

***Mapping Study On Violence
Against Children in Pakistan(2024):
A Provincial Analysis of Physical and
Sexual Abuse, Kidnapping, Child
Trafficking, Child Marriage, and Child
Labor***





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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Violence, in all its forms—whether Gender-Based Violence (GBV) or Violence Against Children (VAC)—can occur in any setting and community. VAC remains a largely hidden issue worldwide, often taking place behind closed doors, where children are subjected to various forms of abuse, neglect, and exploitation. These include physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, child marriage, kidnapping or abduction, forced and bonded labour, and trafficking. All such forms of violence inflicted on individuals under the age of 18 have the potential to cause lifelong harm.

Exposure to violence in childhood significantly increases the risk of a range of behavioral, physical, and mental health problems. These may include depression, substance abuse, high-risk sexual behavior, and impaired development of the brain and nervous system. The consequences of childhood violence are profound and far-reaching, impacting not only individual well-being but also society at large.

The World Health Organization estimates that 1 billion children between the ages of 2 and 17 face some form of physical, emotional, or sexual violence (WHO, n.d.). Even more heartbreaking—three out of four children aged 2 to 4 are regularly punished with violence or harsh words by the very people who are supposed to care for them (UNICEF, n.d.). These are not just numbers; these are real children, with names, dreams, and futures that are being harmed quietly. Thus, to eliminating this violence against children, the goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Target 16.2 aims to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against the children.

Pakistan is no better at this. Every day, children across Pakistan are subjected to violence at schools, homes, streets, often by their caregivers. From child marriages to physical and sexual abuse, coerced into Labor, their agony concealed in silence. In 2023, UNICEF helped to protect 7,271 children (3,471 girls and 3,800 boys) who were either at risk or survivors of violence (Pakistan-2023-COAR.Pdf, n.d.).

Scope and Focus of the Report

This report highlights the state of violence against children in Pakistan, focusing on data obtained through the Right to Information (RTI). It emphasizes the importance of a statistical analysis to address these issues, identify provinces and regions with highest reported cases and gaps in the criminal justice system.

This report highlights the VAC trends and types—Physical and Sexual Abuse, Kidnapping, Trafficking, Child Marriage and Labor—across Pakistan, with the strong aim to identify deficiencies in reporting, investigations, and trial proceedings. By thoroughly examining case registration, conviction rates, and delays in the judicial process. Addressing these gaps is key to building stronger enforcement systems, expand support for victims, and implementing legal frameworks that children with urgency and strength from violence.

Objectives

- *To identify and analyse gaps in the reporting, investigation, and trial proceedings of these cases. the prevalence of different types of Violence against Children—including physical abuse, sexual abuse, kidnapping, child marriage, child trafficking, and child labor— in the province of Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan and Sindh.*

- *To identify and analyse gaps in the reporting, investigation, and trial proceedings of these cases.*

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METHODOLOGY

Methodology:

This quantitative research study presents the prevalence of Violence against Children indicators in four provinces of Pakistan. Primary data was collected through formal Right to Information (RTI) requests submitted to the police departments of the province of Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan and Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) and District Public Prosecutor of ICT under respective laws of Right of Access to Information. Upon receipt, all the data underwent a systematic digitization and cleaning process into Microsoft Excel database to remove errors. To ensure data integrity, multiple research team members conducted verification checks on all entries. The cleaned data was sorted systematically and organized to facilitate both national and provincial level analysis.

Right to Information

Every citizen shall have the right to have access to information in all matters of public importance subject to regulation and reasonable restrictions imposed by law.

Article 19A of the Constitution of Pakistan

RTI Laws in Pakistan:

- The Punjab Transparency and Right to Information Act 2013
- Sindh Transparency and Right to Information Act 2016
- The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Right to Information Act, 2013
- The Balochistan Right to Information Act of 2021



The population data for children under the age of 18 in each district of Pakistan's provinces has been derived using the overall population figures and the age-wise distribution provided by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics i.e. Table 5 of 7th Population and Housing Scheme (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, n.d.). By subtracting the population above 18 from the total population in each district, the number of under-18 individuals has been calculated.

After calculating the population, the rate of cases of each district for each province is calculated using the standardize formula for crime rate calculation (Public Safety Institute, 2023). The rate represents the number of cases per 100,000 individuals in the population.

$$\text{Crime Rate} = \left(\frac{\text{Number of VAC reported cases to the Police}}{\text{Population of the Province}} \right)$$

Limitations

The request was filed to Islamabad police under Right of Access to Information Act, 2017 and even after filing the complaint Pakistan Information Commission, the data was not provided by the ICT police.

Definitions

FIR (First Information Report)

An FIR is an account of a cognizable (i.e. over which police has jurisdiction) offence that is entered into a particular format in a register at the police station. Every person has a right to report any matter at the police station concerned and have a case registered in the form of an FIR. The matter may be reported orally or in writing to an officer at a police station or on patrol. An officer who receives an oral report shall reduce it to writing and cause it to be recorded in the FIR register. A certified copy of the FIR, signed by an officer bearing the stamp of the police station is to be provided to the person who reports the crime.[1]

Challan

In criminal proceedings, a challan (charge sheet) is submitted to the court after the completion of investigation by the police.

Conviction

Conviction is the act or process of judicially finding someone guilty of a crime; the state of having been proved guilty.

Acquittals

Trial Court after putting accusation to the accused and examining one PW holding that it had no jurisdiction to try the case and acquitted the accused. Held, such order is an order of acquittal within the meaning of section 403 (1), Cr.P.C. and the accused cannot be re-tried. (DB) 1968 P Cr.LJ 1328 State v. Bashir Ahmed.[2]

Withdrawn

Withdrawn refers to the process where a legal case is discontinued or dropped before a final judgment is made. In the context of criminal cases in Pakistan, a case may be withdrawn by the prosecution, complainant, or the court under certain circumstances.

[1] <https://punjabpolice.gov.pk/faqs>

[2] https://pcps.punjab.gov.pk/acquittal_and_discharge

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Pakistan: Country Analysis

Violence Against Children in Pakistan: Key Findings (2024)

21 Children were abused daily in Pakistan



7608 cases of violence against children reported across Pakistan in 2024.

PHYSICAL ABUSE

683

cases were reported across Pakistan.

1%

Conviction rate

SEXUAL ABUSE

2954

cases were reported across Pakistan.

1.01%

Conviction rate

TRAFFICKING

586

cases were reported
across Pakistan.

46%

Conviction rate

KIDNAPPING

2437

cases were reported
across Pakistan.

0.20%

Conviction rate

CHILD LABOR

895

cases were reported
across Pakistan.

37%

Conviction rate

CHILD MARRAIGE

53

cases were reported
across Pakistan.

0%

Conviction rate

Results and Discussions

Country Province-wise Analysis

Table 1 Number of Violence against Children Cases in Pakistan - Police Data (2024)

Total Registered Cases						
Province	Physical Abuse	Sexual Abuse	Kidnapping	Trafficking	Marriage	Labor
Punjab	455	2506	2189	457	26	450
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	208	366	93	6	3	426
Sindh	19	19	152	121	24	19
Balochistan	1	63	3	2	0	0
Total	683	2954	2437	586	53	895

This table depicts a comprehensive overview of registered cases of VAC types Physical and Sexual Abuse, Kidnapping, Trafficking, child Marriage and child Labor– across Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Balochistan. This data illustrates the regional disparities in number of cases and brings to the forefront the critical and deeply rooted issue of violence against children.

Table 2 Rate of Violence against Children (per 100,000 population)

Rate (per 100,000 Child Population)							
Province	Population	Physical Abuse	Sexual Abuse	Kidnapping	Trafficking	Marriage	Labor
Punjab	56,320,353	0.8	4.4	3.9	0.8	0.05	0.8
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	19,931,395	1	1.8	0.5	0.03	0.02	2.1
Sindh	27,664,581	0.07	0.07	1	0.4	0.09	0.07
Balochistan	8,247,599	0.01	0.8	0.5	0.02	0	0

This table presents crime rates per 100,000 children in Pakistan's provinces, showcasing how population size influences statistics.

Physical Abuse

The aggregated number of documented cases totaled 683, with Punjab reported 455 cases, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 208, while Sindh and Balochistan showing massively under reporting, total number of cases were 19 and 1 respectively, indicating substantial underreporting.

Punjab reports the highest number of cases across all categories, primarily because its larger demographic base as illustrated in table 2. However, the lower number of reported cases from the other provinces indicates severely underreporting

For instance, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa shows a rate of 1. Punjab follows with a rate 0.8. In contrast, Sindh and Balochistan display considerably lower rates, which can be attributed to underreporting.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse reported the highest number of cases than all indicators. Punjab, being the most populous province and reflecting higher reporting mechanisms than others, recorded 2,506 in table 1 cases of child sexual abuse, with a rate of 4.4 per 100,000 population— depicting that approximately 4 children out of every 100,000 are subjected to sexual abuse. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) reported 366 cases, with a rate of 1.8, reflecting relatively better reporting compared to the Sindh and Balochistan provinces. In contrast, Sindh and Balochistan reported only 19 and 63 cases respectively, which again suggests underreporting in these provinces

Kidnapping

A total of 2,437 kidnapping cases were reported across the four provinces. Sindh showed slightly better reporting in this category compared to previous categories, with 152 cases registered and a rate of 1. Punjab, due to its larger population and stronger reporting mechanisms, accounted for 90% of the cases—2,189 in total, with a rate of 3.9 this implies a comparatively stronger documentation or willingness to report such incidents. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), 93 cases were reported, with a lower rate of 0.5, pointing toward possible underreporting. Balochistan, once again, reported the lowest number of cases, with only 3 instances of kidnapping recorded, reflecting a pattern of persistent and severe underreporting in the province.

Child Trafficking

A total of 586 cases of trafficking were reported in four provinces. As in previous trends, Punjab shows the highest number of cases reported. A total of 457 cases in Punjab, with the rate of 3.9 per 100,000 population were observed. Sindh like kidnapping also showed, marginally better reporting in trafficking cases (121). Khyber Pakhtunkhwa shows signs of underreporting in this category, with only 6 cases recorded. Balochistan also reflects underreporting, with just 2 cases reported.

Child Marriage

Child marriage prevails as a substantially underreported issue across all provinces. The total number of reported cases were alarmingly low, indicating both gaps in monitoring mechanisms and potential social stigma around reporting on child marriage. Punjab registered only 26 cases. Sindh followed closely with 24 cases, while Khyber Pakhtunkhwa reported just 3 cases. Most notably, Balochistan reported zero cases of child marriage, which strongly indicates massive underreporting rather than the absence of practice.

Child Labor

A total of 895 cases were reported in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Sindh and Balochistan. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, despite having 2 times less population than Punjab, reported 426 cases, making approximately 48% of total cases: the rate is 2.1 as shown in table 2. Punjab reported 450 cases and the rate 0.8. Sindh reported 19 cases again indicating underreporting. Not a single case was reported in Balochistan.

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Key Indicators and Criminal Procedure

Provincial VAC Case Tracking: Key Indicators and Criminal Procedure

Physical Abuse: Analyzing the criminal procedure

Table 3 Province-wise Physical Abuse Data

Physical Abuse							
Province	Registered cases	Challan	Under Investigation	Under Trial	Conviction	Acquittal	Withdrawn
Punjab	455	386	77	260	7	70	3
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	208	203	5	190	0	6	1
Sindh	19	2	16	2	0	0	0
Balochistan	1	1	0	0	0	1	0

The table presents provincial data on physical abuse cases. Punjab reported the highest number of cases at 455, yet only 7 resulted in convictions. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa followed with 208 registered cases but recorded no convictions. Sindh and Balochistan reported 19 and 1 case(s) respectively, with no convictions in either province. The overall data reflects a stark disparity between case registration and successful convictions, highlighting persistent gaps in the justice system. The aggregated cases of physical abuse reported were 683 with the 1% conviction rate.

Sexual Abuse: Analyzing the criminal procedure

Table 4 Province-wise Sexual Abuse Data

Sexual Abuse							
Province	Registered cases	Challan	Under Investigation	Under Trial	Conviction	Acquittal	Withdrawn
Punjab	2506	2075	265	1164	28	228	31
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	366	364	2	345	0	4	1
Sindh	19	3	14	2	0	0	0
Balochistan	63	56	7	53	2	2	0

The data indicates that Punjab recorded the highest number of registered cases at 2,506; however, only 28 cases led to convictions,. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa reported 366 cases with no convictions. Moving on to Balochistan, the total registered cases were 63 and only 2 cases were convicted. Sindh registered 19 cases, with no convictions. Despite hundreds of reported cases in all provinces, the conviction rate remains disproportionality low, raising serious concerns about the effectiveness of investigations, and overall accountability in the justice system.

Kidnapping: Analyzing the criminal procedure

Table 5 Province-wise Kidnapping Data

Kidnapping							
Province	Registered cases	Challan	Under Investigation	Under Trial	Conviction	Acquittal	Withdrawn
Punjab	2189	1145	650	230	4	30	136
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	93	89	4	83	0	1	2
Sindh	152	8	132	9	0	0	0
Balochistan	43	29	8	24	2	4	0

In kidnapping cases, Punjab reported the highest number of registered cases at 2,189, yet only 4 convictions were recorded. A notable 136 cases were withdrawn and 30 ended in acquittals, indicating that a significant portion of cases do not result in justice for the victims. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa registered 93 cases with no convictions. Sindh followed with 152 cases but also failed to secure any convictions. Balochistan registered 43 cases, resulting in 2 convictions and 4 acquittals. The overall conviction rate of 0.2%.

Trafficking: Analyzing the criminal procedure

Table 6 Province-wise Child Trafficking Data

Trafficking							
Province	Registered cases	Challan	Under Investigation	Under Trial	Conviction	Acquittal	Withdrawn
Punjab	457	426	0	123	267	17	3
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	6	5	1	5	0	0	0
Sindh	121	9	99	4	0	0	0
Balochistan	2	2	0	1	0	1	0

Punjab stands out with the highest number of reported cases (457) and convicted cases (267). A rare trend compared to other indicators. In contrast other provinces reported less cases, pointing to underreporting. Sindh registered 121 cases with zero convictions. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa 6 cases were registered with zero conviction and Balochistan recorded 2 cases with zero convictions and 1 acquittal. The overall provincial case count was 586. Approximately 58% of cases were convicted only in Punjab.

Child Marriage: Analyzing the criminal procedure

Table 7 Province-wise Child Marriage Data

Child Marriage							
Province	Registered cases	Challan	Under Investigation	Under Trial	Conviction	Acquittal	Withdrawn
Punjab	26	16	3	12	0	0	0
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	3	3	0	2	0	0	1
Sindh	24	1	18	1	0	0	0
Balochistan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

The rate of conviction is zero among all the provinces. Child Marriage arises as one of the indicators with the lowest levels of reporting in all the provinces. Regardless of its serious repercussions on children's rights and wellbeing, the number of cases reported are shockingly low.

Child Labor: Analyzing the criminal procedure

Table 8 Province-wise Child Labor Data

Child Labor							
Province	Registered cases	Challan	Under Investigation	Under Trial	Conviction	Acquittal	Withdrawn
Punjab	450	353	97	215	66	12	1
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	426	426	0	123	267	17	3
Sindh	19	4	12	0	0	0	0
Balochistan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Punjab reported the highest number of registered cases (450), shows a moderate conviction rate with 66 convictions, while 12 cases resulted in acquittals and one withdrawn. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa follows closely with 426 registered cases

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa showed the highest number of convictions (267), among the rest of the indicators also, implying an effective legal proceeding. While 17 ended in acquittals and 3 withdrawn. In contrast, Sindh registered only 19 cases and showed zero convictions. Balochistan raises concerns about underreporting. No cases were registered in the year 2024.

As shown in table 1, an aggregate of 895 cases were registered across four provinces. Child labor recorded the conviction rate i.e. 37%.

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Recommendations

Recommendations

Law Enforcement and Legislative Reforms:

1. Establish graduated financial penalties for institutions failing to report child abuse cases along with the funds allocated to victim support services.
2. Establish mandatory reporting requirements with clear accountability mechanisms with in the law enforcement agencies.
3. Reform legal procedures to balance swift justice with due process: Establish specialized children's courts with 120-day resolution targets, presumptive non-bail status for serious offenses, and expedited hearing schedules while maintaining constitutional protections.
4. Modernize legal frameworks by comprehensively defining child abuse categories: Include psychological abuse (isolation, intimidation, emotional manipulation), digital exploitation (grooming, non-consensual image sharing, online harassment), and economic exploitation (labor violations, financial control, inheritance theft).
5. Enhance forensic capacity with targeted investment: Establish regional specialized child abuse forensic units, implement chain-of-custody protocols specific to child abuse evidence, and train dedicated forensic specialists in trauma-informed evidence collection.

Data Driven Prevention and Survivor Support

1. Create an integrated offender management system: Develop a tiered registry with different access levels for law enforcement, child-serving institutions, and the public, with clear eligibility criteria for inclusion and removal protocols.
2. Establish comprehensive witness protection mechanisms: Create specialized safe houses for child witnesses, provide trauma-informed legal advocates throughout proceedings, and allocate sustainable funding through dedicated budget lines.
3. Implement evidence-based institutional safety certification: Design age-appropriate safety standards for different types of institutions, require biannual independent audits, and create accountability mechanisms for certification maintenance.
4. Develop community monitoring systems: Establish local child protection committees with clear mandates and reporting pathways, provide standardized training curriculum, and create data sharing protocols with formal protection systems.
5. Leverage technology responsibly: Implement privacy-preserving data analytics to identify systemic risk factors, create early warning systems based on validated indicators, and establish ethical guidelines for technology use in child protection.

Social Awareness & Community Engagement

1. Design comprehensive awareness campaigns based in schools on good touch and bad touch for children and for parents to how to communicate this essential and sensitive topic with children: Focus on actionable prevention strategies rather than fear-based messaging, tailor communications to different audience segments, and measure campaign effectiveness through changed attitudes and behaviors.
2. Engage influential community leaders through structured partnerships: Provide specialized training on child protection messaging, develop standardized resource materials for different contexts, and create accountability mechanisms for consistent messaging.
3. Implement targeted outreach to vulnerable communities: Map underserved areas using socioeconomic indicators, develop culturally appropriate materials for diverse communities, and train local advocates from within communities.
4. Integrate comprehensive safety education into educational institutions: Develop age-appropriate curriculum for different developmental stages, train educators in trauma-informed teaching methods, and create evaluation mechanisms to measure effectiveness.
5. Establish media accountability frameworks: Develop reporting guidelines in consultation with child protection experts and journalists, provide specialized training for reporters covering child abuse cases, and implement a review system for ethical coverage.



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