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## EMPOWERING TEACHERS IN CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION: STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING PERSONAL SAFETY EDUCATION INTO TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMS

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### Abstract

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The primary purpose of the current study was to explore teachers' perspectives regarding the current practices of personal safety education in schools. The study employed a descriptive research approach. A total of (N =5687) teachers served as the population of investigation from government elementary and primary schools located in Multan region, Punjab, Pakistan. The study's representative sample of teachers was composed of (211), including male teachers (M = 80) and female teachers (F =131) selected through a stratified sampling technique. The data was collected using a structured questionnaire. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics frequencies, percentages, mean, standard deviation, and inferential statistics independent sample t-tests in SPSS. According to the results, teachers were quite confident in their ability to deal with child abuse issues; however, they lack the policies and training to educate children on personal safety education in schools. The study recommended that multifaceted tactics, requiring joint efforts from the administration, stakeholders, and policymakers, can prevent child abuse. Therefore, to effectively combat child abuse, schools should offer teachers training programs on personal safety education.

**Keywords:** Prevention, Safety, Strategies, Teachers, Training.

## Introduction

Child sexual abuse (CSA) continues to be a widespread and devastating danger to the welfare of children worldwide. It is a serious contravention of children's rights, affecting millions of children worldwide. The problem has attracted growing attention due to the recent surge in diverse manifestations of child abuse, which portrays the anguish of susceptible children who rely on others for their well-being and protection. According to [YAAR \(2023\)](#), such children are tortured, humiliated, deprived, and sexually abused provided they are supposed to receive adequate care. However, it is worth mentioning that many children's sexual abuse (CSA) cases go unheeded, especially in low-income developing countries where children experience mental, physical, and sexual abuse. Child abuse can be stopped through education and prevention efforts ([Ramesh, 2017](#)). As such, [Yasmin \(2023\)](#) described in a study that there are many cases of abuse happening globally, and more than 45 percent of children experience some form of violence per year. This is the reason why violence erupts unnoticed, the suffering of survivors is masked, and the impact CSA has on people and society is not evident and hard to explain, a topic that remains a deep worry. The factors such as poverty, illiteracy, and cultural barriers inhibiting the discussion of sexual health make it worse in Pakistan. As per the local and international media, it was reported that sexual violence especially in the form of rape led to the death of more than 800 children in Pakistan ([Faraz, 2022](#)). The consequences of child abuse affect the social, psychological, and physical aspects of life and remain for a longer period. Those kids who report cases of sexual abuse end up lodging withdrawals owing to continued pressure from unyielding parents and caregivers, thus worsening their self-torment and acute fear ([Chandran, 2018](#)). CSA is an antecedent to several criminal actions such as child labor, trafficking, and other forms

of exploitation ([Ashraf & Ilyas, 2018](#)). Since CSA has a major impact on people and the entire society, government and non-government organizations should work shoulder to shoulder in gathering large amounts of data, implementing national action plans, and raising awareness to combat this rapidly emerging social and health crisis. Moreover, professionals and leaders in education can play a crucial role in preventing CSA by explaining its negative effects ([Avais et al., 2020](#)). Besides, another research study conducted by [Qadeer \(2023\)](#) in Pakistan shows that 10 to 20 percent of children are sexually abused, though the numbers are high because most cases are never reported due to cultural taboos and the absence of adequate laws. Besides, [Meghani et al. \(2014\)](#) also indicated that Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) is the most unreported crime in the country of Pakistan. It is well understood that in most Pakistani cultures the topic is very sensitive; this explains why children are usually very quiet whenever there is a case that has been abused. Furthermore, [Choudhry et al. \(2018\)](#) observed a progressive rise in CSA reporting in Pakistan. Regrettably, a significant number of unreported incidents persist. The incidence figures indicate an annual increase in reported cases of (CSA) in Pakistan. Empirical data indicates that from 7% to 19% of children worldwide have experienced child sexual abuse (CSA). Moreover, the data related to child abuse cases may not accurately represent the extent of the issue because of underreporting and constraints in data gathering ([Ashraf & Ilyas, 2018](#)). Child abuse continues to be a prominent societal problem in Pakistan and globally, leading to repercussions such as child labor and trafficking ([Ashraf, 2022](#)). The classification of children according to gender indicates that the Childhood Sexual Abuse rate is raised by 47% for male children and by 22% for girls ([Rahim et al. 2021](#)). Currently, in Pakistan, there is a group of children who don't understand the

difference between sexually abusive behaviors and are reluctant to divulge them to their maternities, trainers, or others, fearing rejection. Given the numerous pressing issues in Pakistan, research on training teachers to prevent child abuse and teach personal safety is particularly significant. Incidents of child abuse, encompassing physical, emotional, and sexual manifestations, continue to be a significant concern nationwide. Teachers, being the first point of contact for children outside of their families, play a crucial role in identifying and addressing instances of abuse. The disparities between regulations and the actual state of instructors' knowledge and preparedness necessitate the implementation of enhanced training programs. Moreover, with the high prevalence of child abuse in Pakistan, teachers have a crucial responsibility in recognizing and reacting to instances of abuse. Child abuse continues to be a profound issue nationwide, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. Teachers, who are frequently the initial point of contact for children outside of their families, have a vital responsibility in recognizing and dealing with instances of abuse. Such measures can ensure that teachers are equipped with the knowledge and ability to protect the pupils or respond appropriately to cases of abuse. Teachers who are well-trained in these areas are likely to create a safe and nurturing classroom environment for the students, hence the positive influence on the wellbeing of learners and their learning process. To better equip teachers in safeguarding pupils, the study emphasizes the necessity of culturally appropriate training and enhanced policy implementation. The present study offers significant insights for policymakers, educational administrators, and school leaders, providing practical suggestions to improve teacher training programs and child safety initiatives. The research intends to enhance the safety and development of the educational environment for children in

Pakistan by focusing on these specific areas. The results of this study may provide valuable information and evidence-based recommendations to school administrators, policymakers, and education system administrators. The study on child abuse prevention and personal safety in Pakistan has implications and significance since it can yield significant contributions to several significant research areas. This can in turn lead to better identification of children who may require intervention and assistance and hence play a part in the reduction of the rates of abuse and the impact it has on the victims. The main purpose of the investigation was to examine current practices regarding safety education in schools to prevent child abuse and to optimize the learning environment by instructing children in schools on self-protection measures. The current research pursuit intended to promote the strategies for child abuse prevention and initiate to inclusion of personal safety education in teachers' training programs in Pakistan.

### **Research Objectives**

- 1.To analyze teachers' perspectives on how confident they are in managing personal safety issues in schools.
- 2.To assess the level of awareness among teachers about school policies on child abuse.
- 3.To evaluate the teacher's training requirements for addressing and responding to child abuse issues.
- 4.To recommend strategies for enhancing personal safety education in schools.

### **Literature Review**

Extensive research has focused on the problem of child abuse, specifically in primary school environments, due to its profound effects on young children's physical, emotional, and cognitive growth. In this respect, [Smith \(2018\)](#) indicated that psychological, sexual, and physical abuse are predominant types of abuse in children. As a matter of fact, within nations in developing

countries particularly are characterized by prevalent taboos on sexual health, poverty, and illiteracy, the presence of socioeconomic circumstances intensifies the occurrence of child abuse (Faraz, 2022). Furthermore, Chandran (2018) pointed out that the reporting of incidents of child sexual abuse (CSA), and the absence of interventions after reporting continue to be major obstacles in tackling the problem in society. In addition to this, Alazri & Hanna (2020) showed their concern that most teachers have low preparedness for defining and preventing cases of child abuse and may thus experience dissatisfaction with their ability to effectively address the issue. Additionally, in another research investigation Mathews et al, (2020) also emphasized that to communicate knowledge and initiate appropriate interactions to protect the children, teachers must have the necessary materials and training related to safety measures. Moreover, Ali (2018) indicated in a study that if teachers or professionals are trained and supported adequately, they can easily identify and report cases of child abuse. To prevent child abuse and to ensure a safe and secure school atmosphere for children, it is necessary to increase awareness and safety education. In addition, Avais et al. (2020) also stressed in their research investigation that there is an urgent need to raise awareness about the moral and ethical imperatives of protecting children from abuse. Further, Gabbels & Assink (2021) highlighted that teachers feel apprehended to deal with such issues due to highly culturally sensitive problems.

### **Research Methodology**

The study's primary focus was to assess teachers' perspectives, with a particular emphasis on their confidence in addressing child abuse prevention and personal safety education in government schools in the Multan district. The study employed a descriptive research design to meet its objectives. The investigation population

consisted of a total (5687) five thousand six hundred and eighty-seven teachers from government primary and elementary schools in the district of Multan, Punjab, Pakistan. According to data, there are a total of 358 primary and elementary male and female schools in the Multan region. The teachers from primary and elementary schools were selected using a stratified sampling technique. For this purpose, the population was divided into strata based on school type (primary and elementary schools), and a proportional sample size was allocated to each stratum. Further, random sampling was used to select schools within each stratum, and then teachers were randomly selected from these schools. Finally, the researchers used stratified random sampling procedures to draw the sample of (211) teachers, comprising (131) female and (80) male teachers. A structured questionnaire was used for the collection of data from the teachers. An extensive review of related literature helped develop the five-point Likert scale research instrument. The questionnaire mainly covered 2 sections; the first section included respondents' background such as gender, location, etc. The second section of the questionnaire addressed various dimensions, including the teacher's confidence to deal with child abuse, the teacher's awareness of policies regarding child abuse in school, the assessment of training needs on safety education, and strategies to promote safety education for children in schools. The content validity of the research tool was assessed through consultation with educationists and experts in the field of Education. Similarly, the reliability of all items of the questionnaire was also checked before its implementation. The reliability coefficient of the overall questionnaire was observed to be greater than 0.79, which is considered acceptable. The data was collected through personal visits and Google forms from all the participants in respective schools of the Multan region. Ethical principles, such as the

comfort level of the teachers, were ensured. Moreover, privacy and confidentiality of data were also ensured in the collection of data because of the sensitive issues and socio-cultural context in Pakistan.

### Data Analysis

**Table no. 1**

#### *Gender-wise Analysis*

Gender	Frequencies	Percentages
Male	80	38%
Female	131	62%
Total	211	100%

Table 1 illustrates the gender distribution within a sample of N=211 individuals, where 80 are male (38%) and 131 are female (62%). This data shows a significant disparity between the genders, with males comprising substantially less of the sample. The percentages reflect the proportion of each gender relative to the total population, highlighting a notable gender imbalance in this group.

**Table no. 2**

#### *Teachers' Confidence Towards Managing Personal Safety Issues*

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median	Mode
1. I feel confident in my ability to recognize signs of child abuse in students.	211	3.45	1.12	3.00	3.00
2. I feel confident in my ability to teach students about personal safety effectively.	211	3.60	1.05	4.00	4.00
3. I can easily provide students with clear, actionable steps on how to protect themselves and whom to contact in case of safety concerns.	211	3.75	1.10	4.00	4.00
4. I feel adequately prepared to address child abuse concerns that arise in my classroom.	211	3.50	1.15	3.00	3.00

Table 2 shows feedback from the teachers on 4 statements about how sure teachers feel about handling personal safety issues. The average scores fall between 3.45 and 3.75, with standard deviations ranging from 1.05 to 1.15. Most median scores are either 3.00 or 4.00, and the most common responses (modes) are often 3.00 or 4.00. This suggests that teachers feel confident in dealing with personal safety matters.

**Table no. 3**

#### *Teachers' Awareness Regarding Policies on Child Abuse*

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median	Mode
1. I feel that the school provides sufficient ongoing support for managing child abuse and personal safety issues.	211	3.40	1.20	3.00	3.00
2. I have access to updated materials and resources related to child abuse prevention.	211	3.55	1.10	4.00	4.00
3. I am aware of how to report concerns related to child abuse or personal safety within my school.	211	3.70	1.15	4.00	4.00

Table 3 shows the teachers' responses to 3 statements about how much teachers know about child abuse rules. The averages go from 3.40 to 3.70, and the spread of answers ranges from 1.10 to 1.20. The middle values are 3.00 or 4.00, and the most common answers are often 3.00 or 4.00. This suggests teachers have a good understanding of child abuse policies.

**Table no. 4**

#### *Need Assessment of Training in Personal Safety Education*

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median	Mode
1. I believe there should be more emphasis on child abuse prevention and personal safety in teacher professional development programs.	211	3.80	1.05	4.00	4.00
2. I believe that additional training sessions on personal safety would enhance my ability to manage classroom safety.	211	3.85	1.00	4.00	4.00
3. I am familiar with the details of my school's policy on child abuse prevention.	211	3.65	1.10	4.00	4.00
4. I believe that additional training on personal safety for students would further enhance my ability to educate them effectively.	211	3.90	1.05	4.00	4.00

Table 4 shows the answers from teachers to 4 statements about the need for training in personal safety education. The averages fall between 3.65 and 3.90, with standard deviations ranging from 1.00 to 1.10. Most medians are 4.00, and modes often hit 4.00 too. This suggests teachers feel they need more training on how to teach personal safety.

**Table no. 5**

#### *Strategies for Enhancing Personal Safety*

Table 5 displays the responses of the teachers on the ways of improving personal safety education. The mean scores are 3.65 to 3.85 and the standard deviations are 1.05-1.12. Most of the median values indicate 4.00 and modes are also as high as 4.00 in many cases. This means that teachers strongly perceive the variety of practices, like participative learning processes and skills developmental activities to support personal safety education. In all,

the findings imply that the educators understand the relevancy of these strategies and they are confident in adopting them.

**Table 6**  
**T-test for Gender-Wise analysis of Teachers' confidence in managing Child Safety issues**

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Median	Mode
1. The use of games and sports should be promoted for the development of adequate knowledge for personal safety.	211	3.70	1.08	4.00	4.00
2. Personal safety training, which must include bullying prevention measures, should be introduced in schools.	211	3.75	1.10	4.00	4.00
3. Teachers should guide children on how to anonymously report any matter regarding safety or abuse.	211	3.65	1.12	4.00	4.00
4. Peer support should be used to enhance safety training for young children.	211	3.80	1.05	4.00	4.00
5. Teachers ought to teach behaviors to children on how to stay protected.	211	3.85	1.07	4.00	4.00
6. Specific skills should be practiced through role play for the assistance of children to teach what is acceptable behavior.	211	3.70	1.10	4.00	4.00
7. Teaching aids should be utilized to supplement teaching on personal safety.	211	3.75	1.09	4.00	4.00
7. Teaching aids should be utilized to supplement teaching on personal safety.	211	3.65	1.11	4.00	4.00

  

Factor	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
Child abuse	Male	80	46.1111	9.24849	1.034	-0.389	0.698	-1.22222
	Female	131	47.3333	12.27217	1.073			

Table no 6 represents the average scores of t-tests that were intended to determine the difference between male and female teachers regarding their confidence in managing child safety issues (M=46.1111) and 131 females (M=47.3333), no difference was observed between the two genders in their confidence level. (t=-0.389 p=0.698). Even though the numbers aren't the same, the results show no real statistical difference between the two groups.

**Discussion**

According to the study's findings, teachers generally don't have the knowledge or the relevant content to deal with child abuse cases. Similarly, [Ain \(2017\)](#) discovered a dearth of interventions or instructional materials in schools that could potentially increase awareness among primary school students. The study findings indicated that teachers lack the policies and regulations for dealing with child abuse issues. The results are consistent with the conclusions of [Barron & Topping \(2010\)](#) in which it was highlighted that teachers at public sector primary schools have complained

that they lack the policies and required content to educate the children regarding safety measures to prevent incidences of child abuse. Furthermore, according to the findings, there were no training plans to provide instructors with continuing professional development opportunities to inform them about safety education. In a similar vein, [Zakar \(2016\)](#) emphasized in a study that awareness-raising initiatives implemented in schools can positively influence children's knowledge and ability to defend themselves. Additionally, study results also correspond to conclusions drawn by [Ali \(2018\)](#) that there is a dearth of CSA-related resources in schools that prepare teachers to address this issue in the classroom.

**Conclusion**

The best way to stop the abuse of children is for the government, lawmakers, and teachers to work together in an integrated, comprehensive, and multidimensional strategy. To combat child abuse, educators must have the necessary training to educate students about personal safety. It is necessary to place more emphasis on teaching personal safety in classrooms. Safety education should be a part of every school's curriculum. Of course, we must all work to end child abuse. By providing our educators with the knowledge and tools they need to help their students stay safe on campus, we can reduce the prevalence of child abuse. In addition, the cultural diversity within Pakistan makes the issue of Child abuse even more complex. Some cultural factors include shame, family pressure, and cultural beliefs, among others, may deter or encourage the act of abuse frequently or reduce the reporting of abuse. Considering this, the purpose of this study was to evaluate the feasibility of the training programs for safety education. Teacher training to sufficiently teach children about safety and the assessment of signs of victimization is essential to creating a safe environment that will foster learning. Teachers must possess the ability to educate pupils on basic safety measures and

identify indicators of abuse to establish a safe learning environment.

### Recommendations

- Establish and execute training initiatives for teachers to increase their knowledge and awareness of child abuse, identify indicators of abuse, and proficiently report suspected instances.
- It is imperative to promote a conducive atmosphere in schools where teachers are at ease addressing child abuse issues and have access to essential resources and support systems.
- There is a need to Promote current child safety policies and regulations to guarantee their comprehensiveness and efficient implementation at the school level.
- The implementation of awareness programs inside schools is necessary to teach students about the identification of abuse in educational settings. It is necessary to provide instructors with instructional material so that they can effectively educate students about their safety in educational institutions.

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