child in Pakistan should be protected from all forms of exploitation and abuse.¹¹ The historic CRC is considered comprehensive as it encompasses all the fundamental rights of children. By signing the convention, Pakistan committed to take legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect and fulfill the rights of all children born or living in its territory. The rights enshrined in the convention encompasses education, physical & mental development, health & nutrition, freedom of expression, right to play, as well as protection against child labour, discrimination and violence and all forms of abuse. The questions that

¹¹<https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/46c190b40.pdf>

looms large is Pakistan's achievement in line with the CRC. Pakistan's progress on the implementation of CRC is slow with criticism from international bodies (UN) and civil societies within the country. The current situation of child rights in Pakistan and statistics on their deprivation, education, malnutrition, neglect and abuse are alarming.

The Zainab Alert, Response and Recovery Act, 2019 is the latest development on child sexual abuse in Pakistan. Zainab Alert Bill was passed on 8th October 2019 by the National Assembly, and on 4th march 2020 it was also passed by the senate. As a result the Zainab Alert service was launched in October 2020, therefore it yet has to be seen how effective the service is.

PPC Section 336-A: Prostitution or procurement of a minor girl under the age of 18 for sexually intercourse is punishable with imprisonment which may extend to ten years and also liable to fine¹²

The Protection of Women (Criminal Law Amendment) Act 2006: Inserted Sections 375 and 376 in Pakistan Penal Code which categorized different kinds of forced and manipulative sexual intercourse as a rape.¹³

Anti-Terrorism Act 1997: Child molestation, gang, rape and robbery coupled with rape are punishable with death (if the crime results in death of the victim), or punishable with imprisonment extending to 14 years but not less than 7 years.

Criminal Law (Second Amendment) Act 2016: Inserted new provisions in the Pakistan Penal Code. The insertion of sections 292A, 292B and 292C criminalized the exposure of children to child pornography and seduction. In addition section 328C was also inserted in PPC which criminalized cruelty to a child. Furthermore, according to section 377A and 377B sexual abuse against someone under the age of 18 shall be

¹²<http://www.pakistani.org/pakistan/legislation/1860/actXLVof1860.html>

¹³<http://www.pakistani.org/pakistan/legislation/2006/wp.html>

punished with imprisonment or fine of Pakistani Rupees 500,000 or both.¹⁴

Recommendations

- Raising awareness of the unacceptability of child sexual abuse, and promoting the notion that stopping child sexual abuse is everyone's responsibility.
- Rigorously evaluating and strengthening existing child sexual abuse prevention programmes.
- Sensitizing the media on improved and child friendly reporting to protect the survivors and their families from trauma.
- Making mental health services available to all those affected by child sexual abuse.
- Exploring, evaluating, and strengthening new approaches to prevent child sexual abuse.
- Implement a strategy that include increasing parents' and other caregivers' awareness and knowledge of protective measures they can take on behalf of their children.
- A powerful public education message must be transmitted to the general public, encouraging society to recognize that child sexual abuse is both everyone's problem and responsibility.
- Implementation of laws can further be made more effective by improving coordination with police and other relevant agencies by the social welfare and human rights ministries.

¹⁴<http://www.mohr.gov.pk/Detail/YmJiZjQ5MWYtYmEyYy00OWFILWFIZWEtYzY1OTY1MTg3Y2Iz>

- Increasing budget for child protection and instituting the child protection units as per law at the district level and ensuring that the role of communities and parents is enhanced. An efficient and effective child protection monitoring system is required to oversee implementation and identify and report on gaps for corrective actions.

Forced and/or Early Child Marriages

Child marriage is an unlawful and illegal practice in which a child (girl and boy) is married before reaching the minimum age of adulthood.¹⁵

12 million girls are married before the age of 18 years, almost 1 every two seconds. Child, early or forced marriage or unions are a violation of children’s human rights. Despite being prohibited by international law, it continues to rob millions of girls around the world of their childhood (ibid). In Pakistan child marriage is highly prevalent, mostly in the rural and disadvantaged areas. Almost one-third of girls in Pakistan are married before they reach age of 18 years. 21% of girls in Pakistan are married before their 18th birthday and 3% are married before the age of 15. According to UNICEF, Pakistan has the sixth highest number of absolute child brides in the world.¹⁶ According to the global network “Girls Not Brides” in Pakistan, child marriage is driven by:

- Traditional customs like, *Swara* (marring girls off to resolve disputes or debt. *Watta Satta* (bartering for brides) and *Paitlikkhi* (marrying girls off before they are born or very young).
- Gender norms: Deeply entrenched patriarchal norms continue to drive child marriage, and girls who marry late are often shamed for “deviating” from tradition.
- Family practices: *Addo Baddo* marriage among families is still very common in Pakistan. 34% of girls age 16 to 17 are married to their first cousin on their father’s side. A wide range of factors are responsible for

¹⁵<https://nation.com.pk/14-Feb-2019/penetrating-culture-of-child-marriage-in-pakistan>

¹⁶<https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/about-child-marriage/>

earlier marriages. This also relates to a desire to protect a girl's *izzat* (honour), and the high premium attached to the chastity of young unmarried girls.

Early marriage is a harmful practice that denies girls their right to make vital decisions about their sexual health and well-being. It forces them out of education and into a life of poor prospects, with an increased risk of violence, abuse, ill health or early death.¹⁷

Legislation against Child Marriages

Under the Child Marriage and Restraint Act 1929, the legal age for marriage for male is 18 years and for female it is 16 years¹⁸. In 2019 a national bill was introduced by Senator Sherry Rehman, it was passed in the Senate to increase the minimum age for female marriage to 18 years. The rules of the bill for implementation have still not been formed.

The Prevention of Anti-Women Practices (Criminal Law Amendment) Act 2011 prohibits several oppressive and discriminatory customs practiced towards women in Pakistan which are not only against the dignity of women, but also violate human rights and are contrary to Islamic Injunctions. The "Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Act, 2011" amended Pakistan Penal Code and Criminal Procedure Code as well by adding a new chapter to Pakistan Penal Code to bring the punishments into effect.¹⁹

Section 310-A

Under section 310-A, there shall be punishment for giving a female in marriage or otherwise in *badla-e sulh*, *wanni* or *swara* or any other custom or practice under any name in consideration of settling a civil dispute or a criminal liability, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to seven years but shall

¹⁷<https://plan-international.org/sexual-health/child-marriage-early-forced>

¹⁸<https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/childmarriage/pakistan/#:~:text=Under%20the%20Child%20Marriage%20Restraint,and%2018%20years%20for%20boys>

¹⁹https://pcsw.punjab.gov.pk/prevention_of_anti_women_practices

not be less than three years and shall also be liable to a fine of five hundred thousand rupees.²⁰

Section 498 A

Under section 498 A, depriving women from inheriting property by deceitful or illegal means shall be punished with imprisonment which may extend to ten years but not be less than five years or with a fine of one million rupees or both.

Section 498 B

Under section 498 B, forced marriages are ten years maximum and three years minimum of jail term along with a fine of five hundred thousand rupees.

Section 498 C

Under section 498C, forcing, arranging or facilitating a woman's marriage with the Holy Quran is punishable with a jail term of maximum seven and minimum three years, along with a fine of five hundred thousand rupees.²¹

In 2014 Sindh became the country's first elected assembly to have passed a bill on child marriages which places a ban on marriage of children under 18 years and makes its a violation punishable with rigorous imprisonment of up to three years.²²

²⁰<https://punjabpolice.gov.pk/system/files/310A498BC.pdf>

²¹https://pcsw.punjab.gov.pk/prevention_of_anti_women_practices

²²<https://www.dawn.com/news/1102895>

Recommendations

- The legal minimum age of marriage for girls in Pakistan should be increased to 18 years.
- Awareness should be created on the rights of the girl child to education
- Creating awareness amongst parents on child marriage as a human rights and a health issue.
- Enforce implementation of laws once these are available
- Develop information materials on the harmful effects of child marriage and communicate it through the media
- Creating education, training and employment opportunities for married girl children
- Increasing access for girl children to reproductive health information and services.

Child Trafficking

Trafficking of children is a form of human trafficking and is defined by the United Nations as the "recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring, and/or receipt" kidnapping of a child for the purpose of slavery, forced labor and exploitation. In Pakistan men, women and children are subjected to trafficking in persons. The largest form of human trafficking is bonded labour.²³

Illegal labour agents charge high fees to parents with false promises of decent work for their children, who are later exploited and subject to forced labour in domestic servitude, unskilled labour, small shops and

²³https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trafficking_of_children

other sectors. Girls are also sold into forced marriages and sometimes are move across borders by their husbands and forced into prostitution.²⁴

The government of Pakistan does not fully meet the minimum standard for the elimination of the trafficking but it is making significant efforts to do so. These efforts included passing the country's first comprehensive human trafficking law that criminalized all forms of sex trafficking and labor trafficking; securing its first conviction in 10 years of an official complicit in human trafficking; and identifying and referring an increased number of trafficking victims to care. Pakistan has been downgraded from 'Tier 2' to 'Tier 2 Watch List' in *The 2020 Trafficking in Persons Report* by the US State Department.²⁵ Official complicity in trafficking crimes remained a pervasive problem, yet the government did not report new law enforcement efforts to hold such officials accountable, including failing to investigate serious allegations of trafficking regarding a high-ranking diplomatic official. Government protection efforts remained inconsistent; only a small number of the total victims identified were referred to assistance services

Legislation against Child Trafficking

The government maintained law enforcement efforts against trafficking. Pakistani law did not criminalize all forms of sex and labor trafficking.

Section 369A of the Pakistan Penal Code (PPC), amended in March 2016, criminalizes transnational and internal forced labor and transnational and internal sex trafficking of women and children which is inconsistent with international law.

Section 369A required a demonstration of force, fraud, or coercion to constitute a child sex trafficking offense, and therefore did not criminalize all forms of child sex trafficking. Section 369A prescribed penalties ranging from five to seven years imprisonment, or a fine between 500,000 and 700,000 Pakistani rupees.

²⁴<https://www.refworld.org/docid/4c1883d1c.html>

²⁵<https://www.dawn.com/news/1566073>

Bonded Labour (System) Abolition Act (BLAA) prohibits bonded labour, with prescribed penalties ranging from two to five years imprisonment, a fine, or both.²⁶

Recommendations

- Pass provincial level anti-trafficking laws and coordinated anti trafficking action plans.
- Advocacy with state actors to take action against the groups that are organized and involved in trafficking children and to implement the laws effectively.
- Improve data and carry out research to generate evidence on the scale and nature of child trafficking in different regions of Pakistan and the loopholes in legislation and effective monitoring by law enforcement agencies at the borders.
- Training of law enforcement agencies on the issue of child trafficking and building their capacities to monitor and take action.
- Involve youth groups to actively engage in monitoring the situation at the community level and provide information of trafficking networks to the authorities while also raising awareness.
- Establish child help lines at the district level so that complaints can be made immediately and alerts raised if a child is kidnapped or abducted.
- Develop Information and communication materials and work with print, electronic and social media to create awareness on different types of child trafficking and use the findings of the research to create pressure on governments to take action.

²⁶<https://www.refworld.org/docid/5959ec6f4.html>

Corporal Punishment

Corporal punishment is physical punishment is intended to cause physical pain to a person. It is often practiced on minors especially in home and school settings. The most common methods are spanking or paddling. It is also used on prisoners and enslaved people.²⁷

Many countries have banned this heinous practice however; Pakistan is among the 69 countries trying to eradicate it in educational institutions.

Corporal punishment encompasses all types of physical punishment, including spanking, slapping, pinching, pulling, twisting, and hitting with an object. It may include forcing a child to consume unpleasant substances such as soap, hot sauce, or hot pepper. Teaching children acceptable behaviors, including how to make good choices and exercise self-control, is an integral part of child-rearing. But, many parents rely on physical punishments to accomplish these goals.²⁸

Many studies have shown that physical punishment, including spanking, hitting and other means of causing pain can lead to increased aggression, antisocial behavior, physical injury and mental health problems for children.²⁹

Corporal Punishment in Schools

Corporal punishment has been used in school for centuries. Most school systems employ corporal punishment to discipline students. Many schools have limited the use of corporal punishment but most schools continue to use corporal punishment. It often involves striking the student across the buttocks or palms of their hands with a tool such as a rattan cane, wooden paddle, slipper, leather strap or wooden yardstick.

²⁷https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corporal_punishment

²⁸<https://www.verywellfamily.com/facts-about-corporal-punishment-1094806>

²⁹<https://www.apa.org/monitor/2012/04/spanking#:~:text=Many%20studies%20have%20shown%20that,mental%20health%20problems%20for%20children.>

Legislation against Corporal Punishment

Pakistan has made some progress in enacting laws which prohibit corporal punishment in schools. Corporal punishment is prohibited in some but not all schools. Except where it is explicitly prohibited, corporal punishment is lawful in schools under article 89 of the Penal Code 1860.³⁰

Pakistan penal code section 89 empowers parents, teachers and other guardians to use corporal punishment as a means to discipline and correct the behavior of under-12 children.

In February 2017, the Sindh Provincial Assembly passed a bill banning corporal punishment of students and any kind of humiliating treatment and abuse by teachers or educators, as well as bullying by fellow students, and in January authorities in Punjab Province issued a notification banning corporal punishment in educational institutions in the province.³¹

Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2012 was passed in Islamabad Capital Territory, providing for the right to education for children aged 5-16 and prohibiting corporal punishment in government schools for children of that age.

The Gilgit-Baltistan Prohibition of Corporal Punishment Act 2015 prohibits all corporal punishment of children in schools and care homes.

- While the legislations in Sindh, GB and ICT is positive, it require rules of business to be developed for implementation which has not yet been done, the government has issued no progress or monitoring reports after the legislation in either of the above provinces and/or territories.
- In 2020 Zindagi Trust approached Islamabad high court to ban corporal punishment. The court banning corporal punishment noted that corporal

³⁰<https://endcorporalpunishment.org/reports-on-every-state-and-territory/pakistan/>

³¹<https://pakistan.asia->

[news.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_pf/features/2018/10/10/feature-01](https://pakistan.asia-news.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_pf/features/2018/10/10/feature-01)

punishments are not in consonance with the constitutionally guaranteed right of inviolability of dignity notwithstanding section 89 of the Pakistan Penal Code 1860. Respondent No 5 is further directed to put in place a mechanism for receiving complaints and redressal thereof against alleged use of corporal punishments within the Islamabad Capital Territory.

Recommendations

- Ensure provincial legislation on corporal punishment is in place in all provinces and is effectively implemented.
- Trained school teachers on positive disciplining methods.

Acid Crimes

For years, thousands of Pakistani women and children suffered one of the cruelest forms of violence imaginable acid attacks. An acid attack also called acid throwing is form of violent assault involving the act of throwing acid on any part of the body of another person with the aim to disfigure torture or kill. In Pakistan, the acid crimes are more prevalent in the rural areas

The acid, thrown at the faces and bodies of human beings, melted skin, disfigured limbs, and dehumanized individuals. Acid attacks left survivors with physical and psychological scars that lasted a lifetime.³²

Alongside, evoking emotional and psychological trauma, acid attacks cause loss of educational, training and employment opportunities for the survivors.

Acid throwing was a serious issue in Pakistan. It was one of the worst forms of violence against women in local society. According to Acid Survivors Foundation Pakistan (ASF), an (NGO), at least 3,412 cases

³²<http://pakrtidata.org/2018/02/28/pakistan-acid-attacks-decrease/>

have been reported in Pakistan between 1999 and June 2019. These attacks affected as many as 3,791 victims.³³

Legislation against Acid Crimes

In 2018, National Assembly (NA) passed the Acid and Burn Crime Bill, 2017. The bill offers free medical treatment and rehabilitation for acid burn victims. It also outlines a process for conducting trials of accused in the shortest possible time.

The Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act, 2011 (Criminal Law Second Amendment Act, 2011) made amendments in Pakistan Penal Code and Criminal Procedure Code to punish perpetrators of acid crimes by clearly including acid crimes in the definition of hurt. The definition now includes “hurt by dangerous means or substance, including any corrosive substance or acid to be crimes”. Through an amendment in Section 336-B of Pakistan Penal code, Punishment of offenders under this Act can extend up to life imprisonment.

Recommendations

- Steps should be taken to prevent more acid attacks.
- Emphasis should be taken toward ensuring the equality of women and educate society about the rights of women.
- The laws regarding acid attackers should be implemented sternly. Offenders should be given severe punishments, to set an example for the future.
- The provinces need to pass laws in order to ensure that survivors of acid crimes can access their fundamental right to healthcare and rehabilitative services.
- Psychological help should be given to the victims for the rehabilitation.

³³<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/104093-Significant-decrease-in-acid-attacks-cases-during-2015>

Street Children

Street children are children who are homeless or poor and live on the streets. They have nowhere else to go they beg on the roads, sell things to earn money. Children's life on the streets is very risky.

These children face a lot of difficulties. They are exposed to all sorts of diseases on a daily basis. These children live in the street because they do not have anything to call a home. They are mostly between five to seventeen years of age.

Extreme poverty, broken families and physical or sexual abuse are all factors that force many children and young people on to the streets. Street children are can be seen on the streets of Pakistan's major cities. These children are deprived of their basic rights.

In the major cities of Pakistan, poor children, some as young as five, roam the streets without any guardian. Some beg for money while others sell flowers, newspapers or clean windshields of cars to make ends meet. Most may see these children as nuisance on account of their unruliness, but few wonder about the harsh realities street children experience day-to-day. From poverty to violence, sexual abuse, exploitation and disease, street children are at the mercy of it all.

In February 2019, the government of Punjab also held a province-wide emergency meeting wherein measures necessary to eradicate sexual assault and improve conditions which force helpless street children into beggary were discussed. After the meeting, the Director General of the Child Protection and Welfare Bureau Punjab, Sara Ahmed, was directed to initiate and run an awareness campaign focused on anti-beggary laws and curbing of sexual assault against street children.³⁴

³⁴<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1938812/punjab-take-street-kids-wing>

Recommendations

- All efforts should be done to bring out of school children into school or provide non-formal education opportunities to street children.
- Street children must be provided safe shelter in big cities. Older street children need to be nourished and trained in various skills.
- Training of law enforcement agencies is essential to provide the necessary safety to all children, especially those on street.
- Ultimately, children should not be on the streets but this will have to be progressively eliminated as given in the above recommendations.
- Incentives may be ensured for the children of poor families subject to the condition of sending them to schools
- A survey shall be conducted in order to ascertain the statistics of street children for making strategies of their welfare.
- Public – private partnership especially with respect to donation for welfare of street children may be ensured by the government.
- Upgradation and capacity building of child protection center / bureaus of the governments.

Covid-19 and Violence against Children

The global pandemic has made the already informal or formal system of prevention on violence against children more vulnerable and risky. The necessary instructions to contain the Covid-19 lead to stay at home directives. This presumably has made the children more vulnerable to domestic violence and it has also been called “Shadow Pandemic”. Reports of domestic violence are showing increase in different countries of Europe and especially India during the lockdown. This has raised

alarms for the country to be more vigilant and to devise more effective strategies for decreasing the damage.

Economic and physiological pressures have increased the potential risk of child abuse. In the face of this risk the support mechanism for containing the violence against children have been damaged and weakened. The pandemic has attracted the attention of government across the world and resultantly the recourses allocated for other important matters have diverted towards containing the corona virus. Consequently, the attention to counter the domestic violence against children has increased and the mechanism of counseling was also disturbed, less helpful in view of the restricted access to support mechanism.

As mentioned earlier, over one billion children experience sexual violence each year. The number of cases increased during the pandemic. Violence, especially sexual violence against children, increased during Covid-19 pandemic. It is argued that children were home and more than 55 % of their abusers were acquaintances.³⁵ Violence against children and Covid-19 is a complex thing to understand. School closures have put strain on children's mental health, reduced their access to school-based resources such as food and counseling, and increased the contact with violent caregivers. With schools closed and many children spending more time on the Internet than usual can increase the risk of online child sexual abuse. Children suffer from stress and anxiety by staying at home.

The governments should take steps to ensure provision of shelter to children maintaining isolation of occupants; police may be sensitized towards dealing with the violence issues against children. Swift response mechanisms may be developed to complaints and awareness campaigns through social medial and electronic media messages to warn against the perpetrators / abusers.

³⁵ [https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-children#:~:text=Globally%2C%20it%20is%20estimated%20that,the%20past%20year%20\(1\).](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-children#:~:text=Globally%2C%20it%20is%20estimated%20that,the%20past%20year%20(1).)