

Effects of Child Sexual Abuse T.V. News Stories on Psychological Well Being of Parents in Lahore, Pakistan

Abstract: *Child sexual abuse is a severe problem that is penetrating Pakistan. This is important that how media is covering the issue of child sexual abuse as the audience is highly influenced by media. This study examines the effects of child sexual abuse T.V. news stories on the psychological well-being of parents. By applying purposive sampling, a sample of 100 parents from Lahore is selected. A survey method is employed to collect data from parents. Chi-square is applied to test the hypothesis and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. Results revealed that the majority of respondents agreed that news stories on child sexual abuse cases affect negatively and create distrust, stress, anxiety and fear among parents.*

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Key Words: Child Sexual Abuse, T.V, Lahore, Pakistan, Media

Introduction

Media is considered the fourth pillar of society. It presents the picture of society and has the power to control our thoughts and emotions. People depend upon the media to get a clear picture of society. Mass media inform, educate, guide, form and change public opinion act as a watchdog in society. They also set the agenda for society as to what issues they should talk about and how to talk about them. The impact of mass media on our decisions is enormous. People do learn from mass media and sometimes then change their attitudes and opinions. The perception of people about the world is highly influenced by the media. Child abuse is one of our serious public health problems. The media is contributing and playing a major role in highlighting the CSA (Child sexual abuse) as a social issue. Before 1960 it was a highly unacknowledged issue. The media is

focusing on CSA to eradicate this issue from society. The coverage of child sexual abuse cases is reaching its saturation point ([Kitzinger, 2004](#)).

Child abuse is mistreatment and negligence of a child by their elders, caregiver or other adults that is outside the norms of conduct that causes a considerable risk of physical or emotional harm to a child. The definition of child abuse was presented in 1999 by WHO (world health organization), "Child abuse or maltreatment constitutes all forms of physical or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of the relationship of responsibility, trust or power" ([Krug et al. 2002](#)).

Child abuse generally includes four types which are psychological abuse, neglect, physical

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abuse and sexual abuse. Physical abuse of a child is any non-accidental act that outcomes in bodily injury. Physical abuse can be the result of hitting, beating, kicking, shaking, burning, or otherwise hurting a child physically. Emotional abuse in children is defined as behaviors, language, and activities of parents, caregivers or someone else that have a negative psychological influence on the child. (Krug et al., 2002) define child neglect as "the failure of a parent to provide for the growth of the child, where the parent is in a position to do so ."CSA (Child sexual abuse) is defined as when children are forcefully involved in sexual activities. Usually, a child is under the supervision of an adult or caregiver, so they are more dependent on others and abusers use their power or emotional attachment to get the evil satisfaction of sexual need.

It is not easy to find out a child has gone through sexual abuse because they are threatened or sometimes they feel that it's their fault and they do not talk about it. But there are some symptoms that can be noticed by parents and elders like aggressive behavior, reservedness and difficulties in sleeping. An abused child may hate or look scared of a specific person and try to avoid their company. Severe health issues can be developed among sexually abused children, like tenderness in the genital and anal parts, pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases. To deal efficiently with child sexual abuse in Pakistan there, no proper data is saved for child sexual abuse happening. Fasihuddin (2006) stated that in Pakistan, proper statistics on CSA are not available. For real facts and figures, we have to rely on foreign reports. Some non-governmental organizations are working on it but they have a very limited approach.

Franklin & Parton (1991) stated that media coverage of child mistreatment is exaggerated, dramatic, and most of the time, empirically incorrect. This violation had long-lasting impacts on parents' and child's life. Though child abuse generally and child sexual abuse are specifically measured as violent act in Pakistan but it is not truly implemented in our country. A recent chain to CSA highlighted this issue in the media.

In recent years there has been a remarkable increase in child sexual abuse cases. According to Sahil foundation NGO of Pakistan, there were

2327 cases reported in 2018 on child sexual abuse, which shows that 33% increase in child sexual abuse cases in comparison to the last year.

In Pakistan, having this high percentage of child abuse cases, it is still not openly discussed and people, especially victims, consider it taboo to talk about it. But in recent years, Pakistani media has been performing an important role to break down such taboos by openly discussing and stressing cases of child sexual abuse. The important thing while highlighting such a sensitive issue is to follow a code of conduct or to meet ethical standards. Parents and child relationship is unique in its nature. For the healthy upbringing of the child, his or her parent's mental stability is very important. This study focused upon to measure the effects of child sexual abuse reporting on the psychological well-being of parents.

Research Objectives

- To find out parents' perceptions about the effects of child sexual abuse news stories on their psychological well-being.

Research Questions

- R.Q.: Are T.V. News stories on child sexual abuse affecting the psychological well-being of parents?

The Hypothesis of the Study

- H0: More exposure to child sexual abuse in T.V. news channels stories lesser the chances to have negative effects.
- H: More the exposure of child sexual abuse news stories greater the chances to have negative effects.

Operational Definitions of Key Term

Cases on Child Sexual Abuse

The term in the present study means to cases in which children are sexually mistreated and these cases are covered by the media.

Effects

To measure a change in social and psychological behavior of parents having children aged between (3-12) years.

Psychological well-being

The operational definition of psychological well-being is a mental and emotional positive condition of parents. The researcher will analyze how reporting on child sexual abuse is negatively affecting parents and creating stress, anxiety, aggression, fear, depression and phobia.

Literature Review

Apparently, indeed The Government of Pakistan has designed laws and initiated several plans to deal with the grave issues regarding child protection and to avoid abuse and violence but the poor implementation has failed the government in this regard. There are no specialized systems, staff and experts to deal with such sensitive issues. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and media somehow play a role to highlight issues but at the same time, they sometimes exploit the poor victims for their commercial interests. Whenever such traumatic incidents are highlighted by the media, the politicians and other concerned authorities and organizations lift up the situation but sooner or later, everyone moves on and things get normal for everyone except the victims and their families ([Shackle, 2021](#)). There is a strong need for a proper system of surveillance, help centers, awareness and advocacy campaigns to sensitize people and educate them on how they can avoid such incidents and report to the relevant authorities to seek help also. There must be strict actions to implement the laws regarding child protection as well.

[Virk \(2020\)](#) reported that the law ministry of Pakistan conceded the Anti-Rape ordinance (2020), declaring severe punishments for molesters, sex offenders and rapists including the death penalty and chemical castration. The decision has been finalized after long debates and discussions in media as well as in national and provincial assemblies. It has been taken as the backdrop of the horrible incidents of Qasur, Kashmore, Lahore, Sialkot and many other cities where the cruel molesters assaulted and even killed the victims. This brought emotional outrage to the whole nation and people, media, human rights activists and politicians. Everyone came forward and demanded malicious punishments for the culprits.

The drastic facts and figures of child sexual abuse cases are painful even to shake the spine but the media is playing its due role somehow to sensitize people to realize the gravity of this issue before it gets too late. The media has initiated various campaigns to educate people to take precautionary measures to deal with such issues. There have been certain programs to connive parents to break the barrier of communication with their kids and talk about the concepts of good and bad touch. The media has been playing a significant role in order to make this taboo a topic of discussion among parents and their children and ensuring preventive measures to deal with this social evil ([Haider 2020](#)).

Chachar, Younas and Mian (2018) analyzed the legislation and implementation of child protection and welfare programmes. They suggested that certain government of Pakistan has tried to address the issues related to child care and protection. There are a few essential pragmatic approaches that need to be implemented to ensure good quality child protection services. These precautionary and pragmatic approaches can play a significant role in dealing with this malicious crime and make the brutal criminals feel frightened of the consequences of their cruelty and inhumane behavior.

There must be a well-organized system to monitor, report, prevent and control criminal acts related to children. Provision of a safe atmosphere and support for children must be imperative as victims by the state and child protection and welfare departments. The children who are victims must get legal support, safety and security from the state in their judicial process. All the stakeholders need to play their role effectively and work in collaboration with each other to make Pakistan a safe and secure country for children. The parents, teachers, medical staff, physical and psychological health experts, government officials and other concerned stakeholders need to contribute to this cause.

Section (90) of (the PPC), Pakistan Penal code conspicuously declared child abuse a serious crime. Section (332) has also defined the notion of any kind of harm or hurt against children and declared strict punishment as well clearly to ensure the authorities take strict actions against

this criminal offence. The Anti-Terrorism Act (1997) referred to child molestation as a terrorism and violence act ([Sparc, 2012](#)). So Pakistani lawmakers are making efforts to cope with this heinous crime but still, there are some dark areas that need to be worked on by the legislative bodies.

Research in social sciences has broad and widespread domains of knowledge and wisdom. Wimmer and Dominick (2011) remarked literature review is one of the most fundamental and central parts of the research process. The literature review provides general synopsis, background information, description, critical evaluation and summary of a research problem ([Arlene, 2014](#)).

It is crucial to have a better understanding of child sexual abuse in today's society and it is difficult to make an estimation of the drastic effects on children's life. There is a very low ratio of children who are secure because there is no distinction regarding race, gender and age. Adults who commit this action want to gratify their pleasure and use their power and dominance over weak and dependent children. So it can be said that child sexual abuse is not done accidentally but is a deliberate and selfish act Johnson (2004).

Mccarton (2009) reported that Constructionism and Contextualization both play a significant role in covering sensitive issues like child abuse news stories. It has been observed that now media give extraordinary coverage to issues of pedophilia through news reports, awareness campaigns, documentaries, and dramas to highlight this issue at an individual as well as societal level. Certainly, it can be asserted that this media coverage has made this issue a high-risk social evil and increased the level of consciousness among people for child protection as well.

[Goldman, Wolcott and Kennedy \(2003\)](#) defined child abuse as a criminal act that can harm a child physically, emotionally or sexually and may have some short-term or even long-term effects on the victim. The consequences may vary from case to case, depending on the resilience and ability of the child to cope with the situation. But certainly, it has adverse outcomes on the personality of the victim. It has become one of the

most significant social concerns because reporting of abuse and assault cases of children is increasing each year and the situation is getting traumatically intense.

[Lakhdir, Parpio and Farooq \(2017\)](#) reported that following the critical situation of rising in the reporting of child abuse cases worldwide, it has become a global issue. It has stirred the world that every stakeholder has to take a firm stand to eradicate this social evil and contribute pragmatically and urge the lawmakers to the legislation of child protection laws. The facts and figures by WHO have demonstrated the traumatic situation showing that globally about 1 billion children within the age group of 2-17 suffered emotional, physical or sexual abuse or violence last year (World Health Organization).

[Imdad \(2019\)](#) reported that a survey by NGO revealed that there had been a significant increase in the reporting of child abuse cases by 11 percent in recent two years. The astonishing facts of this report revealed that about 3,832 cases of child abuse were reported by the media, demonstrating a 33% upsurge as compared with the previous year. The cases included 55 percent of cases of girls and 45 percent of boys as victims of harassment, assault or abuse, sodomy, abduction, rape and murder. Zainab case stimulated the whole system somehow and eventually, the culprit was hanged. It did not end the brutality of child abuse but to a greater extent, it has given courage to parents of victims to come forward and use media as the potential power to reach out masses.

[Temoney \(2008\)](#) analyzed the relationship and impact of media coverage on the policy-making and legislative processes of child protection and welfare programs. He concluded that media has become the most influential and indispensable part of the social system and plays a significant role in the policy-making process for programs of child protection and welfare. Research has proven that media has been observed to pressurize legislative bodies and affected the legislative programs for child safety and welfare in various countries. The media focuses on the issues of child protection from abuse, foster care, neglect and concerns of adoption processes. Media coverage and the time and space given to such issues influence

significantly highlight the child protection issues in the mind of people as well as make it an important issue for legislators. The findings of this study concluded that the media sets the agenda for people as well as for governments and legislative authorities through its reporting and style of covering important and sensitive events.

[Gergen \(1995\)](#) and Burr (1995) referred to the idea of social constructionism by affirming that the cognition of individuals constructs social realities for the whole society and it adapts and changes accordingly. So the realities cultivated by media through contextualization and representation of facts in the minds of people not only make significant changes at the individual level but they transform attitudes of people at the societal level. It has been evident that the media has played a crucial role in highlighting the issue of child abuse and urging people to think seriously about it. The credit of breaking the stereotype of abuse as "a taboo not to be discussed" has also been broken due to the media and its awareness campaigns.

Amundson(1993) and Berger(2001) analyzed the role of media in the light of agenda-setting theory and stated that media attention on child abuse stories evoked feelings of fright, anger and anguish among people. The cases were reported and highlighted by the media by playing up the stories of child abuse and keeping an emphasis on the cruelty and severity of the stories about child abuse. This coverage made people think about it and take action to protect their children from any harm.

Dr. Kempe (1962), a social worker, published an article about child abuse referring to "The Battered Child Syndrome," highlighting the adverse impacts of physical abuse on children. The article got immense coverage from newspapers, television shows and other mass media. The article also highlighted the issue of children languishing in foster care and eventually resulted in legislation to reduce the problem. The term "The Battered child syndrome" was frequently used in academic journals, newspapers, television programs and media reports discussing the subject matter of child abuse.

Theoretical Framework

The following section has analyzed the theoretical framework of the present research study in the light of communication and media effect theories.

Cultivation Theory

The contemporarily media-saturated world has transformed our lives in such a manner that what we see, what we think, what we feel, what we do, everything is, to some extent, is determined by the media we are being exposed to. It is media that shape reality for us and tells us what is happening around us. Geroge Gerbner and Gross (1974) validated this claim in their Cultivation theory which explains fostering effects of television on viewers. Cultivation theory explains in a frame that T.V. is the only medium that purposes the charge of molding, developing views or originating the idea of truth. The basic concept of this theory is that the more people watch television more they believe that reality is the same as shown on television.

Basic Assumptions

The main assumptions of cultivation theory are as follows

Unique Medium

According to the cultivation theory, T.V. is the exclusive medium and has many features involved, which make television a powerful source. First, television is prevalent; it is available almost in every household. Television is highly reachable, as it uses more than one human sense.

Nature of Seeing

The idea of cultivation theory is how people absorb information from television. People blindly believe in the content that they see on television. It suggests that these are not viewers who choose to watch specific content on media but there is a certain time which is feasible to people and they watch whatever is going on media. According to [Gerbner \(1998\)](#), what television is showing are constant, strong and broadly shared norms, pictures and presenting

the formal features and concentration of the medium itself.

Magic Bullet Theory

Magic bullet theory suggests that media has direct and very immediate effects on the audience. It was the first theory developed in the mid-1930s which describes the media effect and behavior towards media. The media fire message into the audience's head and create an effect like magic. The main assumption of the magic bullet theory is that it injects media messages into the audience's mind, which creates changes in the behavior of that audience. This assumes that media is so powerful and the audience is passive towards media. The idea is that this is not the people who use the media. Rather, the media is using and manipulating the minds of people.

The public cannot escape from media effects as the media planned its message in a way that has a drastic effect on the public resulting change in the behavior of the public.

Relevance

Cultivation theory explains how television content has strong and direct effects on the thoughts, perceptions, and mindsets of its

consumers. Since this study aimed to analyze modes of reporting and portrayal of the CSA in the media, the magic bullet theory discusses the immediate effect of media exposure which is relevant to the present study as this study is measuring the effect of media reporting on parents. These were selected due to their significant relevance to the study of media effects on consumers. The theory has been taken as a framework to analyze what impacts the content of these cases makes on viewers, particularly the parents of children.

Methodology

The survey method is employed to collect data regarding the effects of reporting child sexual abuse cases on parents whose children are between 3 to 12 years. Purposive sampling is used to collect the data from Lahore city. Lahore is distributed between nine towns and one individually administrative region. A sample of 100 respondents was selected from each town by using equal proportions.

Results

In this section, the major graphical findings of the concerned study are represented.

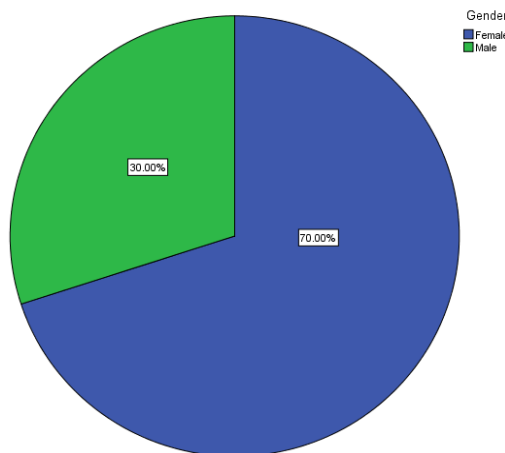


Figure 1: Gender of the respondents.

Interpretation Figure 1 demonstrated that the selected sample for the present study comprises 100 respondents in total. The percentage

indicated 30% males and 70% females, respectively.

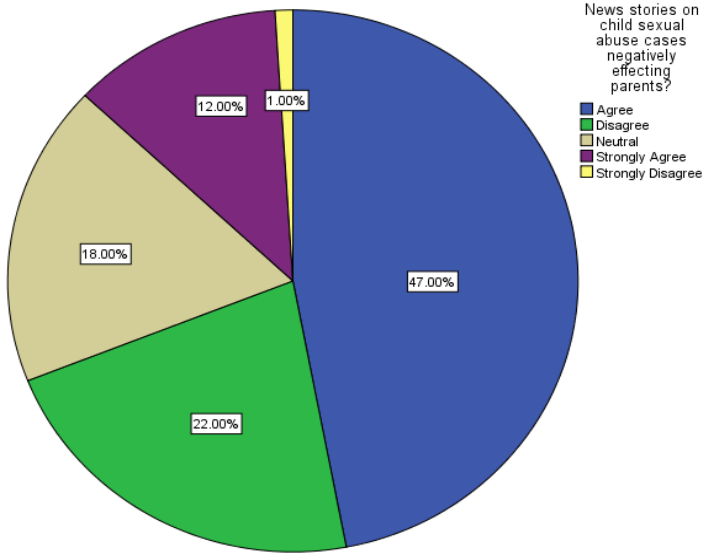


Figure 2: News stories on child sexual abuse cases negatively affecting parents?

Interpretation The findings of figure 2 revealed that 47% of respondents agreed that news stories on child sexual abuse cases negatively affect the parents. 12% strongly agreed, 18% were neutral,

22% disagreed and 1% strongly disagreed. Therefore, results show that majority of the respondent agreed that news stories on child sexual abuse cases negatively affect parents.

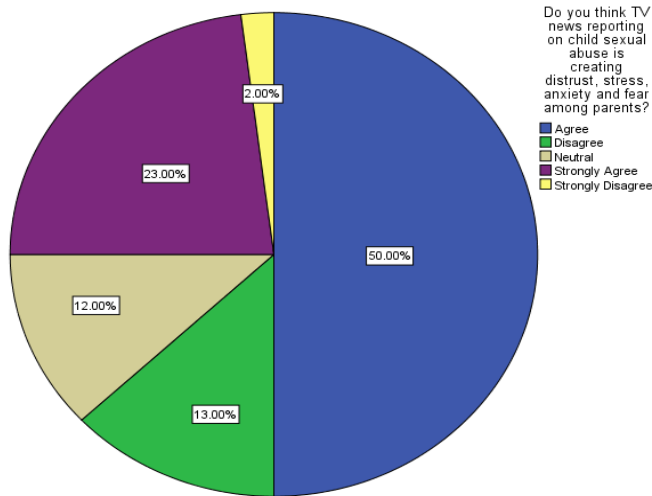


Figure 3: Do you think T.V. news stories on child sexual abuse are creating distrust, stress, anxiety and fear among parents?

The findings of figure 3 revealed that 50% of respondents agreed with the statement that T.V.

news stories on child sexual abuse are creating distrust, stress, anxiety and fear among parents.

23% strongly agreed, 12% neutral, 13% disagreed and 2% strongly disagreed. Therefore results show that according to the majority opinion, T.V.

news stories on child sexual abuse cases are creating distrust, stress, anxiety and fear among parents.

Table 1. Chi-square test for parent's perception of child sexual abuse news stories effects

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	156.312 ^a	16	.000
Likelihood Ratio	69.723	16	.000
N of Valid Cases	100		

Above table 1 shows the p-value is less than 0.05 in the chi-square table, which shows that there is a significant relationship between more exposure to child sexual abuse stories and more negative effects on parents. So the alternative is approved.

Conclusion

The present study examined child sexual abuse

T.V. news stories and their effects on the psychological well-being of parents. A sample of 100 parents was purposively selected from Lahore. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire. Results revealed that the majority of respondents agreed that news stories on child sexual abuse cases affect negatively and create distrust, stress, anxiety and fear among parents.

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