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Challenges in Integration: Sociological Interpretive Analysis of Sexually Abused Male Children in District Dir Lower

Salman Khan¹  Riaz Ullah¹  Dr. Mansoor Ahmad¹  Hammad Zada²  Marjan Gul³ 

¹ Lecturer in Sociology, Govt. Postgraduate College Timergara Lower Dir-Pakistan.

² PhD Scholar, Department of Rural Sociology, The University of Agriculture Peshawar-Pakistan.

³ M.Phil, Department of Pakistan Studies, Islamia College University Peshawar-Pakistan

Correspondence: Dr. Mansoor Ahmad, Email: mansoorsoc5@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study intended to know about the reintegration challenges faced by sexually abused male children. Child sexual abuse causes severe physical, psychological, and emotional suffering and is a serious violation of human rights. The aim of this study was to determine the difficulties faced by male children who had experienced sexual abuse had in reintegrating into society. The researchers employed qualitative research methodologies in this study since the nature of the research necessitates a thorough examination of the rehabilitation and reintegration process. Albert Bandura's social learning theory served as the theoretical foundation for this investigation. The saturation point was used to establish the sample size, which were ten participants. The data in the current study was decoded by the researchers using thematic analysis. The study finds out that there are significant obstacles for male children who have experienced sexual abuse, such as psychological trauma, societal stigma, and a lack of family support. The results indicate that survivors face anxiety, despair, remorse, fear, and loneliness, and that reintegration is further hampered by weak family ties and social stigma. The study recommends establishing community awareness campaigns, offering ongoing psychosocial counseling, and bolstering family-based support networks.



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Introduction

Child sexual abuse describes any sexual act with a child which may be sexually expressive. Child abuse includes any non-accidental, emotional abuse, trauma or injury wreaked on a person under 18 by someone (Günthner, 1996). According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (2022), child sexual abuse is an international epidemic that has awful long-term effects on minor's social, physical and mental health. The environment in which children live has foremost effect on their well-being as well on health. A sexually abused minor faces many mental and physical problems including anxiety, depression, behavior problems, low self-esteem, impaired relationships, lack of interest and drug use. (Manukrishnan & Bhagabati, 2023).

Although its critical role in long-term recovery, reintegration which is the safe return of survivors to their families, educational institutions and communities, remains inadequately addressed. Globally, stigma, lack of gender-sensitive care, and insufficient legal protection continue to be significant obstacles (Alaggia et al, 2017). The victims need reintegration to become acceptable and normal associates of the society. Reintegration is the comprehensive process of emotional, educational and social support of the individual to guarantee the safe, dignified and sustainable requite into the same society to live a normal life. There are numbers of domains of support they need for reintegration and recovery including peer support, life skills, health, basic needs and educational, vocational training, shelter, legal support, access to recreational, cultural and religious activities (Ahmad & Muhammad, 2024).

One of the primary challenges faced by the victims are the discrimination they face on regular basis, which is mostly caused by the sexual harassment and exploitation by the abuser. It is thought as a key barrier for the victims to get

proper education, access to health care, secure jobs and find a place to live. Typically, they also faced fear because they do not want that other people know about their sexual victimization and harassment (Anwar, Österman & Björkqvist, 2022). There are many social issues that lead to imbalance and disruption in societies all around the world. One of the most important societal issues facing the world today is child sexual abuse. According to United Nations International Child Emergency Funds 2024 global estimates, between 240 and 310 million boys worldwide roughly 1 in 11 are raped or sexually assaulted before the age of 18. Every year, 302 million children are impacted by online sexual abuse, which includes exposure to non-consensual sexual content, in addition to physical assault (UNICEF, 2024).

Reintegration frameworks frequently incorporate trauma-informed therapy, specialist foster care, and school reintegration programs in high-income nations like the US, UK, and Australia. However, cultural prejudices that cast doubt on their victim status continue to marginalize male survivors (Manolios, 2022). On the other hand, structural flaws including poverty, cultural stigma, and a lack of child protection services hinder reintegration in low and middle-income countries (LMICs) in South Asia and Africa (Ellermeijer et al., 2023). Access to reintegration services is delayed with disclosure rates of only 10–20%, according to research (Mbakogu & Odiyi, 2021).

The issue of child sexual abuse has long existed in Pakistan. Unfortunately, in Pakistan, child sexual abuse has grown widespread. Neglect, carelessness, mental abuse, physical and sexual abuse, and other kind of exploitation are examples of poor treatment (Abbas, 2021). Boys make up 47% of survivors in Pakistan, which has one of the highest rates of child sexual assault in South Asia, with 4,253 recorded cases. Again, 47% of the 3,364 CSA cases that were

documented in 2024 were male survivors, primarily aged 11 to 15 (Dawn, 2025). Even though there were over 7,600 child abuse cases nationwide in 2024 an average of 21 instances per day conviction rates were still less than 1%. Reintegration is hampered by the absence of accountability when boys return to dangerous situations without access to justice or community support (Duignan, 2025).

Systemic gaps are highlighted by provincial differences in CSA prevalence and reintegration. Nearly 62% of occurrences (3,323 incidences between 2019 and 2023) occur in Punjab, which is indicative of increased reporting but insufficient reintegration programs. Sindh recorded 458 incidents (8.5%), most of which were in urban slums where children are neglected and exploited, but there are seldom any formal programs for their reintegration. With only 257 cases recorded (5%), Baluchistan exhibits a serious underreporting problem as a result of tribal norms and inadequate child protection systems. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, child sexual abuse is a severe problem that prevents many children from leading normal lives. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's legislative bodies and other legal departments did not understand their duty. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa reported 1,360 cases (25.1%) between 2019 and 2023, including 1,102 cases in 2024 alone, including 366 sexual assaults, although no one was found guilty, according to the Department of Home and Tribal Affairs (Retrieved from: Dawn, 2025).

For male survivors, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, is a prime example of the obstacles to reintegration. District-level data is limited, indicating pervasive victim silencing, despite province-wide statistics highlighting high frequency (Batool et al., 2024). Here, archaic traditions, ingrained stigma, and a dearth of professional psychological treatments make reintegration difficult (Dawn, 2023). Bullying in schools, isolation from community areas, and rejection by families out of fear of

"honor loss" all hinder the psycho-social healing and continuation of schooling of many boys. In addition to discouraging disclosure and reintegration, KP low conviction rates expose survivors to recurring abuse (Manolios, 2022).

Statement of the Problem

Child sexual abuse has wreaked havoc upon the social fabric of Pakistan, with numerous detrimental consequences for those who are being affected by it. Ranging from psychological impacts, sexual abuse can tamper with the entire social existence of children. The experience can significantly alter the social behaviors directed towards them, to the extent that even the family members cannot be left out of the equation. The consequences faced are not just personal, but can also become a powerful source of social stigma for their kin and families. This post-abuse behavior act as a form of victim-shaming, that batters the personality and quality of social interactions of the affected children and their families, thereby causing mental agony and social phobia. If the ways are not mended, such children can drift further away from society with destructive personal and social consequences. Therefore, their social reintegration is a desideratum. Unfortunately, the process of reintegration is never a smooth sailing in Pashtun society, therefore addressing the lacunae in the said process shall be given due regard, as to expedite the process of rebuilding the human resource which has been severely battered. This study has extensively examined the challenges affected individuals face in their process of social re-integration, and the strategies which can be employed to brave those challenges.

Objectives of the Study

1. To explore the psychological, social, and cultural barriers affecting the reintegration of sexually abused male children, focusing on stigma, identity, and community acceptance.

2. To understand the experiences of sexually abused male children within reintegration programs, counseling, and institutional policies.

Research Questions

1. How do sexually abused male children experience stigma, identity crisis, and community attitudes during reintegration?
2. How do children and key stakeholders perceive the effectiveness and limitations of reintegration programs, counseling, and policies?

Theoretical Framework

This research study was conducted under the following theoretical Framework;

The social learning theory of Albert Bandura (1925–2021) serves as the foundation for this investigation. This theory asserts that social interaction, imitation and observation are the ways in which behavior is learned. This theory describes how relationships with family, friends, counselors and the community influence coping mechanisms, social behaviors and personal identity. While stigma and unfavorable social cues may encourage maladaptive reactions, positive modeling and supportive treatments promote adaptive behaviors and resilience. Therefore, a research-based framework for analyzing the impact of social surroundings and observable behaviors on reintegration is provided by Social Learning Theory (Bandura & Walters, 1977).

Literature Review

A crucial stage of human development is childhood which lasts from birth till puberty. Any person under the age of eighteen is considered a child under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (Milne, 2005). Engaging a child in sexual activities, such as physical, emotional, or sexual exploitation

without their understanding, consent, or developmental readiness is known as child sexual abuse (CSA) (Mathews & Collin-Vézina, 2019). As a serious crime, child sexual abuse is strongly condemned in Islam (Surah An-Nur, 24:2). Reintegration initiatives help abused children's return to their families and communities by attending to their physical, emotional and psychological needs (Gamongan & Moyao, 2025).

Research studies show that abuse is pervasive in Pakistan. Nazir & Ali (2023) found that minors in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) experienced sexual, pharmacological, and physical abuse, frequently while working in dangerous settings. The Pakistan Penal Code (PPC), the Criminal Law Amendment (Offences in the name of Honor) Act 2016, and child labor legislation like the Employment of Children Act, 1991 are among the laws in Pakistan that address CSA (Pakistan Penal Code, 2021). Laws that criminalize sexual exploitation and provide protections for children are in place in nations like the US, South Africa, and the UK (Mbaku, 2019).

Because of fear, guilt, stigma, and socio-cultural influences, CSA is still underreported despite legal frameworks. 121 million children worldwide are subjected to forced sexual activities, according to UNICEF, with many of these cases being unreported or unpunished (UNICEF, 2020). Talking about sexual assault is frowned upon in Pakistan, which makes it difficult to identify report and effectively intervene (Akram & Yasmin, 2023). The reintegration and social needs of abused males are not sufficiently taken into account by Pakistan's current programs, which frequently target girls and address symptoms rather than underlying causes. Direct attention to male victims, public awareness, and harmonization of laws, capacity training, and strategic child protection systems are all necessary for effective methods (Khaleel et al., 2024).

Reintegration is hampered by long-term psychological issues that are closely associated with childhood sexual abuse (CSA). Engel (2005) describes how abused children absorb helplessness, stigma and betrayal. Collin-Vézina, Daigneault, and Hébert (2013) stress that enduring symptoms exacerbate social isolation, while Platt & Freyd (2015) contend that such trauma shows up as shame and mistrust. It was recently demonstrated by Stanescu et al. (2025) that these scars interfere with rehabilitation in peer and school environments.

Relationship difficulties are especially severe for male survivors. According to Kia-Keating, Sorsoli, and Grossman (2005), inflexible masculine norms encourage resentment, estrangement, and relationship issues. According to Lisak (1994), men are compelled by stigma to repress their vulnerability which leads to cycles of disengagement. Internalized shame and avoidance are highlighted by Easton, Saltzman, and Willis (2014), while Danish & Antonides (2013) stress that these obstacles make it more difficult for survivors to reestablish relationships with their families and communities. Identity issues make reintegration more difficult. Male survivors experience emotional deregulation and physical shame. Acheson & Papadima (2023) highlight adolescence as a time when identity crises are especially harmful and societal discourses that equate masculinity with domination exacerbate these conflicts.

Reintegration difficulties in South Asia are influenced by structural and cultural limitations. In Pakistan, survivors experience stigmatization, disruptions in their education, and a lack of institutional support, according to Murtaza and Manj (2022). While Higgins et al. (2019) draw attention to the shortcomings of child protection institutions; Higgins et al. (2019) contend that patriarchal norms stifle disclosure. Research on intervention and resilience offers promise in spite of these challenges. According to Marriott,

Hamilton and Harrop (2014), reintegration is enhanced by education and supportive families. Ungar (2013) highlights resilience as a socially and structurally created concept, while Harvey and Delfabbro (2004) contend that schools serve as protective buffers. Although the majority of models are still Western and unsuited for South Asia, therapeutic interventions also show impact (Cohen et al. 2004). Deblinger (2011) contend that trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) lessens PTSD and shame, and Hetzel-Riggin, Brausch, and Montgomery (2007) demonstrate that group therapy lessens isolation.

Research Methodology

The methodical approach, strategies, and processes used by researchers to gather, examine and evaluate data in order to address research questions or test hypotheses are referred to as research methodology (Kapur, 2018). The interpretive school of thought is supported by this study which takes a broad view within the qualitative paradigm and bases its conclusions on nominal's ontology and epistemology. It claims that using a subjective lens is the best way to understand the world (Keates & Scott, 2021).

The current research study is based on qualitative research design, since it places emphasis on a full contextual analysis of fewer events or conditions and their interrelations. The time and financial constraints were also considered in selecting this research design. The design was also selected due to its nature having in-depth and contextual analysis of similar situations in other organizations as once being researched in. Sequential sampling was used as a technique for data collection while the information was gathered from the respondents. The sample size was consisting of 10 respondents. After that, the researchers reached to saturation point and further no new data was coming from the respondents. Interview guide/Structured Questionnaire was used as a tool of data collection in the present research study. Thematic analysis was used for

this research study. As per study design and tools used for data collection the information is analyzed qualitatively, where thematic analysis method employed in this study is a potent tool, uniquely suited to unveil the layers of complexity, legal subtleties, and contextual factors that interlace the intricate world of contracts.

Ethical Considerations

Collecting data from sexually abused children was a very sensitive task. So the researcher has to follow certain ethical considerations in the field. Ethical consideration in this study were sexually abused children's informed consent, privacy, right to withdraw, Data confidentiality, voluntary participation and honesty. The researcher briefed and debriefed the participants at the end of the study. The participants were assured that the data to be collected is purely for academic purposes only. The researcher also assured participants that identification symbols used like names were not to be recorded in the interview guide to ensure anonymity of the respondents. The researcher also ensured that the respondents were protected from any possible harm that might have risen from the study.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The researcher interviewed participants according to each theme and the opinion/feedback that came from sexually abused children were analyzed and included in the finding section.

1. Re-integration of sexually abused children in their respective families.

A thorough and complex strategy is required for the reintegration of children who have experienced sexual abuse, requiring the participation of a wide range of experts and stakeholders, such as child protection services, mental health specialists, educators, law enforcement officers, and other pertinent parties. During field study, the researcher asked a few

questions regarding the above themes. One of the key informants explained that;

"Reintegrating into their families is still very difficult. These children nevertheless face social stigma, tense family acceptance and the severe psychological scars of abuse despite therapeutic efforts to support emotional recovery and mental health. These obstacles demonstrate that reintegration is a complicated process influenced by psychological, societal, and familial issues rather than just being a clinical or therapeutic issue".

Another respondent shared his opinion and narrates;

"From the respondent's point of view, people who are better at social learning and those who have more social skills are equally included. Technical training is seen to be the best choice for those of us who might not be as academically inclined and do not seek traditional school".

With an emphasis on stigma reduction, family acceptance, counseling, and technical training, this study looks at the reintegration of children who have experienced sexual abuse. The results show that successful reintegration and long-term well-being require all-encompassing support.

2. Resistance/impediments in Reintegration in family.

The aforementioned theme explains resistance in the context of family therapy and goes into additional detail about the difficulties and barriers that arise while trying to reintegrate a family member into the family system after a period of disruption or separation.

One of the respondents opined that;

"No, the family shows reluctance in swift acceptance primarily due to the pervasive social stigma surrounding sexual abuse," one respondent stated. Family separation and division have been found to be fundamentally triggered by this stigmatization".

Another potential participant was of the view that;

"No, our family does not treat us fairly in comparison to a youngster who has not experienced abuse. There are still discriminatory hurdles in our family environment. I do not receive the same treatment as other children in my family who have not experienced abuse because I am an abuse victim".

Research shows how difficult it is for adolescents who have experienced sexual assault to reintegrate into their families. In addition to the societal stigma associated with sexual abuse, which increases their vulnerability and puts them at danger for death, they frequently experience rejection, threats, and unsafe living conditions.

3. Challenges faced by sexually abused children in their family in reintegration.

Child sexual abuse that occurs within the family creates long-lasting psychological, emotional, and physical damage. The family, instead of offering care and support, frequently turns into a source of discrimination and neglect, which exacerbates the child's trauma. Betrayal of trust also breeds dread, humiliation, guilt, and bewilderment. One respondent offered their opinions when participants were questioned about these difficulties during the field study;

"Children who are sexually abused are frequently criminalized because the adults who abuse them use the children as leverage for their unlawful activities."

Another participant made a similar observation:

"Victims of sexual abuse may also exhibit aggressive behaviors." According to the adage, "A man is known by the company he keeps," one's environment has an impact on their character.

According to the findings, children who have experienced sexual abuse encounter several difficulties, chief among them being in social interactions. Family members frequently provide

less emotional support and consideration, which make these kids less important and valuable in the family than other kids.

Conclusion

As a third-world nation, Pakistan has several political and socioeconomic obstacles. These vulnerable children are neglected and marginalized as a result of the widespread problem of child sexual abuse in the nation, which is made worse by social stigma. According to the study's findings, male children who have experienced sexual abuse have significant obstacles to reintegration because of psychological trauma, societal stigma and insufficient family acceptance. These obstacles prevent emotional healing and the reestablishment of positive family and community ties. Active family involvement, ongoing psychiatric therapy and community initiatives to eliminate stigma and advance acceptance are all necessary for meaningful reintegration.

Results

Successful reintegration is hampered by survivors' psychological anguish, which shows up as suicidal thoughts, anxiety, sadness, humiliation, guilt and dread. Discrimination and social stigma in communities, peer groups, and schools isolate survivors and make it more difficult for them to reestablish networks of supporting people. Emotional ties are further weakened by familial rejection, neglect and blaming, which restricts the acceptance required for reintegration into the home. Inadequate legal documentation and cultural taboos also hinder survivors' access to justice, silence abuse instances, and prolonged cycles of marginalization. Some survivors exhibit resilience in spite of these obstacles because limited community support and counseling create a sense of safety that eventually makes more successful reintegration possible.

Author Contributions

Salman Khan: Conceptualization (equal), Methodology (equal), Qualitative Analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing –review & editing

Riaz Ullah: Methodology (equal), Qualitative Analysis, Writing –review& editing

Dr. Mansoor Ahmad: Methodology (equal), Qualitative Analysis

Hammad Zada: Methodology (equal), Qualitative Analysis

Marjan Gul: Methodology (equal), Qualitative Analysis

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to research, authorship, and or publication of this article.

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