

Analyzing the Portrayals of Child Sexual Abuse of Urdu Newspapers in Developing Countries

Mohammed Habes¹, Mokhtar Elareshi^{2*}, Sana Ali³ and Abdulkrim Ziani⁴

¹Radio and TV Department, Yarmouk University, Zip Code 21163, Irbid, Jordan

²Communication and Media College, Al Ain University, 64141, Al Ain, United Arab Emirates

³Allama Iqbal Open University Islamabad, 44000, Islamabad, Pakistan

⁴Mass Communication College, Umm Al Quwain University, 536, Umm Al Quwain, United Arab Emirates

ABSTRACT

Child sexual abuse is serious in any developing country confronting children's sexual exploitation. Certain factors are liable for fostering child sexual abuse, and the media can play a significant role in eradicating this issue. This research scrutinized the portrayals of child sexual abuse in three Urdu-Pakistani newspapers by analyzing the role of the newspapers concerning the burgeoning prevalence of child sexual abuse based on seven categories proposed by UNICEF. The data were generated in 2019 using a purposive sampling technique and analyzed using content analysis. The results revealed that the newspapers analyzed followed different ethical guidelines in reporting child sexual abuse, indicating that news reports contained details of helplines for victims. Statistically, the study found a strong and significant relationship between child sexual abuse cases and newspapers' reporting, recommending scrutinizing other aspects of child sexual abuse, especially pornography, to ensure a safer future for children in Pakistan.

Keywords: Child sexual abuse, children's rights advocacy, newspapers, social responsibility, Pakistan

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E-mail addresses:

mohammad.habes@yu.edu.jo (Mohammed Habes)

mokhtar.elareshi@aau.ac.ae (Mokhtar Elareshi)

sana_Leo1990@hotmail.com (Sana Ali)

drabdul.karim@uaqu.ac.ae (Abdulkrim Ziani)

* Corresponding author

INTRODUCTION

Research debates about the role of media in spreading awareness about social issues and their elimination are of great magnitude. As a vital institution, the media (old and new) have a positive role in disseminating awareness of social phenomena (Davies et al., 2017; Mubeen & Qusien, 2019; Ye et al., 2020). Today's media (e.g., TV, radio, and

newspapers) form powerful communication tools and information to represent the factual picture of ongoing issues in society (Döring & Walter, 2020). The media industry gives the correct picture of current occurrences and also helps to tackle difficult situations in communities (Döring & Walter, 2020). As noted by Dwivedi et al. (2013), an increased dependency on media indicates the power of these relevant information resources in life, especially regarding social issues, e.g., child abuse, community division, people's rights, diversity, and race.

However, awareness of, and information about, these issues is only possible through different media platforms. As a result, society depends not only on the media; it is also influenced by what the media sometimes provides or highlights. For example, social activists and welfare organizations depend largely on the media to gain access to the public, spread awareness, and attain public support to sustain and preserve human rights in general (Ye et al., 2020). In this context, human rights and the role of the media are a much-debated phenomenon as the news media play their part in upholding such rights, particularly in increasing public and political awareness about the rights of different groups, including children, women, and other minorities.

Within the framework of contemporary media trends, international laws holistically support children's rights and resort to all media platforms to spread awareness. Agboola (2020) indicated that media platforms provide a distinguished avenue for highlighting children's-rights issues and

bringing them to the fore of public debate. Consequently, journalists are the champions of children's-rights advocacy. They address the prevailing issues and emphasize the need for a quick and effective response from those authorities concerned.

In cases of children's-rights violations, they can also provide opportunities for children to speak for themselves especially, concerning child sexual abuse. More particularly, we have observed a significant increase in child sexual abuse incidents in Pakistan. Both girls and boys confront sexual abuse at different levels (Ali, 2019). However, there is little research about child sexual abuse in South Asian countries, particularly Pakistan (Frederick, 2010). In aiming to rectify this, this research examines portrayals of child sexual abuse in Pakistani newspapers. It studies whether newspapers in Pakistan follow any ethical guidelines regarding reporting child sexual abuse and looks at how such matters are presented in newspapers, using seven categories proposed by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) (Frederick, 2010). This study's contribution is acknowledging the role of newspapers in disseminating awareness of child sexual abuse and examining whether they follow ethical guidelines in reporting such matters.

The following section reviews the existing survey research regarding child sexual abuse, particularly in Pakistan, its leading factors to such abuse, and how it is framed in the Pakistani newspapers. The

data collection and analysis methods are presented next, followed by the findings and discussion. Finally, the paper concludes with a summary of key findings, research implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In modern society, the media play an important role in highlighting issues regarding human-rights infringement (Döring & Walter, 2020) by providing information and awareness campaigns. For example, in their presentation of abuse, the media play a powerful role in spreading awareness about the infringement of human rights in society (Khalid & Yousaf, 2018; Salman, 2017a). McQuail (2003) defines media as an engine of change, and now the question arises as to what extent the media are fulfilling their responsibilities, particularly in terms of how their role in spreading child-protection awareness is important in influencing public opinion (Awatade, 2016).

Whether or not the media have reported any particular incident, or whether they are just bringing the issues to the public's consideration, this role is of great pertinence. News stories about child sexual abuse *largely* appear in the news media (Weatherred, 2017). The media representation of such abuse helps the public understand this social concern's nature and prevalence (Mejia et al., 2012; Saint-Jacques et al., 2012). Due to the growing number of media campaigns, the public is now tending to act against child molestation because they are more aware of

it (Weatherred, 2015), and they realize that the issue is serious and in need of attention.

In the digital media age, the public can notice and understand such issues (Weatherred, 2015) and help prevent child abuse. A study conducted by Bendo and Mitchell (2017) examined the link between media reporting and children's-rights coverage in Canada and found a significant relationship between media attention to children's-rights reports and cases reported to child-protection organizations. The media's role is also linked to the policy and practice of child-abuse awareness. For example, Weatherred (2015) further reviewed the available literature based on geographical boundaries and found that—at almost every level—the media play a significant role in spreading children's-rights awareness. In this regard, the role of the media in Pakistan can be of great importance.

However, in reality, the Pakistani media are struggling to change people's perceptions concerning their attitudinal change (Sabir, 2010), as reporting child sexual abuse is prominent in Pakistan (Jabeen, 2020). Not only do the media report the incidents, but they also tend to focus on in-depth details. Anne et al. (2008) acknowledged the role of newspapers in keeping a permanent record of news stories. Because of their huge readership, newspapers have the potential to influence convictions. The correlations between newspapers and child protection have been a focus of media debates because new policies and legislative systems in the media provide an independent voice

for civil-rights advocacy (Bharati, 2004; Dawson et al., 2012). Redefining journalism and its ethical practices, the media today can preserve children's rights in a larger context (Döring & Walter, 2020; White, 2011).

Child Sexual Abuse — An Overview

The word abuse distinguishes a state of illegal dominance over another person's behavior. It can also be described as a misuse of power and status to harass or sabotage another person and to make the victim more defenseless (Pucci, 2012). Abuse is not only physical desecration but goes beyond this to the next level. In addition, physical and emotional abuse, and now sexual exploitation, have become more common (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 1990). In considering how to save children from sexual abuse or harassment, the OHCHR, in Article 34, made the following proposals, which came into force on September 2, 1990:

“States Parties undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. For these purposes, States Parties shall, in particular, take all appropriate national, bilateral, and multilateral measures to prevent: (a) The inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity; (b) The exploitative use of children in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices; and (c) The exploitative use of children

in pornographic performances and materials”. (OHCHR, 1990)

In 2014, across the world, one billion children aged 2-17 faced physical, emotional, and sexual violence. About half of adults said that they had undergone sexual molestation at an early age. One in 13 men and one in five women reported being sexually exploited in childhood (Chen & Chan, 2016; Malathi, 2016). Individuals of every age are vulnerable to sexual assault, but children are more defenseless, especially female children, with around 15 million girls reporting that they faced sexual violence during their early teenage years (UNICEF, 2018a). In 2018, 8% of boys and 18% of girls faced sexual harassment worldwide (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020).

WHO defines child sexual abuse as “the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared, or elsewhere that violates the laws or social taboos of society” (WHO, 2020). Although child abuse exists in Pakistan, it is still a taboo subject. For example, Pakistani society accepts talking about sex in general, but talking about child sexual abuse is immoral (Avais et al., 2020). According to Khan et al. (2014), child sexual abuse is a matter of explicit infringement on children and is rooted in society. It is one of the most sensitive sociocultural issues today, with cases remaining unreported, unsupported, and underrepresented. Child sexual abuse causes serious physical, mental, and emotional issues as children are immature

and unprepared for such abuse. In 2015, a massive child sexual abuse scandal came into focus, involving more than 300 children who were sexually abused on camera with video clips shared widely across the country. Most victims were under 15 years old, with thousands of videos including scenes of 14-year-olds raping six-year-olds.

Salman (2017) confirmed that, in Pakistan, children are abused almost everywhere, with many cases of families neglecting to hear complaints and failing to confront child sexual exploitation for many years. In 2018, seven-year-old Zainab Ansari was found dead in a garbage heap. After the autopsy, her rape was confirmed, leading to a massive reaction in the media. However, despite this huge reaction against the sexual molestation and murder of Zainab Ansari, child sexual exploitation is still increasing rapidly. In May 2019, 10-year-old Ferishta was abducted after going to play outside, and her burnt body was later found. Again, the autopsy report revealed sexual molestation, but still, the molesters have not been found. More than 1,304 children have faced sexual molestation in Pakistan during the past six months, including 729 girls and 575 boys (IANS, 2019).

In 2011, for example, around 50 Pakistani police officials were perpetrators of child sexual abuse in Pakistan, as reported by Avais et al. (Avais et al., 2020). In 2019, 2,846 cases of child sexual abuse in Pakistan were reported by Sahill (2020), and 3,832 cases were reported in 2020 (Tahir, 2021). Avais et al. (2020, p. 215) indicated that children in Pakistan are exposed to sexual abuse everywhere, “even in their own

homes,” suggesting that government, civil society, and religious leaders are responsible for recognizing such matters as a major threat to the fabric of society.

Factors Leading to Child Sexual Abuse

While discussing the role of media in disseminating awareness of child sexual abuse, it is crucial to highlight the alleged motives behind such abuse. Child sexual abuse involves different sexual activities. Some offenders restrain their conduct from masturbating openly in front of children or undressing them. Others, however, tend to perform oral sex or genital intercourse. An early common view of sexual molesters of children was that they were “born that way.” Many assumed this was because of a psychological disorder, with people believing that the abuse was a matter of choice by the perpetrators (Abbas & Jabeen, 2021; Richards, 2011). However, many people proposed several other factors behind child sex abuse, suggesting that pedophilia is an innate orientation and that much abuse was simply opportunistic (Ali, 2019).

Psychologically, there are mainly two types of child sex abusers: one group sexually abuses a child in their fantasies, while the other performs abuse in reality in order to satisfy their sexual needs (Tenbergen et al., 2015). Khalid and Yousaf (2018, p. 2471) state pedophilia “is mental ataxia and psychotic anarchy associated with a more sexual interest in prepubescent children.” It is directly linked with the frontal lobes, amygdala, and hippocampus, causing anti-social and extremely violent behavior.

Likewise, studies have considered the environmental reasons for sexual attraction toward children. For example, it is a common notion that individuals who have confronted sexual abuse during their childhood tend to adopt such behavior (Stines, 2015). Furthermore, child sexual abuse is more common in many developing countries, including Pakistan. As people confront extreme poverty, child abuse is a million-dollar business. As a result, families themselves prepare their children to be sexually abused on camera (Ali, 2019). They sell this pornographic content and help organize the mafia behind child sexual abuse (Ali, 2019). For example, the Federal Intelligence Agency (FIA) of Pakistan has claimed that child pornography is a business. There is an endless trail of such crimes, and many perpetrators face court trials (Abbas & Jabeen, 2021; Döring & Walter, 2020).

Poverty and economic factors are responsible for the growth of child sexual abuse in Pakistan (Syed, 2019). Similarly, according to Ali et al. (2020) and Hall and Hall (2011), the “abused abuser” is a high-perception phenomenon. Researchers claim that people who get abused during childhood want to gain self-esteem and confidence. To attain these, they sexually abuse other children (Stines, 2015).

Newspapers’ Framing of Child Sexual Abuse in Pakistan

The media usually play a key role in defining social problems by emphasizing a particular aspect of an event, e.g., child sexual abuse. Therefore, any society needs to follow

ethical guidelines in publishing and publicly to discuss such topics. Although such reports and coverage help to break the silence around child abuse, it remains a very sensitive matter for much of society (Tahir, 2021). The media can help empower the public by providing information about their basic rights and obligations. However, they cover only a tiny percentage of child abuse and neglect issues. For example, the Islamabad newspaper, Azad Kashmir, and the Gilgit Baltistan newspaper reported 2322 child sexual molestation from January to June 2018 (Wasif, 2018). Of these cases, 65% were from Punjab, 25% from Sindh, 3% from Khyber Pakhtun Kha and Islamabad, and 2% from Gilgit Baltistan. Table 1 summarizes the most reported child sexual abuse issues in two popular areas in Pakistan between 2016 and 2019.

Table 1
Reported total of child sexual abuse issues in Pakistani newspapers

Year	Reported cases in	
	Punjab	Lahore
2016	2676	266
2017	2168	112
2018	2403	148
2019	1502	98

Source: Tahir (2021)

Notably, 74% of cases were from rural areas as opposed to urban areas (26 %). Such reports have become a very serious concern in Pakistan, as sexual exploitation continues to lead to brutal murders (W. Shah, 2018). However, cases of acquaintance rape are also rapidly increasing in number. Child sexual abuse reports from 2017 revealed

that 1,787 cases of child sexual abuse in Pakistan were of acquaintance rape (Avais et al., 2020; Imdad, 2019). Several newspapers in Pakistan have disclosed the names of the victims of sex crimes, although it is illegal to do so (Tahir, 2021). Such reports are mainly due to a lack of training and understanding of the legislation. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Newspapers in Pakistan significantly follow ethical guidelines in publishing child sexual abuse news reports.

METHODS

Content analysis was used to investigate whether the selected newspapers follow ethical guidelines in reporting child sexual abuse in Pakistan. It is an exploratory study of three prominent Pakistani newspapers: The Daily Jang, The Daily Duniya, and The Daily Ausaf. We purposely selected the most prominent national newspapers in Pakistan because these are the independent newspapers with the highest circulation. However, in terms of data gathering and other limitations, we used a purposive sampling technique depending mainly upon the language used by the newspapers, Urdu, as this is the national language of Pakistan.

For the second step, the study developed the initial codebook prior to beginning to conduct the data analysis (Kyngas & Vanhanen, 1999). Kyngas and Vanhanen (1999) further state that as analysis of the data proceeds, additional codes are developed, and the initial codebook is refined. This technique can also be applied

to broader scientific research disciplines because it is designated to determine the systematic characterization of a message.

For the third step, we collected all the news reports and stories related to child sexual abuse for seven months, from January 1 to July 20, 2019. This collection period was important because it witnessed ongoing media reports of child sexual abuse in Pakistan (Mehkar, 2019; Mehnaz, 2018; Salman, 2017; Weatherred, 2017), especially after Zainab Ansari was murdered and during Ferishta's reported case. In addition, all the news articles published in the selected newspapers were collected, thus allowing us to capture 87 stories.

Keywords related to child sexual abuse were identified to filter out relevant stories. These words were mainly: "child abuse," "sexual abuse," "child neglect," and "child sexuality" and were used to search through the selected articles. After that, we filtered out any article that did not directly mention the seven ethical reports below. At the end of this process, 64 were found to be related to news of child sexual abuse issues. These articles were then retained for further analysis.

Coding Process

All the 87 news articles were coded, with the unit of analysis being a single news story. A detailed set of categories was developed for the quantitative analysis based on relevant literature and the current context (Fahmy et al., 2022). After the data-gathering process, we assigned codes for data-manipulation

purposes. For example, if the news story contained certain information regarding child abuse, it was coded (1); if not, it was coded (0). This coding technique was applied to different “levels of abstract” as data is converted into quantities for statistical analysis (Assarroudi et al., 2018). The content analysis included all the news reports covering child sexual exploitation, including relevant news reports published during the selected time.

Categories

The study operationalized the term “ethical reporting” under the seven categories proposed by UNICEF, the National Children’s Advocacy Center, and others (Frederick, 2010). Frames, in terms of ethical guidelines regarding child sexual abuse reporting, were measured for the following categories (unit of analysis):

1. Sensationalism
2. Helpline details
3. Identifying the victims
4. Identifying the perpetrator
5. Gender-sensitive code of ethics
6. Reporting language
7. Victim’s photographs

Reliability Analysis

Furthermore, to examine the intercoder reliability of the coding technique, one of the authors, proficient in Urdu and English, completed the coding of the 87 news articles. A second person randomly coded a selected subset of 11.5% of the entire sample (10 articles). We conducted intercoder reliability analysis using Krippendorff’s

Alpha technique with satisfying results for percentage agreement ($\alpha \geq .800$). Therefore, with α having a value of .714, the study affirmed that the coding technique was reliable.

RESULTS

This study aimed to examine whether the selected newspapers followed ethical guidelines in reporting child sexual abuse in Pakistan. First, the data were measured to determine whether they were drawn from a normally distributed population of Pakistani newspapers. In doing so, a Gaussian test indicated that the data were normally distributed. Figure 1 exhibits the normal curve distribution of the data.

The results further revealed that the Daily Ausaf newspaper led the coverage of child sexual abuse issues by publishing ($n=24$ or 37.5%) news reports, followed by the Daily Jang newspaper ($n=22$ or 34.3%), and the Daily Duniya newspaper ($n=18$ or 28.1%). Thus, the accumulative frequency ($n=64$) ($M=203$, $SD=.854$) of published news reports in all the selected newspapers

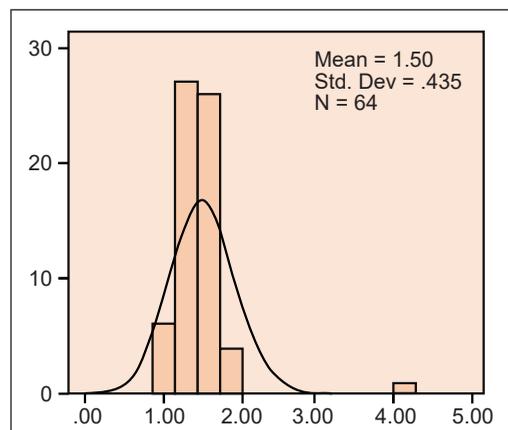


Figure 1. Gaussian distribution of the study data

depicts the higher prevalence of the issues and the news media’s focus on publishing these incidents. Table 2 summarizes the descriptive statistics of the coding unit. The result affirmed a strong relationship between the selected newspaper reports and Pakistan’s awareness of child sexual abuse.

A Pearson correlation analysis was run (as shown in Table 3) to test the relationship between the ethical guidelines regarding child sexual abuse mentioned above, and this revealed a significant relationship between newspapers and positive conduct in publishing child sexual abuse reports, with the correlation value at $r = .203$ and the significance value at $p > 0.013$. This result indicates that, overall, newspapers’ conduct

concerning child abuse awareness is positive, judiciously spreading consciousness of the incidents, and thus our hypothesis was supported.

Furthermore, regarding child sexual abuse issues, the study found that the selected newspapers embraced positive conduct and highlighted the issue. For example, they guaranteed the victims’ safety, avoiding sensationalism and other related concerns. However, comparing the Daily Jang newspaper and the Daily Duniya newspaper, the Daily Ausaf has analogously shown more positive and effective conduct in publishing child sexual abuse reports. As shown in Table 4, the correlation between newspaper reports, sensationalism ($p > 0.185$), helpline ($p > .0713$), victims’ identity ($p > 0.391$), perpetrators’ identity ($p > 0.623$), gender-sensitive ethics ($p >$

Table 2
Descriptive statistics for the mean and standard deviation

Variable	M	SD
1. Sensationalism	1.52	.504
2. Helpline details	1.53	.503
3. Victim’s identity	1.94	2.593
4. Perpetrator’s identity	1.17	.380
5. Gender-sensitive code of ethics	1.50	.504
6. Language/words	1.17	.380
7. Photos	1.17	.380

Table 3
Pearson correlation analysis results

Correlations			
	Newspaper		Code of Ethics
Newspaper	Pearson correlation	1	.203
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.013
	N		64

Table 4
Correlation between and within test subjects (code of ethics)

Source	Items	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Newspaper	Sensationalism	0.104	2	0.052	1.733	0.185
	Helpline	0.101	2	0.050	0.340	0.713
	Victims	0.030	2	0.015	0.953	0.391
	Perpetrator	0.150	2	0.075	0.477	0.623
	Ethics	0.030	2	0.015	0.953	0.391
	Language/words	0.359	2	0.180	4.384	0.017
	Photographs	0.030	2	0.015	0.953	0.391

0391), and photographs ($p > 0.391$) all remained insignificant, indicating that the overall reporting patterns remained positive. However, only one item, “language/words,” was significant, indicating that the selected newspapers differed in the language/words they used to highlight and present their sexual abuse coverage. Such findings suggested the need for further studies examining the language used to cover such subjects.

Furthermore, cross-tabulation validated the research hypothesis on whether the selected newspapers followed ethical guidelines in reporting child sexual abuse issues. Thus, the results explicated ethical coverage in relation to child sexual abuse reports. These results are briefly discussed below:

Sensationalism in the news refers to presenting a story that may represent editorial prejudice and grave manipulation of the facts (Arbaoui et al., 2020). Playing with audience emotions and fostering resentment, disgust, and grief are attributed to sensationalist media reporting. Journalists often utilize subtle and obvious ways to gain audiences’ attention. It leads to the public misperceiving the reported incident and the individuals involved in the crime (Grundlingh, 2017). However, the findings revealed that $n = 31$ or 48.4% of our selected newspapers were found to have zero sensationalism in the language, with the reporting style also found to be appropriate and relevant.

In regard to **helpline details**, news media can provide these details of helplines and support centers. They can also help to

break down the myth that the victim alone has to suffer within his / her family. By providing important helpline details, the media ensure support and protection for the victimized child (Tahir, 2021). The study found that an average number of newspaper reports ($n = 30$ or 46.9%) had details of helplines that could aid victims in the report and finding the criminals, counteracting the abuse, and providing medical surveillance of the victims.

In response to the **victim’s identity**, it is clearly stated in section 8 of the code that “no report in newspapers and magazines would be allowed to disclose the victim’s identity.” This identity may include the victim’s name, school, or any other particular that could put him/her at risk (Shah, 2018). The study found that $n = 40$ or 62.5% of analyzed newspaper reports mentioned details concerning victims and their families. Therefore, it implies that exposing the victim’s identity is a weak factor in the conduct of newspapers and the media.

Similarly, revealing the **perpetrator’s identity** is fundamental in exposing the alleged offenders (Betus et al., 2020). Our results revealed that $n = 53$ or 82.8% of analyzed newspaper reports explicitly involved all relevant identities of the perpetrators, including names and occupations (Abbas & Jabeen, 2021).

Furthermore, in response to the **gender-sensitive code of ethics** to which all the newspaper organizations are signed up (Raza & Khan, 2017), it is known that organizations under these principles are

bound to abide by the laws in respect of guarding females' identities, their gender identification, their consent regarding granting interviews and taking pictures, and other factors. As a result, journalists are restricted in exaggerating or oversimplifying incidents involving female children and women (Smith, 2012). In this context, our analyzed data revealed that some ($n = 32$ or 50.0%) newspaper stories indicated that there was no violation of the gender-sensitive code of ethics, meaning that ($n = 32$ or 50%) of reports were found to be explicit violations of the gender-sensitive code of ethics.

If improperly used, *language/words* can adversely affect victims. It is fully applicable to media reporting concerning child sexual abuse. Reports should not contain words such as "teens," "nippers," "juveniles," and "minklins" (UNICEF, 2018b). The analyzed data found that $n = 23$ or 35.9% of newspaper reports featured words such as "teens" and "nippers." According to UNICEF (2018a), using these words might be patronizing and offensive to the victims

Lastly, our analyzed data revealed that only $n = 11$ or 17.1% of newspaper reports had *photographs/pictures* of incidents, victims, or their families (Raza & Khan, 2017). These pictures were not obscured; rather, they explicitly identified the faces of the victims and their relatives. However, several news stories ($n = 53$ or 82.8%) did not have any graphic depictions of the respective incidents or the victims.

DISCUSSIONS

Child sexual abuse is growing into a common topic in middle society, both in urban and rural areas (Tahir, 2021). Mainstream media outlets can educate the public about such abuse if they consider it part of their agenda and priorities. In terms of knowledge of sexual and child abuse matters in most societies, the print media (newspapers) play a vital role. They can help to document, and spread awareness of, most issues in any society because they can reach large audiences and even target anti-social groups. Furthermore, due to ease of access, it is convenient for them to deliver awareness and support to the victims through such platforms (Vilvaraj, 2017). This study's data showed that the selected newspapers followed ethical guidelines in reporting child sexual abuse, supporting our hypothesis.

As the hypothesized newspapers in Pakistan significantly follow ethical guidelines in publishing reports of child sexual abuse, we found that the selected newspapers somehow followed ethical guidelines in reporting child sexual abuse issues. Also, the news coverage highlights details of support centers where victims can seek help and guidance. In this regard, journalism ethics are important in the media enjoying their freedom of expression (Döring & Walter, 2020). Moreover, ethical journalism not only helps the media to protect their stability but is also used to secure people's trust in the media (Chiyamwaka, 2008).

In particular, details relating to child sexual abuse, victim's identity, judgmental language, attribution to a particular race/ethnicity, and other ethical issues should be kept confidential. Child protection is the priority for any media professional, and ethics are very important (Jabeen, 2020). Following ethical guidelines is important in Pakistani society as this ensures that victims are protected and honored and highlights the growing pervasiveness of child sexual abuse (Mehkar, 2019).

There are many examples of the vital role played by newspapers in reporting such matters. For example, they can increase awareness of child abuse and children's-rights advocacy in general. In this regard, the mainstream media have always helped raise public awareness about child sexual abuse (Döring & Walter, 2020). Lonne and Parton (2014) stated that the media play a very important role in highlighting child maltreatment cases, eventually leading to a high level of awareness. It is always important to consider certain ethical guidelines while reporting an incident (Ali et al., 2020; UNICEF, 2018b).

Although the results affirmed the notion of ethical conduct concerning news media reporting in Pakistan, the study found a smaller number of news stories having been sensationalized in the selected newspapers. It may be because sensationalized rape stories are not merely poor reporting examples but also an alarm call in terms of media critiques and social activities (Rekdal, 2017). Therefore, the overall role of newspapers in reporting child sexual

abuse cases is positive (Goodman et al., 2020). Also, the publication of $n = 64$ cases within six months shows that newspapers are highly concerned about child welfare in Pakistan. Nevertheless, on the other hand, it all illustrates the growing prevalence of child abuse, which is thought-provoking for the concerned bodies.

Furthermore, the assumption here is that newspapers are vital in highlighting Pakistan's social issues (e.g., child abuse). They allow their readers to communicate and share their feedback (Tahir, 2021). According to Shah (2010), newspapers in Pakistan absorb a large proportion of the public's attention. They focus more on domestic issues, and child sexual abuse is of greater significance. For example, ethical ways of representing relevant cases in the media provide a fair sense of the problem in Pakistan society (Khalid & Yousaf, 2018).

In this regard, the media can also educate children about how to tackle an abusive situation, and perhaps children can also learn about the magnitude of their rights (Saunders & Goddard, 2002). The media's role in protecting children's rights in general and disseminating awareness of child sexual exploitation has the potential to bring about a positive societal change (Agboola, 2020; Jabeen, 2020).

Media strategies could try altering the public opinion toward child sexual exploitation by informing about child abuse. A sensible approach to spreading awareness about child abuse weighs much due to its potential outcomes (Weatherred, 2017). Newspapers play their part by recognizing

child abuse as a major social concern. They also can increase awareness and motivate people to act against such abuse. For this reason, newspapers can influence people's perceptions about such matters and help them look at their behaviors (Bendo & Mitchell, 2017).

To a great extent, sporadic media campaigns can help to increase community knowledge about tackling such situations effectively. They help alter people's attitudes, thereby counteracting child sexual abuse in society (Saunders & Goddard, 2002). Efforts made by the media have positively influenced law-making bodies regarding children's-rights preservation policies and political responses on a broader level (Bendo & Mitchell, 2017). Media campaigns also help encourage people to stand against injustice by spreading awareness that child sexual abuse is an infringement of human rights (Agboola, 2020; Saint-Jacques et al., 2012).

CONCLUSION

Despite the increasing prevalence of child sexual abuse in Pakistan, few studies are probing this phenomenon. This study attempted to understand the role of newspapers in disseminating awareness of child sexual abuse. It used a content analysis technique to scrutinize three major newspapers in Pakistan over seven months. Analyzing the newspapers' reporting under the guidelines proposed by UNICEF (e.g., sensationalism, helpline, identifying the victims and perpetrator, gender-sensitive ethical code, reporting language, and

victim's photographs) was important as these were used to determine the frequency of relevant news reports and to scrutinize the extent to which this reporting could be attributed to ethical conduct.

Our results revealed a positive role played by newspapers concerning child sexual abuse reports based on the seven proposed categories, as the duty of newspapers is to take rational steps to promote public welfare (Saint-Jacques et al., 2012). Furthermore, this study reveals how Pakistani newspapers follow ethical guidelines in reporting child sexual abuse. Therefore, the assumption is that if newspapers ensure that they follow the code of ethics in reporting such matters, it not only will help with the preservation of children's rights but will also keep people aware of the prevalence of child sexual exploitation, especially if they can get the attention of local governments and authorities (Rahim et al., 2021).

Implications

The growing prevalence of child sexual abuse in Pakistan is a critical phenomenon. This paper offers several implications for such a matter in Pakistan. In this regard, the Pakistani media should initiate more child-abuse campaigns, targeting different social activists and the public, as well as updating the audience about the menace of child sexual abuse, its social indicators, and the prevention of child molestation (Khalid & Yousaf, 2018). The role of newspapers can also include demands for the judicial system to propose new laws against child

sexual abuse. Judicial reforms and new laws against pedophilia in Pakistan are of great significance. However, the slow procedure of trials and an ineffective judicial system have made it hard for justice to be served (Mehkar, 2019). The media are rightly called the eyes of society as they can pressure local authorities to take action against any injustice to the common person (Abbas & Jabeen, 2021; Rahim et al., 2021).

Limitations and Future Research

This study was administered over a limited period with restricted resources. Moreover, very limited data concerning the growing prevalence of child abuse in Pakistan were obtained. So it is because child sexual abuse cases are briskly increasing, but very little attention is given to this issue for research purposes. However, with the growing pervasiveness of child sexual abuse, many facets should be scrutinized; in particular, child pornography is one of the highly prevalent infringements of children's rights in Pakistan that should be discussed on a broader level.

However, our study prudently analyzed selected newspapers, and the results are drawn accordingly. Therefore, child sexual abuse and its other facets should be investigated in Pakistan to ensure improved public understanding of the issue, and that could contribute to easing the suffering of Pakistani children. Furthermore, based on our existing results, there is always scope for conducting longitudinal research to provide more insight into how the news media report on this sensitive topic in their daily coverage.

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Conflict of Interest

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