

	<p>A peer-reviewed, double-blind, open-access Journal</p> <p>Research Journal of Human and Social Aspects</p> <p>Web link: https://rjhsa.com/index.php/rjhsa</p> <p>P-ISSN: 3006-9696, E-ISSN: 3006-970X</p> <p>Volume 2, Issue 3, 2024</p>	
---	--	--

<h2>Child Abuse and its impact on Mental Health</h2>	
<p>Bisma Akbar </p>	
<p>BS Diplomacy and Strategic Studies, Department of Political Science, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan</p>	
<p>Correspondence: bisma.akbar23340@hotmail.com</p>	

Article information	ABSTRACT
<p>Article History:</p> <p>Received: 2024-07-10</p> <p>Received in revised form: 2024-08-17</p> <p>Accepted: 2024-08-23</p> <p>Published Online: 2024-09-03</p> <p>Keywords:</p> <p>Child Abuse; Environment of Family; Mental Health; World Health Organization (WHO); Psychological Health.</p>	<p>Child abuse is a widespread and complex issue which happens to affect millions of children worldwide. The environment of family, bonds between parent-child, and parenting methods have high level of impact on children's mental health and personality. However, some parents knowingly or unknowingly end up hurting their children, which results in affecting them negatively creating an unstable personality and mindset. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that six out of 10 children of 5years below or above undergo physical and psychological violence. Child abuse leads to outcome of lifelong mental instability and disconnection with people, also physical harm includes impaired immune and nervous system development. Children who go through intense physical abuse often experience psychological health problems, including headaches, cancer, heart disease, and substance abuse. Long-term consequences include mental and physical health problems, such as inflammatory bowel disease, mood disorders, anxiety disorders, and heart disease. Addressing child abuse in any society requires cooperation from society, government and institutions so we can avoid and alleviate its destructive effects.</p>



© 2024 by the Authors. Licensee Akbar. This article is an open-access distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) License <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Introduction

Child abuse is a major problem almost every country. In today's rapidly changing and developing society, where life conditions are becoming increasingly complex, it is of utmost importance to raise children and youth in a healthy environment, because this generation is the foundation of the future. The family environment, parent-child relationships, and parenting methods play a key role in shaping children's mental health and personality. Although the family is considered the safest place for children, some parents intentionally or unintentionally harm children in the name of training, which results in negative effects on their physical, mental, and social development.

Violence, which is a harmful act against any individual, has become a major social and public health problem that requires the cooperation of society and various institutions to deal with. This problem manifests itself in emotional, physical, verbal, and sexual forms and is unfortunately also seen in some home environments. When a child is mistreated, not loved and cared for, it falls under the category of child abuse. The consequences of this last a lifetime. A recent WHO study has shown that six out of 10 children under the age of five are victims of physical and psychological violence at the hands of parents and caregivers. This report was given by WHO on November 5, 2024. According to WHO (world health organization), the immune system and nervous system of the victims can prevent the development of the child's immune system and nervous system. Child abuse occurs all over the world. In South Asia, countries like India, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Pakistan, child labor, prostitution, child trafficking, etc. are among the problems. According to WHO, (70 million) children in South Asia are engaged in unauthorized labor, of which (5.8 million) in India, (5.0 million) in Bangladesh, (3.4 million) in Pakistan and (2.0 million) in Nepal. While working, these children face psychological abuse and verbal abuse. Which includes shouting, threats, imprisonment, insults, criticism. Psychological health problems are seen in

children who have survived child abuse. The consequences of child abuse continue into adulthood. In terms of health, headaches, cancer, heart disease, and abused people drink alcohol, which is harmful to health. If we analyze the abuse, 18% of these children experience physical abuse and 9% experience sexual abuse. If the physical abuse is short-term, its effects include cuts, other injuries, fear, sadness, lack of sleep, sudden changes in behavior. A large-scale data showed that 157,000 people had experienced physical and sexual abuse, which included mental and physical health problems such as IBD (inflammatory bowel disease) mood disorder, anxiety disorder, heart disease.

It is essential to provide children with support and resources, along with prevention and intervention measures, when they are exposed to physical abuse. Trauma-informed therapy and counseling can help them better understand their experiences, learn healthy ways to cope, and restore a sense of safety and trust. Understanding the long-term effects of this problem is essential not only for developing effective intervention strategies but also for providing better support to affected children.

Aim of this Study

The main purpose of this study is to determine whether young people who are abused as children have more mental and physical problems than those who have not experienced abuse. To examine the relationship between different types of childhood abuse and physical health problems and to see what the relationship is between the number of types of childhood abuse and physical health problems and how it affects them.

Method and Design

The research methodology of this survey is quantitative. The survey was collected online by people. The participants were randomly selected from the population and included adults of different ages (18 years to 35 years). Youth (n=50) between the ages of 18 and 25 years participated in the study, out of which 44% of the total invited youth responded. The survey was conducted between January 25 and February 8. Population

(n=98) between the ages of 26 and 35 years participated in the study, out of which 76% of the total youth responded. The survey included 40% males and 56% females, and also people from different fields.

Measure:

Child abuse includes many types, including: Physical abuse Emotional Abuse Neglect of the child Early childhood violence by parents and caregivers A questionnaire was developed for the assessment of child abuse, which includes multiple choice questions (MCQs). This questionnaire is designed to understand the different possible experiences of children. Children who are abused face mental effects. This survey includes many questions on child abuse. Emotional abuse in children can indicate (a) Excessive fear of making mistakes (b) Low self-esteem (c) Withdrawal from friends and activities. At what age is abuse most common (a) 12 years (b) No age limit (c) Five to eight years (d) 14 to 18 years The most effective way to protect your children is (a) Talking openly with children (b) Applying strict discipline (c) Keeping children at home and not exposing them to the outside world Keep away from any specific reason why the abuser abuses children (a) Poverty (b) Lack of education (c) Mental problems are attached to the child's mind (a) Anxiety and depression (b) Difficulty trusting others (c) Academic struggle According to this survey, the behavior of children who are abused, its mental and physical effects were discussed. In addition, the abusers feel ashamed and what is the reason for abusing them. Parents should protect their children. They get equal treatment in the society. This evil should be eliminated in the society and awareness should be raised in various institutions. These 20 questionnaires were MCQs. The answers to these questions were different. Each question was measured separately so that it could be understood better. Many people also gave their opinions about it. The questions were designed in such a way that it could meet the objectives of the survey and get useful information about violence against children. The questions were designed by

avoiding difficult words or complex sentences so that respondents of all ages could be especially less This was done so that older people could understand them so that accurate research results could be obtained.

Results

Repeated childhood exposure to traumatic events without treatment can affect the brain and nervous system and increase health-risk behaviors. Characteristics of the study sample are that (38.7%) of 147 individuals reported exposure only, (Mean= 0.25) **25%** of participants recognized various behaviors as symptoms of emotional abuse, while there was a (SD=0.16) **16%** difference between responses.

Mental effects of child abuse

The results showed that a significant number of respondents (**56.1%**) acknowledged the severe mental health effects of child maltreatment, such as anxiety, depression and low self-esteem. **75.4%** of participants identified long-term mental health problems as a direct result of childhood maltreatment, reinforcing the importance of early intervention and treatment for affected children.

Prevention of child abuse in society

This was a question on which most participants were in favor of strict protective measures against child abuse in the society. Programs like awareness campaigns, educational workshops and involvement of law enforcement agencies should be considered necessary to tackle the problem, while **35.1%** of participants said that this evil cannot be eradicated due to parents not paying proper attention to their children.

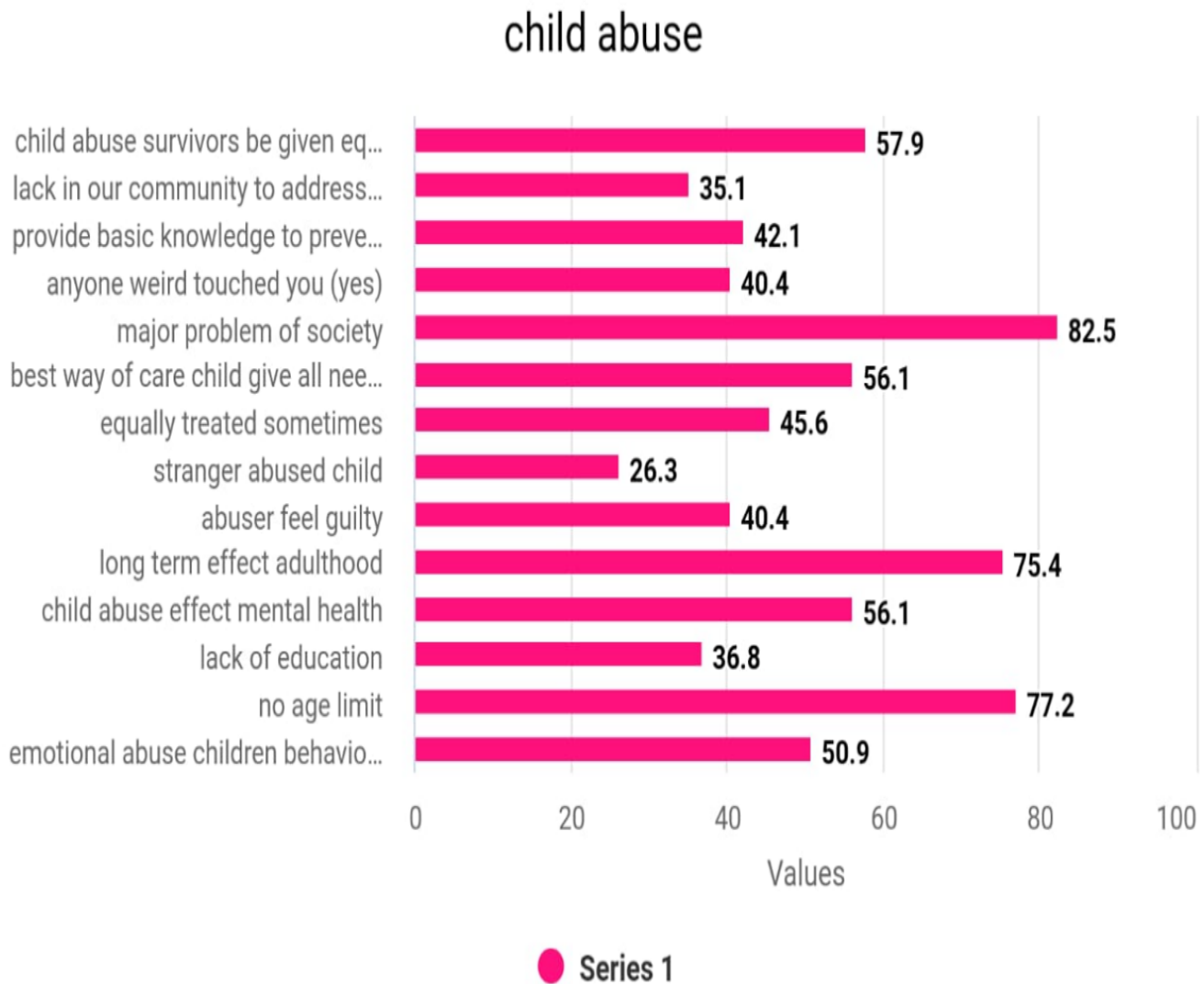
Awareness from various institutions

The results of this question indicate that in addition to the participants saying that schools can help reduce child abuse, the role of institutions such as schools and **NGOs** in raising awareness about child abuse is also important. Respondents pointed out that government agencies should take strict measures in such incidents.

Table 1: *Descriptive assessment of the child abuse*

Which of the following behaviors may indicate emotional abuse in children?	(a)Excessive fear of making mistakes (19.3%) (b)Low self-esteem (22.8%) (c)Withdrawal from friends or activities (7%) (d)All of the above(50.9%)
what age group are most often abused?	(a)12years (10.5%) (b)No age limit (77.2%) (c)16years (8.8%)
what is the most effective way for parents to protect their children?	(a)Open communication with children (78.9%) (b)Strict rules and discipline (10.5%)
for what specific reason abuser do child abuse?	(a)Poverty (15.8%) Lack of education (36.8%) (b)Mental health issues (29.8%) (c)Others(17.5%)
what is the impact of child abuse on children mental health?	(a)Anxiety and depression (35.1%) (b)Difficulty trusting others (8.8%) (c)All of above(56.1%)
can child abuse have long term effect on adulthood?	(a)Yes, always(75.4%) (b)Sometimes (19.3%)
do abusers feel guilty and ashamed and embarrassed?	(a)Always(31.6%) (b)Never(28.1%) (c)Rarely(40.4%)
who are the people who most often abuse children?	(a)Caregivers (7%) (b)Parents (22.8%) (c)Stranger(26.3%)
are children who are victims of abuse treated equally in society?	(a)Yes (19.3%) (b)Sometime (45.6%) (c)Rarely (19.3%) (d)Never(15.8%)
factor influencing degree of trauma of extra familiar sexual abuse.	(a)Duration (19.3%) (b)Strength of emotional bond (29.8%) (c)Penetration (10.5%) (d)His/her awareness of the taboo violation (40.4%)
which child care method is best for children?	(a) Take care of their needs(14%) (b) Never treat badly in front of others(19.3%) (c) both(56.1%)
do you think child abuse is a problem in our society?	(a)Yes (82.5%) (b)No(0%) (c)For sure(12.3%)
has anyone touched you in a way that is weird or does not feel good?	(a)Yes (40.4%) (b)No(35.1%) (c)Don't remember (19.3%)
what do you think can be done to reduce child abuse in our community?	(a)Teach children not to meet anyone privately (10.5%) (b)Provide basic knowledge of bad touching (42.1%) (c)Government should take authentic strict steps or punishment for abuser (35.1%) (d)Any other in your opinion (12.3%)
what resources do you think are lacking in our community to address child abuse?	(a)Careless parents(35.1%) (b)Disobeying nature of the kids(12.3%) (c)Basic knowledge to address in homes and schools(31.6%) (d)Trusting on relatives, teachers, friends or strangers(17.5%)
what support do you think child abuse survivors need the most?	(a)Acceptance in society (12.3%) (b)Psychology lessons (10.5%) (c)Provide them security (19.3%) (d)All of above(57.9%)

Figure 1: Factors of child abuse in Pakistan



Discussion

This study has highlighted that young people who have been abused or mistreated in childhood have more mental health complaints along with physical health complaints than people with healthy upbringing. If physical and mental health are compared, physical health is still good, but the effects on mental health give very bad results, but in some affected children, both of these can last for a long time. The participants in the study said that the most common mental symptoms reported among affected children are anxiety, depression, irritability, lack of trust in others, academic efforts, self-harm, anger, hatred, loss of self-esteem. All of

these are included, but apart from this, the participants also emphasized anxiety and depression more. Childhood abuse can lead to and increase the risk of developing psychological problems in adulthood, such as antisocial behavior, alcohol or **SUD (substance use disorder)**, in which a person uses an intoxicant and is unable to control themselves, which has negative effects on their lives, health and relationships. Only a few research studies have shown a link between child abuse and poor physical and mental health. The survey results suggest that the effects of child abuse last a lifetime, and the respondents did not specify an age limit for abuse. It can happen to a child at any

age. It is important from adolescence to adulthood, where a person finds their identity and decides on a path in life. These effects can limit a person's abilities. The results clearly show that parents can keep their children safe by communicating openly with them. Many participants agreed with this, but some said that strict discipline can also protect children. Parents play a very important role in the lives of children. Through open communication, children trust their parents and tell them everything. Parents can warn their children about inappropriate behavior. Parents are like a strong protective shield that protects children from physical, social, and emotional dangers. This is a huge problem in our society. It is not only in Pakistan but also has a serious impact on the mental health and social development of children all over the world. The results of this survey also included a question: Has anything like this ever happened to you? 40.4% of the participants said yes, while 35.1% of the people answered no. But when they were asked to explain it in detail, all the people refused. Some said that they do not remember anything about it. Most people forget small incidents and even refuse to remember or accept major traumatic events. I read in a study that one-third of adults who were sexually abused in childhood do not admit it later. This study also showed that interviewing a four-year-old child is extremely difficult because young children have limited language and imagination, and interviewing children between the ages of four and eight can easily affect them. Some parents refuse to give interviews, and many parents are asked to give interviews. If they go, they also forbid it. Similarly, in my research, many people forbade it, arguing that society does not consider these people right. The affected people feel ashamed of what people will think of them. Some said that those were very bad days for us and we do not want to recount the incident again. In addition, in this study, most of the abusers include parents and strangers. Parents do not like to listen to them and judge them before the conversation is complete. They get angry and do not believe anything they say or help them. They are beaten. The respondents said that strangers are the most abusers. They win the trust of children through

love and gifts. And some strangers kidnap children and subject them to physical and sexual abuse. Later, the child is threatened not to tell anyone about it. 45.6% of people agree that they are sometimes treated as equals in society. The respondents blamed neglectful parents who cannot take care of their children and do not know their good and bad. Such children are more likely to have personal problems because the love they do not get from their parents, they expect from others, which makes children vulnerable to this evil. The insights gained from this study encourage us to include the mental health and well-being of children in our priorities.

Conclusion

During all these surveys and procedures, we have finally come to the conclusion that this is a serious threat to the lives of children and this is all due to our negligence. Abuse affects the health of children and this can be found in schools, care centers and justice institutions. Very few programs have been implemented to protect children and prevent this evil, which is costing children and society a lot. In addition, children who have been abused should be included in society as equals, provided with mental treatment and all protection so that they do not feel what society will think of us and do not feel ashamed. Rather, this evil should be discussed openly so that it can be eliminated. Many parents do not provide any treatment to their children so that no one knows, which is a crime in our community. To reduce abuse, children should be given basic knowledge about it. The government should enforce strict laws against it and severely punish the abusers so that they do not do it again. Children should be provided with all their needs and do not make them feel bad in front of others. Children should be told at school and at home what is right and wrong. If a child is abused, reassure him that it is not his fault because many children feel guilty, which demotivates them. In the future, there is a need for such integrated measures that help improve both the mental health and academic performance of children at every stage of their lives. If we address these issues in a comprehensive manner, not only will

the lives of children improve, but society will also

benefit from its positive effects.

References

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry. (2024, April). Trauma and Child Abuse Resource Center. *American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*.

Islam Khabar. (2024, August 13). Over 1,600 cases of child abuse reported in Pakistan in first half of 2024: Report. Islam Khabar. Retrieved from

Cleveland Clinic. (n.d.). Child Abuse Types, Signs & Prevention. Cleveland Clinic. Retrieved from

Mayo Clinic. (n.d.). Child abuse - Diagnosis & treatment. Mayo Clinic. Retrieved from

ReachOut Australia. (2023, September 5). What is child abuse? ReachOut Australia.

NSPCC. (n.d.). Child sexual abuse. NSPCC. Retrieved from

Springer, K. W., Sheridan, J., Kuo, D., & Carnes, M. (2003). The long-term health outcomes of childhood abuse: An overview and a call to action. *Journal of General Internal Medicine, 18*(10), 864–870.

Police Scotland. (n.d.). What is child abuse? Police Scotland. Retrieved from

Government of Alberta. (n.d.). What is child abuse, neglect and sexual exploitation? Alberta.ca. Retrieved from

Cleveland Clinic. (n.d.). Child abuse types, signs & prevention. Cleveland Clinic. Retrieved from

Office of Justice Programs. (n.d.). Child abuse: Overview. U.S. Department of Justice. Retrieved from

BBC News. (2016, September 27). Pakistan's Hidden Shame. BBC News.

Naqvi, M. (Director), & Doran, J. (Producer). (2015). Pakistan's Hidden Shame [Documentary]. Channel 4.

Boduszek, D., Nanfuka Kalule, E., Harvey, R., Turyomurugyendo, F., Nelson, K., Willmott, D., & Mason, S. (2024). Child abuse and neglect and

associated mental health outcomes: A large, population-based survey among children and adolescents from Jamaica and Uganda. *Mental Health and Social Inclusion, 28*(1), 42–65.

Boduszek, D., Nanfuka Kalule, E., Harvey, R., Turyomurugyendo, F., Nelson, K., Willmott, D., & Mason, S. (2021). COVID-19 and domestic violence: Impact on mental health. *Journal of Criminal Psychology, 11*(3), 191–206.

Mangion, M., & Buttigieg, S. C. (2014). Multi-type childhood maltreatment: Associations with health risk behaviours and mental health problems in adolescence. *Journal of Children's Services, 9*(3), 191–206.

Holly, J., & Horvath, M. A. H. (2012). A question of commitment – improving practitioner responses to domestic and sexual violence, problematic substance uses and mental ill-health. *Advances in Dual Diagnosis, 5*(2), 59–67.

Zhu, Q., Gao, E., Cheng, Y., Chuang, Y.-L., Zabin, L. S., Emerson, M. R., & Lou, C. (2015). Child sexual abuse and its relationship with health risk behaviors among adolescents and young adults in Taipei. *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Health, 27*(6), 643–651.

Özbay, A., Aşağıdağ, R., & Eker, E. (2024). The effects of child physical abuse on children's mental health. *Journal of Experimental and Clinical Medicine, 41*(1), 192–200.

Rueness, J., Myhre, M. C., Strøm, I. F., Wentzell-Larsen, T., Dyb, G., & Thoresen, S. (2020). Child abuse and physical health: A population-based study on physical health complaints among adolescents and young adults. *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health, 48*(5), 511–518.

Cuellar, A. (2015). Preventing and treating child mental health problems. *The Future of Children, 25*(1), 111–134.

Horwitz, A. V., Widom, C. S., McLaughlin, J., & White, H. R. (2001). The impact of childhood abuse and neglect on adult mental health: A prospective study. *Journal of Health and Social*

Behavior, 42(2), 184–201.

Hyder, A. A., & Malik, F. A. (2007). Violence against children: A challenge for public health in Pakistan. *Journal of Health, Population and Nutrition*, 25(2), 168–178.

Lalor, K., & McElvaney, R. (2010). Child sexual abuse, links to later sexual exploitation/high-risk sexual behavior, and prevention/treatment programs. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 11(4), 159–177.

Larsen, C. D., Sandberg, J. G., Harper, J. M., & Bean, R. (2011). The effects of childhood abuse on relationship quality: Gender differences and clinical implications. *Family Relations*, 60(4), 435–445.

Nurse, A. M. (2020). Child sexual abuse: Definition, prevalence, and harm. In *Confronting child sexual abuse: Knowledge to action* (pp. 1–20). Lever press.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to research.

Funding Statement

No funding is received for this project.