**Unrelenting Menace**

[Muhammad Kashif](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/muhammad-kashif/%22%20%5Co%20%22More%20Articles%20by%20Muhammad%20Kashif)

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Nowadays, hardly a day goes by when no dreadful incident of child abuse emerges. Unfortunately, subjecting innocent little children to harsh physical or sexual abuse has become a daily occurrence. Sahil, an NGO functioning for the protection of children, compiled a report that revealed that 4253 cases of child abuse were reported in Pakistan last year alone. It is indeed an alarming number. What adds more to this sorrowful figure is the irrefutable fact that it cannot be an exaggerated number but surely an underreported one, as a large number of cases go unreported because the victims’ families mostly fear humiliation and the threats hurled by influential people, so they do not dare to demand justice. Also, the victims’ families are sometimes enticed with hefty money to not take any legal steps against the perpetrators. A lot of such cases have happened in the past, where the culprits used either money, political influence, or death threats to come clean about their crimes, even those that were unforgivable and cruel in nature.

The sad reality is that our society may face a grimmer situation in the future, as child abuse cases rose 33% compared to 2021. It indicates for the future that if this rampant menace is not curbed promptly, it will further tighten the noose around the country’s neck. Furthermore, the government appears to have buried its head in the sand, which is obvious from the back-to-back ghastly incidents that surfaced within the past few months. The painful agony of the little girl, Rizwana, who faced extreme torture at the hands of a callous judge in Islamabad had not yet subsided when the dreadful story of another ten-year-old girl named Fatima, who fell under the wrath of a brutish predator, came to light in Ranipur. The former incident was indeed terrible; however, the latter shook every soul as a little teenage girl was pushed to death in an absolutely abhorrent way. These incidents captured attention immediately due to social media, but many of those that don’t fall on the radar of social media go ignored and unnoticed.

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The sinisterly rising frequency of child abuse incidents points to the grim reality that morality is gradually perishing in our society. As per a report by Al Jazeera, a child was sexually abused every two hours in Pakistan this year. Such incidents never manifest in a civilized and morally intact society. As our society advances along the lines of modernization, it is sidetracking from its ethical and moral lines, which is starkly apparent from these couple of incidents unleashed in the past few months. The girl in Islamabad, whose body was riddled with bruises inflicted by heavy torture, suffered at the hands of an educated woman whose spouse is serving as a judge. It clearly shows that families with great education are also indulging in such shameful and despicable acts.

Similarly, this other incident, which transpired in Ranipur, brings out another embarrassing aspect of our society that even people, who are propagating religious teachings and education, are not spared from these despicable crimes. The heart-wrenching sin in Ranipur was committed by a so-called faith healer. Such a detestable action being carried out by a revered figure highlights unambiguously that moral values are declining in our society. Moreover, some local people coming forward to defend and fight for him substantiate the point that people in significant parts of the country, if not the entire country, lack moral education. Both of these incidents had different natures; one pertained to physical abuse and the other was linked with sexual abuse, which clearly shows that both types of abuse are prevalent and flourishing in the country.

In the age of playing games, young children are plunged into the mouths of sharks by their parents. However, the truth is that they are bound to swallow this bitter pill because of growing needs and declining income. In today’s era, it is difficult to feed the family parents together, let alone the father alone, which is why they kneel and make the hard decision of sending children to labour work. Of course, affluent families do not have to bear this agony. It is only the poor who shoulder this pain. No parent would like to see their young children labouring in the age of play, but due to economic hardships, they have to.

Many laws have been enacted and organizations have been set up to deal with child abuse and child labour; however, all of these haven’t yielded any substantive outcomes yet. Indeed, there will be nothing commendable from them in the future either, because by merely creating new and more laws and organisations, these transgressions cannot be stopped. Sincere and concerted efforts are needed at the broader and smaller levels to ensure no child is put through inhumane treatment and child labour reduces instead of flourishing. Besides, stringent punishments should be meted out to those who indulge in these deplorable acts. By condoning them or not holding them accountable for their crimes, a hazardous notion is sent across that they have impunity; therefore, they commit such acts more frequently and with greater magnitude. And sets a bad precedent for other stray ones to follow.

*The writer is pursuing an MBA at Sukkur IBA University.*