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Abstract

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**Keywords:** Child Abuse, Emotional, Sociological Theories

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## Title

### Child Abuse in Pakistan: A Sociological Examination of Contributing Factors

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## Abstract

*The study explores phenomenon of child abuse in Pakistan. It focuses on various kind of abuse like emotional, sexual and physical. Regardless of the presence of legal frameworks it remains a significant problem influenced by poverty, lack of education and cultural norms normalizing abusive behavior. The study employs sociological theories, like the cycle of violence, social situation theory, and cultural model, to understand complex roots of child abuse. It highlights how social forces, including household size, gender norms, and parental education levels, contribute to prevalence of abuse. Using data from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) Punjab (2017-2018) a logistic regression analysis was conducted to identify correlates of psychological, moderate physical, and severe physical abuse among children aged 5 to 14 years. The findings indicate that boys as compared to girls are more likely to experience abuse, wealth status negatively correlates with abuse, and household size positively correlates with abuse.*

## Keywords:

[Child Abuse](#), [Emotional](#), [Sociological Theories](#)

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## Introduction

Child abuse is a distressing issue in Pakistan which comprises various forms like emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. It is not a new phenomenon, however, the sensitivity that people have now about it is a recent development (Wolfe, 1987). No doubt it has a deep impact on a child's psychological and physical well-being. In spite of the fact that legal frameworks are available, and awareness campaigns are being run in the country, the prevalence of the phenomenon remains concerning due to factors like lack of

education, poverty, and cultural norms and this sometimes normalizes the abusive behavior. Many cases are not reported because of fear, stigma, and inadequate or no support system for victims.

Child abuse has an impact on the victim. In the short term, the impact is experienced by the child however the long term has an impact on the adolescent and the adult (Trickett & McBride-Chang, 1995). Children who have experienced abuse may subsequently exhibit various behavioral issues like emotional volatility, depressive tendencies, and a



proclivity towards aggression or violence towards others (American Academy of Pediatrics et al., 2008).

Sociological theories offer a powerful lens to understand the complex roots of child abuse. The cycle of violence argument highlights how witnessing or experiencing abuse in childhood increases the likelihood of becoming an abuser later (Reckdenwald, Mancini, & Beauregard, 2013). Social situation theory emphasizes how poverty, social isolation, and lack of resources can create stress and desperation, leading to a higher risk of abuse (Belsky, 1978). Finally, the cultural model explores how societal norms around child discipline and acceptable behavior can influence what constitutes abuse and how readily it occurs (De Munck & Bennardo, 2019). By examining these factors, sociology moves beyond placing blame solely on the individual abuser and reveals the broader social forces that contribute to this devastating problem.

There are a number of contributing factors to child abuse. It might be considered an act done to discipline the child, especially in a culture where the child's obedience is considered to be an important component of socialization (Youssef, Attia, & Kamel, 1998). Most often the use of physical punishment is practiced by mothers and not by fathers (Uslu et al., 2010). Mothering is considered to be the crucial source of identity for women but at the same time this can result in misery when children start reflecting anti-social behavior and the last resort somehow seems to be abusing the child. There are numerous factors starting from characteristics of parents e.g. their backgrounds, personalities, and lifestyles. Then comes the social environment of the family which can include cultural influences and community dynamics. Furthermore, factors that are the cause of child abuse include communication patterns, parenting styles, and familial relationships. However, the factors intrinsic to children look into their age, gender, and behavior which can influence their vulnerability to abuse.

Gender is an important category when child abuse is to be looked into. Boys in comparison to girls are more prone to be abused (Thompson, Kingree, & Desai, 2004). There could be different interpretations for this for e.g. boys are often socialized to be tough and resilient, making physical discipline more socially

acceptable and potentially more frequent. Cultural norms associating masculinity with aggression can lead to harsher disciplinary practices for boys (Feder, Levant, & Dean, 2007). Boys may also underreport abuse due to stigma and fear of appearing weak, leading to underestimation of abuse rates. Families might use more physical discipline on boys due to different expectations and stress responses (Morawska, 2020).

Contrary to common expectations, many studies indicate that children living with their mothers are at a higher risk of experiencing abuse compared to those living without their mothers. This is often due to the stressors and challenges faced by single mothers, including financial strain and limited social support, which can contribute to heightened risk factors for abuse within the household (Cancian, Yang, & Slack, 2013). Additionally, single mothers may have to juggle multiple responsibilities, potentially leading to higher levels of parental stress and, consequently, an increased likelihood of abusive behavior towards children (Tucker & Rodriguez, 2014).

Child abuse is assumed to have a strong relationship with the size of the household. As the household size increases it can serve as a compounding factor in the risk of child abuse because of various factors such as increased challenges and stressors that contribute to such situations for e.g. parents might be facing difficulties while providing individualized attention and supervision to each child and this could potentially lead to oversight of abusive behavior (Li, Godinet, & Arnsberger, 2011). Additionally, the presence of many family members can create gaps and complexities in coordination and communication resulting in the abusive behavior going unnoticed (Collin-Vézina et al., 2015). Apart from this larger households experience intense stress levels due to financial strain and scarcity of resources hence increasing the likelihood of abusive responses due to pressure and frustration (Cronin et al., 2015).

In contrast to the expectations, many studies suggest an inconsistent trend where educated mothers may display higher rates of involvement in child abuse as compared to those mothers who are less educated. This occurrence could be because of increased

expectations related to balancing career and family responsibilities, as well as high levels of perfectionism. Moreover, mothering norms contain severe costs for e.g., educated mothers might be more likely to engage in emotionally abusive behaviors for e.g., excessive criticism or pressure for academic achievement, due to heightened awareness of child development principles (Lapierre, 2009).

In Pakistan, the ratio of child abuse is more likely to be higher because of the people who are often struggling with it (Pulla, Tarar, & Ali, 2018). Poverty can lead to a lot of problems such as causing chronic stress, resulting in mental health problems, and a lack of resources, these can increase the chances of abuse. The situation is further worsened because of economic hardship, including financial insecurity and unemployment making things even worse (Schneider, Waldfogel, & Brooks-Gunn, 2017).

An interesting phenomenon is seen with the children who are employed as their rate of child abuse is lesser than that of non-working children. This could be attributed to the fact that their level of autonomy is higher and also as they tend to stay away from potentially abusive environments, this reduces their exposure to parents that might commit abuse. Furthermore, as they are bringing in money they enjoy a certain level of respect or protection within the household reducing the risk of abuse. Social norms and a lack of awareness about the rights of children can strengthen this problem (Jabeen, 2020). Cultural factors also have a deep impact in the sense that it does not approve of reporting such issues and interventions, further risking younger ones (Fontes, 2005).

Likewise, children who attend school are more vulnerable when it comes to abuse (Maguire et al., 2015). Multiple factors can be responsible for this abuse like being absent from the parent's sight for a longer time. As they get more independent, they might meet new adults who could take advantage of them. Sometimes school environments may vary in terms of supervision and safety standards which can result in their chance of abuse (Bradshaw et al., 2021). At the same time, children at home and involved in household chores are vulnerable too. Children

engaged in household chores often experience various forms of abuse due to their constant proximity to parents, who may view them as readily available targets for venting frustrations (Booth, 2017). This closeness can lead to increased exposure to physical, emotional, and verbal abuse. Moreover, cultural norms may justify harsh treatment under the guise of discipline or training.

## Methodology

Secondary data analysis of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) Punjab data (2017–2018) was carried out. The MICS is globally collected under the auspices of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in 118 countries, including Pakistan. Within Pakistan, the MICS is conducted in each of the four provinces, separately. In Punjab, the MICS (2017–2018) was collected and compiled by the Punjab Bureau of Statistics (PBS). These data were collected by PBS by first dividing the province of Punjab into 2,692 clusters and then randomly selecting 53,840 households from these clusters. The selected households were visited and it was found that 51,660 households were actually occupied and respondents were interviewed from these households, with a total response rate. The overall response rate was 97.8%. Overall, the PBS interviewed 39,052 women, 39,799 men, and 39,799 infants (in cases where the age of the child was less than 5 years, the mothers were interviewed), with a respective response rate of 93.1%, 93.8%, and 95.8%.

A total of 27,974 cases were selected from the MICS Punjab (2017–2018) dataset for the present analysis. The selection criterion for the study was that all cases should be between 5 and 14 years of age. Binary variables representing the prevalence of psychological, moderate physical, and severe physical violence were created and served as the dependent variables for the present study. Lastly, a selection of demographic, economic, and household-level variables was identified in the MICS (2017–2018) Punjab, based on the review of the literature. The variables were included in the study as IVs (independent variables). Logistic regression was used to analyze data.

**Table 1**

n=27974

Variables	Freq.	%age	Variables	Freq.	%age
<b>Independent Variables</b>					
Gender			Age of Child		
Male	14388	51.4	5 - 11 years	20569	73.5
Female	13586	48.6	12 - 14 years	7405	26.5
Place of Residence			Is the Child currently attending School		
Urban			Not Attending School	1748	6.20
Rural	20211	72.2	Attending School	23311	83.3
	7763	27.8	<i>Missing Values</i>	2915	10.4
Wealth Index			Child Engaged in Child Labor		
Poorest	6895	24.6	Not engaged in Child Labor	24968	89.3
Poorer	6152	22.0	Engaged in Child Labor	3006	10.7
Middle	5593	20.1	Is Child Doing Hazardous Work		
Richer	5112	18.3	Does not do Hazardous Work	25897	92.6
Richest	4118	14.7	Does Hazardous Work	2077	7.40
<i>Missing cases</i>	104	0.40	Does the Child do Household Chores		
Father's Education			Do not do Household Chores	12130	43.4
No education/Preschool	7518	26.9	Does Household Chores	15844	56.6
Primary	4501	16.1	Mobility Issues (Does the Child Need Walking)		
Middle	3887	13.9	Does not need assistance in Walking	27580	98.6
Secondary	5263	18.8	Needs Assistance in Walking	356	1.30
> Secondary	3168	11.3	<i>Missing Values</i>	38	0.10
<i>Missing Values</i>	3637	13.0	The child needs to be physically punished to be brought up properly.		
Mother's Education			Punishment not necessary	15930	56.9
No education/Preschool			Punishment is necessary	11881	42.5
Primary	14856	53.1	<i>Missing Values</i>	163	0.60
Middle	5216	18.6	<b><i>Dependent Variables</i></b>		
Secondary	2357	8.4	Prevalence of Psychological Violence		
> Secondary	2981	10.7	No	6799	24.3
<i>Missing Values</i>	2460	8.8	Yes	21144	75.6
	104	0.40	<i>Missing Values</i>	31	0.10
Does Mother Live in Household			Prevalence of Moderate Physical Violence		
Lives in Household	26500	94.7	No	9162	32.8
Does not Live in Household	816	2.90	Yes	18756	67.0
<i>Missing Values</i>	658	2.40			
Does the Mother have a Functional Disability?					
Does not have Disability	23516	84.1			
Has Disability	1136	4.10			

Variables	Freq.	%age	Variables	Freq.	%age
<i>Missing Values</i>	3322	11.9	<i>Missing Values</i>	56	0.20
How many Members in the Household			Prevalence of Severe Physical Violence		
3 or less members	986	3.50	No	14684	52.4
4 – 5 members	7335	26.2	Yes	13260	47.4
6 – 7 members	10114	36.2	<i>Missing Values</i>	66	0.20
8 – 9 members	5198	18.6			
10 or more members	4341	15.5			

A total of 27974 children between the ages of 5 and 14 years were included in the study. Table 1 shows that child abuse is an insidiously prevalent phenomenon in Punjab. 75.6% of the children had been victims of psychological abuse in the previous month. A majority (67%) of the children had experienced moderate physical violence, while almost half the children (47.4%) had experienced severe physical violence, in the past month. The reported cases of psychological and physical abuse are excessively high and warrant further investigation.

51.4% of the children in the sample were males and 48.6% were females. Almost three-quarters (72.2%) of children reside in urban settings. 46.6% of the respondents belonged to the poorest and poorest households (22.0% and 24.6%, respectively) while 20.1% were from middle-class households and 33% of children were from households in the richer and richest (18.3% and 14.7%) strata. A comparison between parents' education showed that mothers tended to be less educated than fathers. More than half the mothers (53.1%) were either uneducated or had attended preschool, whereas only 26.6% of the fathers were uneducated. Similarly, 19.5% of the mothers had a secondary or higher level education (10.7 and 18.8%, respectively), while for the fathers this percentage was 30.1% (18.8% and 11.3%, respectively). The mothers of 2.9% of children did not reside with their children, while 4.1% of the mothers suffered from some form of functional disability.

Only 3.5% of the children were from small households (3 members or less), while 26.2% were from moderate size households (4 - 5 members). The majority of the children belonged to large households with 36.2% living in households with 6-7 members,

18.6% living in households with 8-9 members, and 15.5% living in households with 10 or more members. 73.5% of the children were between 5 and 11 years old, while the rest (26.5%) were 12 to 14 years old. 6.2% of the children were out of school while 10.7% were working as child laborers. 7.4% of the children within this group were working in hazardous sectors. More than half of the children (56.6%) performed household chores on a regular basis. 1.3% of the children in the data had mobility issues and needed assistive devices or technology to walk.

Lastly, almost half, or 47.4% of the mothers (or caretakers) believed that physical punishment was necessary to bring up children properly. The results of the regression analysis will reveal if this belief is significantly related to the high rates of child abuse that were observed earlier in these data. The results of the three logistic regressions conducted to determine the correlates of the three types of abuse under study (psychological, moderate physical, and severe physical abuse) are presented in Table 2.

Gender was found to be significant for all three categories of abuse. Compared to boys, girls were 18% ( $p < 0.01$ ), 28% ( $p < 0.01$ ), and 22% ( $p < 0.01$ ) less likely to experience psychological, moderate physical, and severe physical abuse, respectively. Overall, girls faced significantly less psychological and physical abuse than boys. Place of residents did not appear to be related to child abuse and there was no significant difference between the incidence of abuse that children faced in rural or urban areas.

Overall, household wealth was negatively related to the odds of psychological and moderate physical abuse. Compared to children in the poorest households, children in poorer households were 13%



less likely ( $p < 0.01$ ); middle-level households were 12% less likely ( $p < 0.05$ ); richer households were 24% less likely ( $p < 0.01$ ); and the richest households were 32% less likely, to face psychological abuse. Similarly, in comparison to the poorest households, children from poorer, richer, and richest households were 10% ( $p < 0.10$ ), 14% ( $p < 0.05$ ), and 21% ( $p < 0.01$ ) less likely to experience moderate physical violence. However, the relationship between household wealth and severe violence remained unclear. Children from poorer households had 1.12 times ( $p < 0.05$ ) greater odds of experiencing severe abuse compared to the children from the poorest households. Conversely, a comparison between the richest and poorest households revealed, that the children from the richest households were 16% less likely to experience severe physical abuse.

Father's education was found to be unrelated to the prevalence of psychological violence. However, children with educated fathers were less at risk of being moderately or severely physically abused as compared to children with uneducated fathers. Table 2 shows that compared to uneducated fathers, children whose fathers had secondary level or more than secondary level education were 15% ( $p < 0.01$ ) and 32% ( $p < 0.01$ ) less at risk of being victims of moderate physical violence. The influence of the father's education on severe physical abuse was found to be stronger. Specifically, children of fathers with middle-level education were 9% less likely ( $p < 0.10$ ), secondary level education was 16% less likely ( $p < 0.01$ ) with more than secondary level education were 30% less likely ( $p < 0.01$ ) to experience severe physical violence, when compared to children with uneducated fathers.

Mother's education was counter-intuitively found to be positively related to child abuse, specifically in the case of psychological and moderate physical abuse. Compared to uneducated mothers, children of mothers with primary, middle, or secondary level education had 1.16 ( $p < 0.01$ ), 1.18 ( $p < 0.05$ ), and 1.17 ( $p < 0.05$ ) times greater odds of experiencing psychological abuse. The relationship between a mother's education and moderate physical violence followed a similar trend. Compared to uneducated

mothers, children of mothers with primary, middle, or secondary level education had 1.13 ( $p < 0.05$ ), 1.18 ( $p < 0.01$ ), and 1.21 ( $p < 0.01$ ) times greater odds of experiencing moderate physical abuse. Interestingly, both in the cases of psychological and moderate physical violence, no significant difference was found in the odds of experiencing abuse between children of the least (uneducated) and most educated (more than secondary level education) mothers. A similar but less prominent trend was observed with reference to severe physical violence. Compared to children of uneducated mothers, the children of mothers with primary and middle-level education had 1.07 ( $p < 0.10$ ) and 1.14 ( $p < 0.05$ ) times greater odds of encountering severe physical violence. However, the analysis showed no statistically significant difference between the odds of encountering severe violence among children with uneducated mothers and children whose mothers had completed secondary or higher levels of education.

Another unexpected result was observed in the case of children who did not live with their mothers. It was hypothesized that children who were not living with their mothers would be more likely to experience abuse. However, the results revealed the opposite. Children who were not living with their mothers were 62% less likely ( $p < 0.01$ ) to experience psychological violence, 66% less likely ( $p < 0.01$ ) to face moderate physical violence, and 73% less likely ( $p < 0.01$ ) to encounter severe physical violence; when compared to children that were living with their natural mothers.

Household size was found to be positively related to the three types of abuses being studied. Compared to children living in small households (with 3 or fewer members), children in middle size households (with 4 - 5 members) were 1.89 ( $p < 0.01$ ), 1.94 ( $p < 0.01$ ), and 1.72 times more at risk of being victims of psychological, moderate physical and severe physical violence, respectively. The odds of abuse continued to increase with the household size. As compared to children living in small households (3 or fewer members), children living in households with 6 - 7 members had 2.05 times ( $p < 0.01$ ), 2.21 times ( $p < 0.01$ ), and 1.79 times ( $p < 0.01$ ) greater odds of

encountering psychological, and moderate and severe physical violence. Similarly, compared to small households, children in households with 8 - 9 members had 2.19 times ( $p < 0.01$ ), 2.30 times ( $p < 0.01$ ), and 1.94 times ( $p < 0.01$ ) greater odds of experiencing psychological, and moderate and severe physical violence. Lastly, compared to small households, children from extremely large households (10 members or more) had 2.38 ( $p < 0.01$ ), 2.45 ( $p < 0.01$ ), and 1.85 ( $p < 0.01$ ) times greater odds of being victims of psychological, and moderate and severe physical violence.

12 to 14 years old children had significantly lesser odds of encountering psychological abuse (adjusted odds ratio = 0.57,  $p < 0.01$ ), moderate physical abuse (aOR = 0.39,  $p < 0.01$ ), and severe physical violence (aOR= 0.46,  $p < 0.01$ ) when compared to younger children (between 5 - 11 years of age). Compared to out-of-school children, children going to school had greater odds of experiencing psychological (aOR= 1.56,  $p < 0.01$ ), moderate physical (aOR= 1.52,  $p < 0.01$ ), and severe physical violence (aOR = 1.34,  $p <$

0.01). Child workers were less at risk of being victims of physical violence. Compared with nonworking children, working children had 17% ( $p < 0.1$ ) lesser odds of facing moderate physical violence and 18% ( $p < 0.05$ ) lesser odds of experiencing serious physical violence.

Interestingly, children who participated in household chores had greater odds of experiencing abuse. Compared to children who did not help out at home, children doing household chores had 1.72 ( $p < 0.01$ ), 1.26 ( $p < 0.01$ ), and 1.19 ( $p < 0.01$ ) times greater odds of encountering psychological, and moderate and serious physical violence, respectively.

Lastly, parents' acceptance of punishment as an effective parenting technique in child rearing was positively related to psychological and physical abuse. Compared to children whose parents did not believe in punishment, children whose parents believed that punishment was necessary, had 2.84 ( $p < 0.01$ ), 2.87 ( $p < 0.01$ ), and 2.51 ( $p < 0.01$ ) times greater odds of experiencing psychological, and moderate and serious/severe physical violence, respectively.

**Table 2**

Variables	Psychological Abuse		Moderate Physical Abuse		Severe Physical Abuse	
	aOR	95% CI	aOR	95% CI	aOR	95% CI
Gender						
Male	0.82***	0.76 - 0.88	0.72***	0.68 - 0.77	0.78***	0.73 - 0.82
Female						
Place of Residence						
Urban	1.03	0.94 - 1.13	0.97	0.89 - 1.06	1.06	0.98 - 1.15
Rural						
Wealth Index						
Poorest	0.87***	0.77 - 0.98	0.90*	0.81 - 1.00	1.03	0.94 - 1.13
Poorer	0.88**	0.78 - 1.00	0.95	0.84 - 1.06	1.12**	1.01 - 1.23
Middle	0.76***	0.66 - 0.87	0.86**	0.75 - 0.97	0.96	0.85 - 1.07
Richer	0.68***	0.57 - 0.80	0.79***	0.61 - 0.92	0.84**	0.73 - 0.96
Richest						
Father's Education						
No						
education/Preschool	1.10*	0.98 - 1.24	0.92	0.83 - 1.03	0.98	0.90 - 1.08
Primary	1.05	0.93 - 1.18	0.96	0.86 - 1.07	0.91*	0.83 - 1.00
Middle	0.94	0.84 - 1.05	0.85***	0.77 - 0.95	0.84***	0.76 - 0.92
Secondary	0.90	0.78 - 1.03	0.68***	0.60 - 0.77	0.70***	0.62 - 0.78
> Secondary						

Variables	Psychological Abuse	Moderate Physical Abuse	Severe Physical Abuse
Mother's Education			
No education/Preschool	1.16***	1.05 - 1.28	1.13**
Primary	1.18**	1.03 - 1.35	1.18***
Middle	1.17**	1.03 - 1.34	1.21***
Secondary > Secondary	1.04	0.89 - 1.21	1.04
Does Mother Live in Household			
Lives in Household			
Does not Live in Household	0.38***	0.22 - 0.64	0.34***
Does the Mother have a Functional Disability?			
Does not have Disability	0.93	0.79 - 1.10	0.92
Has Disability			
How many Members in the Household			
3 or less members	1.89***	1.51 - 2.37	1.94***
4 - 5 members	2.05***	1.64 - 2.55	2.21***
6 - 7 members	2.19***	1.74 - 2.75	2.30***
8 - 9 members	2.38***	1.88 - 3.00	2.45***
10 or more members			
Age of Child			
5 - 11 years	0.57***	0.52 - 0.62	0.39***
12 - 14 years			
The child currently attending School			
Not Attending School	1.56***	1.35 - 1.82	1.52***
Attending School			
Child Engaged in Child Labor			
Not engaged in Child Labor	0.94	0.75 - 1.18	0.83*
Engaged in Child Labor			
(If Child Works) Is Child Doing Hazardous Work			
Does not do Hazardous Work	1.01	0.77 - 1.33	1.03
Does do Hazardous Work			

Variables	Psychological Abuse	Moderate Physical Abuse	Severe Physical Abuse
Does Hazardous Work The child does Household Chores Do not do Household Chores	1.72***	1.60 - 1.85	1.26*** 1.18 - 1.35 1.19*** 1.12 - 1.27
Does Household Chores Mobility Issues (Does the Child Need Walking) Does not need assistance in Walking Needs Assistance in Walking	0.85	0.61 - 1.19	1.51** 1.07 - 2.13 1.29* 0.96 - 1.73
The child needs to be physically punished to be brought up properly. Punishment not necessary Punishment is necessary	2.84***	2.62 - 3.08	2.87*** 2.68 - 3.09 2.51*** 2.36 - 2.67

**Discussion and Conclusion**

The study aimed to identify the determinants of psychological, moderate physical, and severe physical abuse of children (5 and 14 years), in Punjab. Findings revealed that boys had greater odds of facing psychological and physical violence compared to girls. Household wealth was negatively related to abuse and children living in affluent households were less likely to be inflicted with psychological and moderate physical violence. However, the relationship between household wealth and severe physical violence was not clear. The father's education was negatively related to moderate and severe physical child abuse. Conversely, the mother's education was positively associated with both psychological and moderate physical child violence. Children growing up with their mothers had greater odds of being of encountering physical and psychological violence compared with children growing up without a

mother. Household size emerged as an important determinant of child abuse. Compared to small households, children living in medium-sized, large, and very large households had greater odds of facing psychological, moderate, and severe physical violence. Younger children were facing significantly more abuse than older children. Children attending school were more at risk of facing violence (including psychological, moderate, and severe physical) while working children had significantly lesser odds of being physically abused. Children engaged in household chores had higher odds of experiencing violence (including psychological, and moderate and severe physical). In cases where the parents or guardians believed that the use of punishment was necessary to bring up children properly, children were found to be extremely likely to experience the three types of abuse.

Findings indicate a gender disparity in the prevalence of abuse among boys and girls. The study perhaps may have unveiled an often ignored aspect of patriarchy. In patriarchal societies, where girls are divested of many rights and liberties, boys too may be facing more discipline and abuse as part of their socialization process. Policies and development programs that aim at mitigating the gender gap in Pakistan should also focus on this aspect of patriarchy. The association of socioeconomic factors with child abuse also warrants policies and programs that specifically focus on the incidence of child abuse among disadvantaged families and communities. Even though the association between the father's education and abuse followed a predicted trend, the association between the mother's education and the risk of child abuse presented an anomaly. This finding requires further exploration. It can be surmised that perhaps educated mothers hold higher expectations towards their children in terms of discipline and educational achievement. This stress may be attenuated when coupled with the limitation of resources and access to opportunities. Alternatively, it is also possible that our education system fails to permeate the influence of the local culture, which generally considers the use of punishment for children as legitimate. This explanation is further bolstered by evidence that more than half the women believed that punishing children was necessary to properly bring children up.

The study posited a positive relationship between household size and child abuse. Larger households are more likely to face resource and space constraints which may lead to a stressful environment within the

household. Furthermore, parental supervision of children may be more difficult in larger households as the parents are more likely to be busy with work or household-related responsibilities. In such cases, younger children may be under the unsupervised care and control of older siblings for long periods. This may lead to imbalances in the power dynamics between siblings in a household, allowing older siblings the leeway to exert authoritative control over their younger siblings, leading to more instances of abuse.

Future research should also explore why younger children, school-going children, and children engaged in household chores are at a higher risk of facing violence. In the case of working children, perhaps the contribution that they make to the household income offers them a blanket of protection against abuse.

Overall, the findings show child abuse to be a multifaceted phenomenon that is influenced by an intricate interplay between various socioeconomic, household-level, and individual-level factors. To fully understand this complex phenomenon, future studies should validate these findings and address interpretational gaps using mixed methods. Policymakers should design policies and intervention programs to empower and protect vulnerable groups like young boys, and children living in poverty and those living in large households. Furthermore, findings suggest a need to review the school curriculums to ensure that students are properly educated about the harmful consequences of violence on young children.

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