



Exploring Religious Scholars Perspectives on Child Physical Abuse: A Case Study of District Malakand

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Abstract

Child physical abuse is a significant global concern, and its prevalence varies across cultures and societies. This case study focuses on District Malakand, exploring the perspectives of religious scholars on child physical abuse. The study is qualitative in nature, utilizing purposive sampling to select 10 religious scholars as respondents. Islamic teachings emphasize the protection and welfare of children, promoting kindness and mercy. While Islam does not support physical punishment, some mild forms of discipline are allowed under specific circumstances. The findings reveal that religious scholars and teachers are not in favor of physical abuse due to its negative psychosocial impacts on the child's development. The study sheds light on the need to eradicate physical abuse from educational institutions and homes to create a nurturing environment for children in accordance with Islamic teachings.

Keywords: Physical Abuse, Child, Islamic, Malakand, Punishment

Background

Child abuse has a long history in the world. It is evident from the world's history that violence against children has also been reported in the primitive era. The global perspective should



consider the different patterns of parenting in different cultures around the world regarding child abuse and maltreatment (Rehma, et al., 2014). In the late 19th century, during the period of the industrial revolution, neglecting the child was acknowledged as a social distress in most parts of the Western world. Keeping in view the initial concerns for orphaned and neglected children, the first Child Protection Societies were formed in the year 1988 (Graycar, 2000). Child abuse is a serious and alarming issue found in every society, but its ratio depends on cultural grounds. In illiterate areas and rural societies, the ratio of abuse is more as compared to urban and literate areas, but in some urban societies the ratio is vice versa (Ashraf, et al., 2019). World health organization reports that throughout the world nearly about 40 million of children under the age of 15 are abused each year (Javed, et al., 2020). Nearly about one billion of children under the age of seventeen face some form of abuse including physical annually (Iqbal, et al., 2021). A study held in 2013 reveals that the annual average of death and disabilities is 24.6 per 100,000 children resulting from physical abuse. In the total number of such affected children, 3.5 million of cases were reported from US (Nayani, et al., 2016). But the ratio of child abuse is higher in the regions of Asia which is about 70%. It is more commonly observed in educational institutions especially in schools. Teachers are involved in psychological violence, including intimidation and threats which results in increased loneliness and fear, loss of ability to act and strength. The historical backdrop of child abuse is a nightmare that we have only recently begun to awaken. As time goes on, the chances of children to be killed become higher (Donald & Mark , Chalimah, 1975:2018) .Child abuse is now reported about 300,000 a year in South Asian countries. If ignored, this number can reach 1 million. About 60,000 children have serious injuries, nearly about 2,000 died and 6,000 suffer permanent brain damage due to physical abuse. In country like Pakistan, with a low social and economic situation and huge population base, neglect of children is a worrisome widespread public health issue. Urban, deprived, displaced population and rural communities are particularly affected. In big cities, street children and child labourers working on menial jobs have even more serious problems (Jane & Seth, 1976:2015).

Islamic point of view regarding child abuse

The child is the purest flower in Islam (Fazel, 2020). Many terms are used for the child in the Quran such as Zahriya (Vase), Baniya (Roof), Mawlid (Born), Tifl (Child) and Saghir (junior) etc. Quranic proclamations about children are mostly associated with infants, normal offspring,



adoption, breastfeeding and orphans (Islam, 2015). Islam always gives emphasis on the importance of building and maintaining a peaceful social system for the best interests of children as part of the Ummah (Muslim society). Children need appropriate knowledge and skills for the future. Islam makes it necessary for parents to take care of their children (Ridho, 2015). Islam entitled various rights to children. The first and foremost of these rights is to nurture children properly, to raise and educate them. This means that children should be provided with adequate, correct and appropriate religious, moral and ethical guidance so that they can live their entire lives (Qasmi, 2008).

Islamic teachings, jurisprudence and philosophy have made arrangements for the protection and promotion of the welfare of children. Islamic scholars have adopted many 'rights' which every child should enjoy in all circumstances. These include the child's right to life, sustenance, property, freedom of conscience, parenthood, inheritance and care, proper upbringing and guardianship of both the individual and the property (Hutchinson et al., 2014). Islam forbids any attack such as abuse, harassment and annoyance to human. From an Islamic point of view, child abuse is explicitly mentioned on several occasions in the Qur'an and Sunnah. In the pre-Islamic Arab society, there was a massacre of new-borns (Bhat, 2020). Quran says "Do not kill your children for fear of poverty. We will provide for them and for you. Indeed, killing them is a great sin." (Quran, al-Isra, 17:31).

Islam teaches its followers that children are the part of a healthy society and it is their right to be protected by their family members (Hassan & Abubakari, 2015). Quran makes it clear "O you who believe! Protect yourself and your family from the fire whose fuel is man and stone on which are hard and strong angels. They do not disobey God's command. [Actually] they do what they are commanded to do. Thus, one who goes to Hell will be told: O disbelievers! Don't make excuses on this day. In fact, you are only being rewarded for all the evils you have done [in life]." (Sûrat Al-Ta ẖrîm, 66:6-7)

Islamic sharia contains many references to the consideration and security of children (Hutchinson & Leary, 2016).

Besides the orders of Allah given in Quran, the prophet of Allah also has given emphasis on the rights of children. It is mentioned in Hadith that:



“He who goes to the market to buy gifts for his family and brings it for them is like one who spends on the poor. He is like the man who freed a slave from the descendants of Ismail(A.S).”
[Sahih Bukhari]

In another Hadith, the messenger of Allah says;

"Take care! Each of you is a shepherd and each of you will be asked about his flock. The chief is the shepherd of his people and he will be asked about his flock. And the woman is the shepherd of her husband's house and her children and she will be asked about them." [Al-Bukhari]

It is revealed from the authentic books of Hadith that the prophet of Allah used to love children. Thus once the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) took Ibrahim (his son) and kissed him and sniffed him [Bukhari]

Similarly, Aisha(R.A) narrates that some desert people came to the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) and said: Do you kiss your children? He said: Yes. They replied: By Allah, but we do not kiss our children. The Messenger of Allaah (PBUH) said: Then what should I do if Allah has deprived you of mercy?" [Muslim]

“The best women are camel riders and the women of Quraysh are righteous. They are the kindest women to their children in their childhood and the more careful women of the property of their husbands.” [Bukhari]

“Fear Allah and do justice to your children.” [Bukhari]

Material and Methods

The present study was conducted in the district of Malakand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, with the aim of exploring the perspectives of religious scholars on the extent, nature, and impacts of physical abuse with children in the region. The study is qualitative in nature and used purposive sampling technique to select 10 religious scholars as respondents based on their knowledge and experience related to the phenomenon under study. Islam supports physical punishment under certain contexts, there are rules and guidelines that perpetrators often fail to adhere to when practicing it. Islam also emphasizes kindness and mercy towards children and women. By selecting religious



figures as respondents, the study sought to gain a clearer picture of the phenomenon of physical abuse. Interview guide was designed in English to collect data from the respondents, but local languages Pashto and Urdu was used as stakeholders involved in the practice of physical abuse might not respond to direct questions in English. The sensitivity of the topic led the researcher to keep a diary to note all relevant points during data collection. The results of this study cannot be generalized to the whole of Pakistan, as the issues and problems related to physical abuse may vary in different areas of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The study's limitations include challenges related to subject access, financial constraints, travel logistics, and the country's public order situation. The study excluded children as respondents due to its non-basic nature, likely to protect their well-being and ensure ethical considerations. Therefore, the conclusions drawn from this study are specific to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province and provide valuable insights into the views of religious scholars on physical abuse with children in that particular region.

Results

Physical punishment of children is a key concern that continue to challenge the educational, social and philosophical practices worldwide. This section evaluates the Islamic perspective about physical punishment of the children because in Pakistan, public is strictly bound to Islamic teaching. Hence this aspect will help to further elaborate the causes and impacts of physical punishment in Malakand. About the teaching of Islam about physical punishment we should see a little back said by a teacher of religious school (Madrassa);

[Physical punishments was allowed in Bible. In this context he referenced a well-known verse from Bible “He who spares the rod hates his son, but the who loves him is diligent to discipline him (13-14, Bible). Traditional norms and values of the Victorian society also allow physical punishments. However, no example of physical punishment can be found from the teaching of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). And Muslim scholars are strict followers of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him). So in Islam there is no teachings of physical punishment]

This comparison clarified that Islam has no teachings of physical punishment. Therefore, these should be eradicated from the institutes and homes. Another respondent said that;



[Here I will quote a saying of Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) “He who do not love and care of our children and do not respect our elders is not among us”. So you can conclude that whether physical punishment is allowed in Islam or not. Obviously not Islam give the teachings of care and respect with children]

These responses clearly indicate that there is no space of physical punishment in Islam for children because it has serious negative impacts which is not only bad for the individual but also for family and surrounding society. In this regard a respondent answer;

[If a child misbehave we should teach him through advise and practical teachings not by hitting and beating]

Another respondent replied that;

[Islamic teachings do not support physical abuse. There is no verse or any practical example as a proof from the life of our prophet (Peace be upon him) and his companions. But I do not know why the religious institution administer such harsh physical punishments. It also led to escape of student from the institution and result in other social evils and depression]

Generally physical punishments are not allowed and not supported by the Islamic teachings. However, there are some circumstances which allow minor punishments. A respondent answered in this context as;

[Islam teach love and care to children. But on the other hand teaching about Islamic and social values are necessary. Islam only allow anger on the child when he reach to 7 years and do not perform prayer. As it is one of the essential components of Islam and performing prayer is a duty of every Muslim. However, when the child do not listen to elder or father about prayer until he reach to 10 years, so the father can beat him but the hitting should not be harsh to make sign or symptoms on his body]

It indicates that Islam is very conscious about physical punishment and do not support physical abuse as it prevails now a day in the society and educational institutions of the country. Regarding administration of other means or tools for learning and teachings the participants responded;



[It is clear that we are also not comfortable with physical abuse as we care of our students but in some circumstances it is necessary. Before going to physical punishment we warn the student many times but if he is not listening then we use hands or sticks. We also suggest counselling and emotional settlement of the student but sometimes it also fails]

Every educational institution and every society has its own rules and regulation to incline students toward education or its culture. However, if someone violates these rules he or she should be subject to sanctions and penalties. In this regard the respondent explained that;

[It is like a national law. If you have no law or penalties people will make disturbance in the society. Similarly, if we will not apply sanctions and penalties bad children will disturb the studies of other students as well. So it will disturb the whole system. We are definitely comfortable with soft tools for the betterment of the students. And everyone knows there are good children as well we also appreciate them and if they commit any mistake we talk to them we use lenient approach but for those who every day repeat his or her act they should be punish]

In the light of the above responses it is clear that Islamic teachings do not allow physical abuse but in some severe cases only mild punishments are allowed. This section also conclude that teachers and religious scholars are also not in favor of physical punishment due to its negative psychosocial consequences of the physical abuse on the child's personality.

Discussion

The discussion provided above highlights the perspective of the Islamic teachings on physical punishment of children. It is evident that Islamic teachings do not support physical abuse as a means of discipline for children. The respondents emphasize the importance of love, care, and respect in dealing with children, which aligns with the overall principles of Islam. There is no example or explicit teaching from the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) that supports physical punishment. The comparison made with other historical practices, such as those found in the Bible or Victorian society, further strengthens the argument that physical punishment is not a part of Islamic teachings. Instead, the emphasis is on advising and teaching children through practical means and counsel, rather than resorting to physical force. While there are some respondents who mention minor punishments under certain circumstances, it is clear that the intention is not to inflict harm or create physical signs on the child's body. These



punishments are meant to encourage the child to fulfill religious obligations like prayer after proper guidance and warning have been given.

Furthermore, the respondents highlight that modern educational institutions and societies should focus on alternative methods of discipline and teaching. They acknowledge that physical punishment can have serious negative consequences on a child's mental and emotional well-being, leading to social evils and depression. Overall, the discussion concludes that physical abuse of children is not supported by Islamic teachings, and instead, alternative methods of discipline and teaching should be employed. Love, care, respect, and counseling should be the guiding principles when dealing with children, fostering a positive and supportive learning environment. It is essential for teachers, scholars, and society as a whole to ensure the well-being and development of children without resorting to harmful practices like physical punishment.

Conclusion

The case study on exploring religious scholars' perspectives on child physical abuse in District Malakand reveals valuable insights into the prevailing attitudes and practices in the region. Child physical abuse is a global concern that varies across cultures and societies, and this study highlights its presence in certain areas of Pakistan, including Malakand. The background of child abuse demonstrates the historical and societal context in which this issue has emerged. While child abuse has been recognized and addressed in some parts of the world for over a century, it remains a significant challenge, particularly in regions with low social and economic conditions. The study shows that children are highly regarded in Islam and deserve protection, care, and respect. Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of nurturing children, providing them with proper education and guidance, and ensuring their overall well-being. The Quran and Hadith explicitly discourage child abuse and emphasize the need for kindness and mercy towards children.

The perspectives of religious scholars regarding physical punishment align with Islamic teachings, as they affirm that Islam does not support physical abuse. While some mild forms of discipline may be allowed in specific circumstances, religious scholars and teachers are not in favor of physical abuse due to its negative psychosocial impacts on a child's development. The findings of this study shed light on the urgent need to eradicate physical abuse from educational



institutions and homes. It underscores the importance of adopting alternative means of discipline and focusing on counseling and emotional settlement for addressing behavioral issues in children. Instead of resorting to physical punishment, which can lead to escape from educational institutions and result in other social ills, a more compassionate and nurturing approach should be adopted to shape the behavior of children. It is essential to ensure that all stakeholders in the society, including parents, teachers, religious scholars, and policymakers, are aware of and aligned with the Islamic teachings that advocate for the protection and welfare of children. By creating an environment that upholds the principles of kindness, compassion, and respect, we can work towards providing a safe and nurturing space for children to thrive, in accordance with Islamic teachings and universal human rights.

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