

UNVEILING CHILD ABUSE: AN ANALYSIS OF NEWSPAPER COVERAGE IN LAHORE, PAKISTAN (2020-2023)

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ABSTRACT

Media coverage plays a critical role in shaping public understanding of child abuse and neglect, often influencing societal perceptions and policy responses. This study examines the portrayal of child abuse in newspapers in Lahore, Pakistan, focusing on the years 2020-2023. Employing a qualitative research design and content analysis methodology, the study analyzes how newspapers frame and report incidents of child abuse, particularly child sexual abuse (CSA). Findings reveal patterns in coverage frequency, framing, and narrative presentation across English and Urdu newspapers. The analysis highlights both the strengths and shortcomings of media reporting on child abuse issues, including sensationalism, lack of sensitivity, and politicization. Despite these challenges, media coverage serves as a crucial platform for raising awareness and prompting societal dialogue on child protection. The study underscores the importance of ethical reporting practices, collaboration between media, government, and civil society, and the implementation of preventative measures to address child abuse effectively. Recommendations include enhancing journalist training on ethical reporting, promoting collaboration between media and child welfare organizations, and advocating for stricter reporting standards to protect victims' privacy.

Keywords: Child sexual abuse (CSA), Media coverage, Newspapers, Framing and Priming, Preventative measures

INTRODUCTION

The media has played a crucial role in increasing society's understanding of child abuse and neglect. This has been achieved primarily through continuous news coverage and features focusing on individual cases, research findings, and intervention efforts, rather than through targeted community education campaigns (Kosher & Ben., 2020). Recently, there has been a shift in attention towards analyzing how media covers topics related to child welfare, with scholars, academics, and professionals in the area examining this coverage (Habib et al., 2023). The media has significantly shaped societal perceptions of "normal" and "deviant" behavior, as well as what constitutes child abuse. At times, the media has appeared to have a greater influence on child protection policy and practice than field professionals. The media's coverage, analysis, and intervention in news stories about child sexual abuse (CSA) increases public awareness and brings attention to the issue in political and societal contexts (Jabeen.,2020). Media coverage of the topic plays a

crucial role in explaining the importance of child protection and safeguarding policies and services. The study analyzes how the media's coverage, portrayal, and advocacy roles contribute to initiating a dialogue on prevention to establish a collective responsibility for children's public safety (Shah.,2020). It helps to comprehend the social and cultural changes happening in society, particularly in Pakistan's media, and how these changes allow alternative care organizations to focus on larger-scale issues. Media coverage is considered crucial to keep public attention on children's issues in the political sphere and to ensure accountability in child protection services. However, the way the media presents child abuse and child protection can negatively impact children and their families (Kousar & Bhadra.,2022). The study analyzes how newspapers in Pakistan covered news stories related to child sexual abuse. Content analysis is employed to examine how child abuse news items are presented in four prominent English and Urdu newspapers

from 2020 to 2023. Media coverage may provide comprehensive coverage of these subjects, focusing on prevention techniques and creating supportive settings and secure, stable, and affectionate connections for all children and families (Arshad et al., 2023).

The present study seeks to assess the media's portrayal of child abuse news and its connection to the implementation of The Children Act and reporting criteria (Jabeen., 2020). This paper employed media framing theory to do a quantitative content analysis study. The report recommended that lawmakers, child welfare organizations, and the media advocate for children's rights to decrease the incidence of abuse cases. The newspaper reports provide an accurate depiction of the violence, abuse, and exploitation that children face in Pakistan (Habib et al., 2023). This includes both isolated incidents and systemic issues caused by broader structural and institutional factors. The data serves multiple functions. They emphasize the real and possible dangers to children in Pakistani society, hence making child safety a significant concern. They offer a solid methodological rationale for utilizing newspaper coverage as a documentation of child protection issues in Pakistan (Tahir., 2021). Their focus is on how the media brings attention to child protection concerns in the public sphere and political discussions (Latif et al., 2020). This research demonstrates how the portrayal of child safety issues in print media mirrors reality and can influence public perception and responses to these issues. This data can illuminate the current and possible dangers that Pakistani youngsters encounter. They are used to conceptualize and define child protection issues and offer recommendations for child protection policy, legislation, and programs (Anik et al., 2021). This research examines how the language and substance of print media coverage convey child abuse issues, reflecting reality and perhaps influencing public opinions. Journalists are responsible for the difficult yet crucial duty of reporting on child abuse. The journalist and the audience may feel inundated by the delicate subject matter, the graphic details of the allegations, and the enormous outrage surrounding the incidents (Shah et al., 2020). Media specialists have a distinct opportunity to impact public comprehension of the issue of child abuse. Journalists can broaden the coverage of child abuse tales by focusing on and documenting the initiatives taken by communities to prevent future incidents of

abuse. The media may educate the public on preventing child abuse and ensuring the healthy development of all children by shifting their focus (Jabeen et al., 2021). Child abuse dynamics are recognized as a growing global social issue intimately linked to child humiliation. Pakistan's government has implemented various measures to tackle child abuse and neglect, including enacting laws to protect children from exploitation, abuse, and violence. However, these laws are often not enforced or are ineffective due to a lack of clear definitions of child abuse and related terms, as well as inconsistent methods for reporting cases of child abuse. NGOs in Pakistan mostly concentrate on addressing serious cases of child sexual abuse, such as child rape and commercial sexual exploitation of minors. The study aimed to analyze how newspapers in Pakistan covered news topics related to child sexual abuse. A quantitative content analysis method was utilized to examine how CSA news items were framed in four mainstream media outlets. Media outlets in English and Urdu published from 2020 to 2023. The research field aims to analyze the frequency of child sexual abuse news reports in newspapers. b) To examine the presentation of child sexual abuse narratives. c) To contrast the framing of English and Urdu newspapers.

LITERAURE REVIEW

Child abuse is a diverse occurrence that has escalated globally. Children are subjected to maltreatment in various settings such as homes, schools, markets, and businesses, irrespective of their social class, group, religion, or gender (Ahmad & Khan, 2023). The main forms of abuse include physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. Ashraf (2022) defines physical abuse as any action that results in a kid being injured, such as hair pulling or hitting, whereas neglect is characterized by not meeting a child's physical and emotional needs. Emotional abuse includes actions that cause individuals to feel unloved, undervalued, and unwanted, such as insults and shouting. Sexual abuse encompasses behaviors like genital or oral contact, child exhibitionism, and child pornography, as outlined by Nawaz et al. (2022). Child abuse has significant repercussions for children. Ahmad (2023) states that child maltreatment can result in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, low self-esteem, social dysfunction, interpersonal difficulties, high-risk behavior, suicide, and violence in adulthood. Bibi's (2023) study on the implications of

child abuse indicates that children who experience early abuse or neglect are more likely to exhibit behavior issues such as instability, despair, and aggressiveness. Child abuse also impacts economic well-being in later phases (Waseem, 2020). Increased child maltreatment has a greater negative impact on the likelihood of employment in middle age, particularly for women. Child abuse has a notable effect on disease susceptibility and can hinder the effectiveness of treatment for mental disorders (Khan, 2020). Ahmad and Khan's (2023) study on child abuse and neglect shows that stress and trauma are factors in the development of medical and psychiatric illnesses. Child abuse has both short-term and long-term repercussions on victims. The long-term repercussions are concerning as they have a lasting impact on the life trajectory of victims. Media coverage of child sexual abuse (CSA) has numerous problems. Sensationalism, stereotyping, and biased coverage of CSA present a significant hazard to the victims and survivors according to Qadeer (2023). A study in Germany found that victims of a crime require thorough and forceful media coverage to bring attention to the issue and raise awareness in society (Khan et al., 2024). Television news stories are typically presented in an episodic rather than thematic manner. Episodic framing presents a tale by focusing on an individual's experience, whereas thematic framing places the issue within a broader societal context. Episodic framing attributes societal problems to individual responsibility (Cockbain, 2020). Social awareness and response to incidences of child sexual abuse are influenced by social debates including victim and child advocate organizations, doctors, academics, legislators, policymakers, the media, and public speakers, as indicated by a study. Historically, the phrase "child sex abuser" has evolved to connote individuals as predators, monsters, and serial child rapists (Latif, 2020). There is less research on parent-sibling communication about the prevention of child sexual abuse. It is seldom clear what knowledge parents provide to their children about CSA and how to prevent it. Parents have a crucial role in providing guidance on the sexual socialization of their children (Rose, 2021). Another study revealed that mothers tend to offer more information and engage in discussions about sexual assault prevention. Mothers are more likely to share information about preventive measures with their daughters than with their sons (Nadeem et al., 2021). A research at Muhammadiyah

Elementary Schools in Pakistan found that children lacked the ability to distinguish between pleasant and unpleasant touching circumstances when assessing their self-protection knowledge against Child Sexual Abuse (CSA). Only 50% of the respondents could recognize unfavorable touching circumstances, and they were also unable to report these incidents to their elders (Abbas et al., 2020). The United Nations data indicate that CSA is a prevalent issue in Pakistan. Because of its sensitive nature, this issue has gone largely unmonitored and is rapidly escalating (Rowther et al, 2020). Sarfraz (2020) examined various reporting methods on child protection groups and concluded that media coverage of child molestation instances can impact the policies of organizations and individuals' perspectives and actions on the matter. The media's coverage of child molestation instances raises awareness and encourages people to report such incidents to the authorities. Many media coverages did not seize the chance to discuss abuse prevention efforts and neglected to incorporate any possible danger or causal factors. Child victims' voices were seldom heard among the stakeholders. As per Iqbal (2021). The involvement of legal specialists was collaborative. Reader responses often expressed rage and sorrow. Various solutions need to be developed to bridge the disparity between research and statistics on child abuse and the way it is currently portrayed in the media, as these representations impact the perceptions of both the general public and politicians. The study aims to examine the media's involvement in researching and reporting incidents of abuse against children. This research can enhance public awareness by providing precise and reliable information on cases of violence against children, enabling the media to broaden public understanding of this issue and emphasize its severity. The media can play a role in motivating individuals to take proactive measures to prevent and address incidents of violence against children. Another advantage is that balanced media coverage of incidences of abuse against children might encourage law enforcement action by increasing pressure on agencies to crack down on perpetrators. This can prompt society to ensure that culprits are held responsible and lead to quicker and more suitable responses from authorities. Press coverage had a crucial role in exposing the CSA's secrecy, amplifying the voices of victims, sparking responses at international, national, and local levels, and facilitating the prosecution of

perpetrators. Moreover, not all media coverage of CSA is now reliable. Communication studies suggest that the media frequently provides inaccurate coverage of CSA. Enhancing your comprehension of the CSA and its principles will enable you to enhance public health within that framework. Consider how the media influences public perception regarding the CSA. Communications researchers established the belief in framing in conjunction with the agenda-setting theory as a tool to study media influence. Frames are concepts that involve selection, emphasis, and presentation based on underlying assumptions about existence, events, and significance. Identifying societal issues through framing involves picking and publicizing specific aspects of events or issues to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and solution. Atif (2023) highlights the importance of people' approach to addressing and managing problems, as discussed by Nadeem et al. (2023). The University of Barcelona's 2009 Meta-Study, published in the *Clinical Psychology Review*, analyzed 65 studies from 22 countries to estimate the global prevalence of child sexual abuse in community and student samples.

Research Questions

- Q1: How is child abuse portrayed in newspapers in Lahore, Pakistan?
- Q2: How do newspapers frame and report incidents of child abuse, particularly child sexual abuse (CSA)?
- Q3: How does media coverage contribute to societal perceptions and responses to child abuse?
- Q4: What are the differences in coverage between English and Urdu newspapers?

METHADODOLOGY

1) Research Design

This study used a qualitative research design to investigate the intricacies and underlying themes in media coverage of child abuse cases in Lahore. News stories coverage related to child abuse cases in Lahore are analyzed using a systematic content analysis approach.

2) Data Collection

The population was newspapers of Lahore sampling technique was purposive sampling in order to get the targeted news. The population was newspapers of Lahore sampling technique was purposive sampling in order to get the targeted news.

A purposive sample strategy is used to select a coverage of newspapers. Data was collected for 12 months consecutively, starting in January 2023 and ending in December 2023, to provide an intensive analysis of media coverage on child abuse occurrences.

3) Data Analysis

A coding scheme is created to identify and assess several elements of media reporting, such as tone, framing, victim representation, perpetrator depiction, contextual circumstances, and society responses. Data undergone thematic analysis to detect repeating patterns, dominating narratives, and underlying biases in media coverage of child abuse occurrences. Two independent coders are involved in coding the data to guarantee consistency and reliability. Discrepancies are handled by discussion and consensus.

4) Ethical Considerations

All data gathered from media sources is anonymized to safeguard the privacy and anonymity of persons engaged in documented child abuse incidents. As the study entails analyzing publicly accessible media content, express consent is unnecessary. Nevertheless, ethical standards about fair use and source citation are rigorously followed. Efforts are made to prevent re-victimization or the continuation of damaging stereotypes while sharing study results. The study maintains sensitivity and respect towards victims of child abuse.

Coding Main Theme	Sub Theme
Tone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive • Neutral • Negative
Framing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thematic • Episodic
Victim representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sympathetic • Stigmatized
Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sensationalist • Sensitive

Research comparing the tone and language of newspaper coverage in Urdu versus English

regarding Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) cases in Lahore suggests that Urdu newspapers tend to adopt a more harsh or sensationalist tone compared to English newspapers.

- **Cultural Context:** Urdu is the national language of Pakistan and holds significant cultural importance. It's often used to communicate with a broader segment of the population, including those who might not be proficient in English. In contrast, English newspapers might target a more educated or elite audience. The cultural context in which Urdu newspapers operate could influence the tone and language used in reporting sensitive issues like CSA.
- **Sensitivity to Language:** Urdu language and its expressions might differ in nuances compared to English. Certain terms or phrases in Urdu might convey a stronger emotional impact or be perceived as more aggressive or confrontational. This could lead to a seemingly harsher tone in Urdu reporting compared to English.
- **Audience Perception:** The audience of Urdu newspapers might expect a different style of reporting compared to English newspapers. This could lead to Urdu newspapers using language and tone that resonate more with their audience's expectations, even if it appears harsher to an outside observer.
- **Societal Factors:** Pakistani society, like many others, may have cultural norms and attitudes that influence how CSA cases are discussed and reported. These societal

factors can shape the language and tone used in media coverage, with Urdu newspapers potentially reflecting and reinforcing certain societal norms or biases more strongly than English newspapers.

In summary, the coding of newspaper coverage regarding Child Sexual Abuse Cases in Lahore involves analyzing the tone, framing, victim representation, and language used in reporting to gain insights into the emotional stance, narrative perspective, portrayal of victims, and linguistic strategies employed by newspapers in their coverage of CSA cases. This analysis helps researcher understand the media's role in shaping public perceptions, influencing policy responses, and fostering awareness and support for addressing the issue of child sexual abuse.

RESULTS

The newspaper review analyzes reported child abuse instances in publications released from 2020 to 2023. Research was conducted in 2023. The selection of newspapers was based on various considerations, such as their nationwide distribution and readership. The researcher meticulously examined 850 newspapers, crafted news pieces, and delved into comprehensive reports in an attempt to investigate the handling of children's sexual assault. The materials were grouped into broader groups based on research questions related to the type of incident. Subsequently, the items in each category were counted for each newspaper individually and collectively. Each piece delved further into topics such as the framing of reports on child sexual abuse, the purpose of reporting, and the level of child welfare issues.

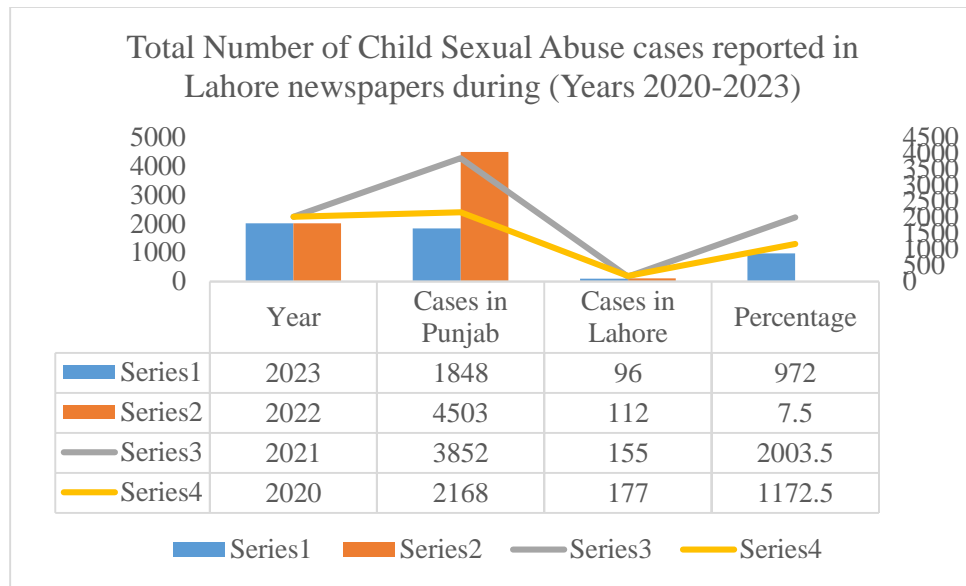
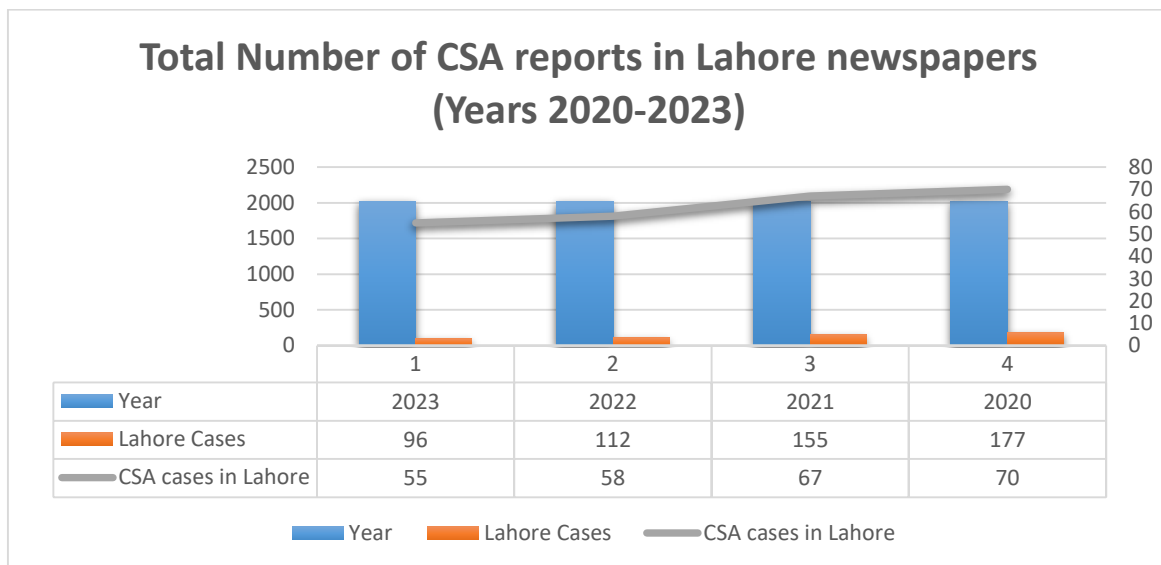


Table 1 revealed that Lahore reported 96 out of a total of 150 cases in the year 2023, the highest number. In 2022, the second-highest number of

instances, 112, was reported. In Lahore, 155 cases were reported in 2021 and 177 cases were reported in 2020.



In 2023, Lahore reported the largest number of instances of CSA, with 55 cases, as shown in Table

2. There were 58 reported cases of CSA in 2022, 67 cases in 2021, and 70 cases in 2020.

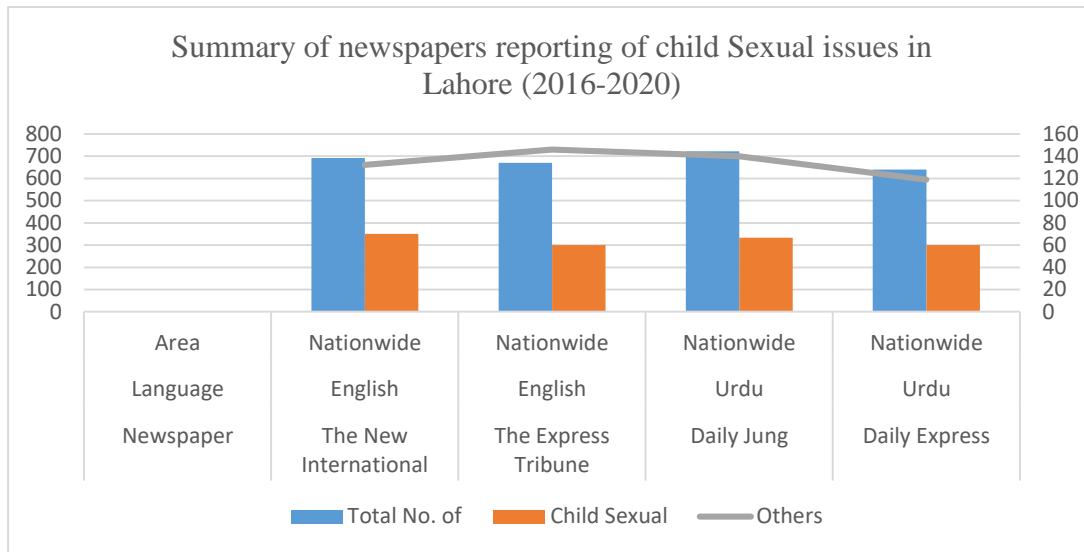


Table 3 displays that between 2020 and 2023, a total of 2718 incidences of child abuse in Lahore were documented in four publications, two in English and two in Urdu. The table above displays the data. A survey spanning four years revealed that 2178 child abuse instances were publicized in national media in Lahore, encompassing both English and Urdu publications. The researcher collected two English newspapers, The New International and The Express Tribune, as well as two Urdu publications, Daily Jung and Daily Express. The English Newspapers (The New International and The Express Tribune) reported a total of 1368 instances, with 695 cases of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA). The Urdu Newspapers (Daily Jung and Daily Express) reported 1350 cases, with 680 cases of CSA.

Discussion

In both urban and rural areas, the incidence of sexual assault is on the rise, particularly in populations that are middle-class, working-class, and economically disadvantaged. In addition, the reports in the news tended to demonstrate that these reports do not discover any reason for the murder and killing of children. In newspapers, the news that was pertinent to matters pertaining to child protection did not receive the attention that it should have received. mostly due to the fact that the media has their own agenda, and the most important agenda they have is politics. Before any particular instance received notice on social media or in mainstream media, the newspaper did not publish any story on the front pages of the publication.

When it comes to publishing or framing a story involving child sexual abuse, there is no code of ethics that takes care of ethical considerations. In most cases, framing is defined as the process of selecting and promoting particular aspects of perceived reality. This can be accomplished by promoting a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, or recommendation for treatment. Additionally, framing can be defined as the distinction between aspects of an object or attributes that characterize the feature of an object and are the central theme of a particular message. The question lends support to the strategy of framing; the issue is connected to the media and has an impact on how advertising is perceived. Based on the findings, it was determined that a total of 16,300 instances of child abuse were reported in newspapers in Pakistan throughout the course of the previous five years (2020-2023). Over the course of the five years (2020-2023), a total of 12,371 instances of child abuse were reported in the province of Punjab. In Lahore alone, there were a total of 706 instances that were documented throughout the years (2020-2023).

Conclusion

In Pakistani society, newspapers play a crucial role in highlighting the real and potential threats faced by children, particularly concerning child abuse issues in cities like Lahore, the country's second-largest city. The research findings suggest that Urdu-language newspapers tend to use a more harsh tone and language compared to English-

language newspapers when reporting on cases of child sexual abuse (CSA) in Lahore. This indicates a potential difference in the way news is presented across different linguistic contexts and highlights how the language of reporting can influence public perceptions and reactions to such sensitive issues. Newspaper coverage serves as a methodological record of these challenges, bringing them to public attention and prompting governmental action. However, the reporting often lacks sensitivity and understanding of relevant legislation, leading to sensationalized narratives and a politicization of child abuse. This trend contributes to risk-averse and punitive responses within societal systems. Nonetheless, such coverage offers valuable insights for professionals in child welfare and media, facilitating a better understanding of public perceptions and potential avenues for change. Strengthening anti-child sexual abuse legislation and implementing educational programs could mitigate the prevalence of child abuse. Crucially, accurate data collection and adherence to ethical standards in reporting, including protecting victims' privacy, are imperative. Ultimately, newspapers serve as a vital platform for raising awareness about child abuse issues, but effective action requires collaboration between government entities and civil society to address structural deficiencies and protect vulnerable children.

Recommendation

- ✓ Implement more stringent criteria for journalists and media outlets to follow when reporting on cases of child abuse in order to ensure that the names of victims are protected, that the reporting is sensitive, and that the information is accurate.
- ✓ In order to offer victims and their families with correct information, assistance, and resources, it is important to establish collaborations between groups that deal with the media, organizations that safeguard children, and specialists who work in mental health.
- ✓ Promote responsible journalistic methods that put the well-being of victims as their first priority and refrain from sensationalizing or exploiting the trauma that victims have experienced for the sake of generating headlines or ratings.

- ✓ Journalists should be provided with training courses and materials on ethical reporting practices, techniques for conducting interviews that are trauma-informed, and an understanding of the psychological impact that media coverage has on these individuals who have survived child abuse.
- ✓ To promote transparency, accountability, and public knowledge of initiatives to address and prevent child abuse in Lahore, it is important to encourage collaboration between local authorities and media outlets.

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