



RESEARCH PAPER

Framing the Vulnerable: A Content Analysis of Child Sexual Abuse Coverage on Leading Pakistani TV News Channels through the Lens of Agenda-Setting and Social Responsibility Theories

¹Dr. Saima Quddoos, ²Muhammad Umar Farooq and ³Shehar Bano Shabbir

1. Lecturer Department of Mass Communication, University of Azad Jammu & Kashmir Muzaffarabad, AJK, Pakistan
2. Lecturer Department of Media and Communication Studies, Government College University, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan
3. Lecturer Media and Communication Studies Department, National University of Modern Languages, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

***Corresponding Author:** saima.quddos@ajk.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

Despite the intensifying situation of child sexual abuse cases in Pakistan, the issue is still shrouded in silence and societal stigma, making open dialogue and ethical media reporting more crucial than ever. While Pakistani news channels have played a crucial role in breaking barriers and stereotypical taboos by highlighting these issues as significant social concern but yet the reporting of these issues carry substantial ethical and societal implications. The reporting of such sensitive issues implicate heavy burden of responsibility and professional expertise by channels. Drawing theoretical foundations from Agenda setting and social responsibility theories the study has conducted a quantitative content analysis to analyze reporting of child sexual abuse among three leading Pakistani TV news channels i.e., Geo News, ARY News and Dunya News. Coding categories for this study include determinants: Frequency, News Headline, Privacy, Tone, Background Sound, visuals of News. One way ANOVA has been applied to test hypothesis for each category. The result of content analysis showed that three out of five categories showed difference of reporting on three selected TV news channels. The results and findings of content analysis have demonstrated that most of the news stories were covered and reported in unfavorable way by news channels. The news channels adopted sensational, dramatic and emotional tones with distressing visuals to enhance the impact which could instead of information result into distress among audiences particularly parents and children. The study strongly recommends that government, policy makers, law enforcement institutions and media all need to come forward to highlight this issue, raise awareness, ensure maximum efforts for protection of children as first priority.

KEYWORDS Coverage of Child Sexual Abuse, Leading News Channels, Sensation, Social Responsibility

Introduction

Child sexual abuse, a crucial global health issue which has affected millions of innocent children around the globe with mostly unreported or misrepresented cases in media (Assink et al 2019). Child abuse in any form of physical, emotional, sexual molestation or act of neglect harm and negatively affect a child's development (Vajpayee & Makkar, 2014). Child sexual abuse can have very dangerous and negative effects on a child's physical, mental, and emotional health. These effects can be long-lasting and effecting child development and other creating other difficulties, including poor performance and sleeping complications. Child sexual abuse constitutes a serious and distressing social issue. Child sexual abuse has a deep impact on individuals and society.

Child sexual abuse is a serious and distressing social issue. It has a deep impact on individual and society at a larger level. Queensland Government (2018) reported a range of conspicuous effects of child sexual abuse on emotional, physical and psychological health of kids. Low self-esteem, Intense feeling of guilt, fear, self-doubt and self-blame, distrust, difficulty in relationship management, anxiety, Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), self-harm, suicidal thoughts. These children have been reported to have multiple personality disorders, poor cognitive development and aggressive behaviors. It is not easy to spot child sexual abuse and children usually do not talk about sexual abuse because they think that it is their fault and sometimes they threatened or convinced by their abuser that it is normal or special secret. But there are some signs which can be noticed by parent or caregiver. Like a child may start act violently and have difficulties in sleeping learning and understanding. Langevin et al. (2022) in their research concluded that child sexual abuse can lead sleeping difficulties in child and adolescent. The child may avoid particular person and show aggressive behavior to that person. Children who have been sexually abused may develop health problems, including soreness in the genital and anal areas or sexually transmitted infections, or they may become pregnant. An abused child may face difficulty in learning and concentrating and their scores in school may start drop.

In Pakistan, child sexual abuse becomes a major issue and it is happening in all sectors. CSA is prevalent and wide spread in Pakistan which is creating serious threats to child development (Khan et al., 2023). CSA can take place in any class culture and society. CSA cases are increasing alarmingly According to the Sahil Foundation which is a non-governmental organization working and compiling data regarding child abuse reported cases, these cases are increasing every year. Despite the increase in CSA cases, this issue is not much explored in terms of its coverage in TV news channels.

Literature Review

Child sexual abuse is a concerning societal issue it can eradicate from society by implementing strong child abuse laws. With the effective use of media representation, it can raise public awareness about CSA. Child abuse is frequently covered in newspapers, but it goes unnoticed because it is not properly covered (Habib, Ullah, Khanum, & Khan, 2023).

Latif, Sultana, and Khan (2020) examined the TV news coverage of CSA incidents and their impact on women. The study sample consisted of 200 housewives residing in Lahore, Pakistan. A survey method was employed to collect data from a sample, and the theoretical framework was based on cultivation theory. The results revealed that mainstream media play a vital role in creating awareness about child sexual abuse and also generate fear and insecurity among women.

Qayyoom, Haq, Rashid, and Anwar (2022) explored the framing of child sexual abuse in mainstream print media. For this purpose, content analysis is purposely used. The results revealed that these newspapers cover child sexual abuse stories unethically. In addition, Pakistan's print media sets both episodic and thematic framing of child sexual abuse cases but mostly they are ethically questionable. The reporting is more focused on the victim and victim's family then the abuser.

Lakhtdir, Parpio, and Farooq (2017) reported that following the critical situation of rise in the reporting of child abuse cases worldwide it has become a global issue. It has stirred the world that every stake holder has to take a firm stand to eradicate this social

evil and to contribute pragmatically and urge the law makers for legislation of child protection laws. The facts and figures by WHO have demonstrated the traumatic situation showing that globally about 1 billion children within the age group of 2-17 have suffered emotional, physical or sexual abuse or violence last one year (World Health Organization).

The motivational things and the patterns followed by child abusers to commit that abuse determine in study of Elliot, Browne, and Kilyconye (2015). They examined the methods to suggest the prevention measures for child sexual abuse and investigated the logical facts collected by the research to improve safety techniques. Results of the study revealed that an average child abuser commits this abuse and may have as many as 400 victims in his entire lifetime. It is about 1 and 9 victims to almost 70% child sexual abusers no less than 20% have 10 to 40 persons in their life. Although people who were sexually abused in their own childhood, did not become abusers when they became adults.

Goldman, Wolcott, and Kennedy (2003) defined child abuse as a criminal act which can harm a child physically, emotionally or sexually and may have some short term or even long term effects on the victim. The consequences may vary from case to case depending on the resilience and ability of child to cope up with the situation. But certainly it has adverse outcomes on the personality of the victim. It has become one of the most significant social concerns because reporting of abuse and assault cases of children are increasing each year and the situation is getting traumatically intense. Children are the potential asset of every society so their safety and security must be among the top concerns to ensure the positive functioning and development of social system.

Child abuse is one of the major health concerns globally as well as in Pakistan. In Pakistani constitution women rights are protected by various laws but study revealed that there are "gender inequalities in favor of male gender are observed in all aspects of routine life". Gender inequality is observed in providing for basic rights, education, health and autonomy of decision making. Ali and Khuwaja (2014) study concluded that prevention of child abuse can be achieved through comprehensive, multifaceted and integrated approaches requiring joint efforts by the government, policy makers, stake holders, social workers, educationists, and public health practitioners.

Sharma (2020) in his study evaluated role of media in creating awareness regarding child safety and protection from abuse. The study collected data from 100 children through questionnaire. The findings concluded that even though, media used effective tools to raise awareness regarding child safety and security but realistically media has failed to create adequate level of awareness regarding child sexual abuse among children. The study demonstrated that about 90% of respondents did not have awareness regarding child abuse and safety measures to deal with it. This substantiated that media need to take more serious initiatives to highlight this issue effectively by keeping their social responsibility role as prime objective. As it is a proven fact as per the propositions of agenda setting theory and cultivation analysis that the issues that are being highlighted by media grab attention of people and they not only think about it but also take practical measures to adopt behavioral changes for dealing with issues of life cautiously.

Parentune, the India's most trusted and substantiated community of parents conducted a survey to highlight concerns of child safety and security. They analyzed situation of awareness related to sex-education, sexual misbehaving attitudes, and the

concept of good touch as well as bad touch. The statistical findings of their study showed that even when the problem is rampant and proliferating the parents are not well aware to guide their kids regarding their safety and preventive measures to avoid abuse and molestation. They analyzed that most of the parents do not talk to their children about sexual education and this hesitation among parents is a common behavior (Cited by India.com 2018).

Hypotheses

- H: There is difference between selected TV news channels (ARY News, Geo News, and Dunya News) reporting on child sexual abuse cases.
- H a: There is difference between selected TV news channels reporting on child sexual abuse cases in terms of news headlines.
- H b: There is difference between selected TV news channels reporting on child sexual abuse cases in terms of privacy of victim and their family.
- H c: There is difference between selected TV news channels reporting in terms of tone of child sexual abuse news story.
- H d: There is difference between selected TV news channels reporting in terms of background sound of news story on child sexual abuse cases.
- H e: There is difference between selected TV news channels reporting on child sexual abuse cases in terms of visuals of news story on child sexual abuse cases.

Theoretical Framework

Agenda Setting

Lippmann (1922, P. 29) asserted that the stories covered by news media are fundamental source of awareness, information and perception about real world in the minds of people (as cited in Simonson, 2016). The media saturated social system and media centered lifestyle have made people so dependent on media that media agenda eventually becomes public agenda. Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw (1968) validated the effects of media and relationship of media and public agenda in their 'Chapel Hill' study. Their findings suggested that media determines the salience of issues for masses. The time and space given to news items derive public's attention and make them believe what is important and what not. So eventually agenda of media become agenda of public over time which eventually affects the public policies.

Media has promoted awareness among people about the solemnity of sexual abuse of children as a sensitive but imperative issue by coverage of child abuse related stories in prime time news bulletins. Media have highlighted the issue at the extent that the concerns for protection from child abuse have become a public as well as socio-political agenda (Nair, 2019). The media coverage and advocacy has risen concerns for governmental institutions as well who have been compelled to make certain policies and legislations to ensure and safeguard children from abuse and assault.

The undertaken research study was intended to explore how media highlight sensitive issues and news stories and set public agenda on them. It discussed how a news event become a sensational news story and media shape narratives of their consumers at

national as well as international level by using their agenda setting and framing strategies. The study focused on the process of selection of news stories, reporting, framing and their presentation to the people in the light of selected theoretical approaches. It studied how journalistic ethics are being observed or maligned by media professionals in covering sensitive issues like child sexual abuse. Since theoretical framework of agenda setting is widely applied to study powerful effects of mass media and to validate that media has power to determine salience of issues in the minds of people.

Social Responsibility Theory

The theoretical approach highlighted the importance of sense of accountability of media institutions and to keep a positive equilibrium in the liberty and responsibility. United Nations' Convention (2019) reported that the media play key role in highlighting, promoting and defending the fundamental rights of children. (UNICEF) has developed specialized guiding principles to regulate media for covering news items about children. The social responsibility theory is extensively applied by researchers to study ethical concerns of media in social systems. Since the present study was aimed to analyze a sensitive issue of child abuse the selected theory served as guiding principle to study what ethical considerations and responsibilities media ought to society. The theoretical framework can be used to organize set of conduct and code of ethics to design media policy for practitioners to determine professional regulatory process to make media accountable for its surveillance. Pakistani news media is misusing their freedom and manipulating sensitive issues of abuse and assault for their ratings. There is a dire need for media professionals, regulatory authorities and consumers even to remind media that freedom cannot be enjoyed without social responsibility.

Material and Methods

The researcher has conducted quantitative content analysis to analyze media content by quantitative approach.

Content Analysis

The study has employed quantitative content analysis approach to examine and analyze the coverage of child sexual abuse in leading TV news channels during 2020.

Population

All news stories related to child sexual abuse which appeared on Geo News, ARY News and Dunya News on prime time, 9'o clock news bulletin have been considered as population of the study.

Period of the study

For this study, the selected time frame was from January 1st to December 31st, 2020. The reason to select the period of the study was that in year 2020 there were highest child sexual abuse cases were reported as compared to previous years.

Sampling Technique

The study adopted purposive sampling technique for collection of data regarding news stories. As it was a census study and all the news stories related to CSA appeared

on selected leading TV news channels were included in this study. A deliberate effort has been done by the researcher to collect data from the maximum available reported news stories on child sexual abuse as part of sample for analysis in the study.

Unit of analysis

Every single news story about child sexual abuse case appeared on ARY News, Geo News and Dunya News have been considered as unit of analysis.

Tool of data collection

The researcher designed the coding sheet containing categories to analyze the news stories regarding child sexual abuse. In present study the news stories were analyzed in the light of following categories. Frequency: Number of news stories on child sexual abuse cases appearing on ARY News, Geo News and Dunya News. Further coding categories for this study include following determinants:

1. News Headline
2. Privacy
3. Tone
4. Background Sound
5. Visuals of News

Inter-Coder Reliability

Independent coder was trained to apply the coding sheet. Numerous coder-trainer tests were carried out to ensure same understanding of the instrument. After that a pretest on randomly selected 15 percent of sampled data was done to test inter-coder reliability. The overall was .78, based on Krippendorff's alpha formula. Inter-coder reliability of all indicators can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1
Values of Krippendorff's Alpha (Inter-Coder Reliability)

	Indicators	Value
i)	News Headline	.75
ii)	Privacy	.77
iii)	Background sound	.74
iv)	Tone	.85
V)	Visuals of News	.81

Results and Discussion

The accumulated data has been analyzed to ascertain, investigate and explain how sensitive issue of child sexual abuse news stories is being reported by popular mainstream news channels of Pakistani electronic media.

Content Analysis

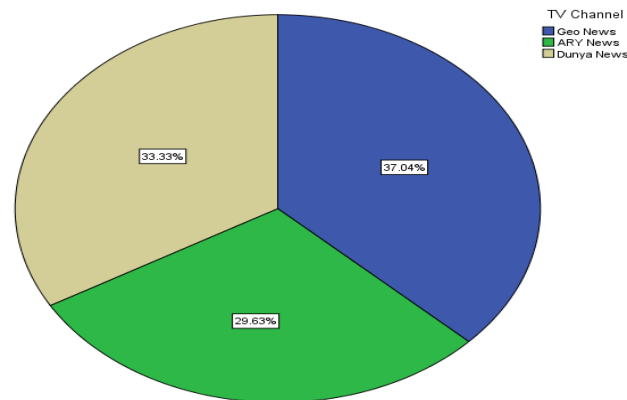


Figure 1 News Stories about Child Sexual Abuse on TV Channels

On Geo News (37.04 %,) 20 news reports were related to child sexual abuse. Similarly, ARY News (29.63%) dedicated 18 reports to child sexual abuse and Dunya News (33.33%) reported 16 news stories about child sexual abuse cases.

One-Way ANOVA

Ha. There is difference between selected TV news channels reporting on child sexual abuse cases in terms of news headlines.

Table 2
Difference of Reporting on the basis of Headline

Measure	Geo News		ARY News		Dunya News		F(2,51)	η^2	Sig.
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
News Headline	13.94	6.234	16.65	5.580	17.47	5.136	2.076	0.094	0.06

One way ANOVA was applied to test H_{1a} and check the difference of news stories on the basis of headlines related to child sexual abuse among Geo News ARY News and Dunya News. Findings have demonstrated that as $p > .06$ so there is no significant difference in the headlines of news stories on child sexual abuse cases among selected TV news channels $F(2,51)$, $p = .06$. Although results showed that statistically there is no significant difference in the headlines of news stories on child sexual abuse cases between Geo News, ARY News and Dunya News. The actual difference in mean scores between the groups was small. The effect size was calculated using eta square and it was .09. These findings have not supported H_{1a} that there is difference between selected TV news channels reporting in terms of news headline of child sexual abuse news stories.

Hb: There is difference between selected TV news channels reporting on child sexual abuse cases in terms of privacy of victim and their family.

Table 3
Difference of Reporting on the Basis of Protecting the Privacy of Victim

Measure	Geo News		ARY News		Dunya News		F(2,51)	η^2	Sig.
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
Protecting the Privacy	14.5	3.45	13.13	2.97	18.50	5.26	9.00	0.40	0.000

Table 3 demonstrate the results of One way ANOVA, that was applied to test H_{1b} to check the difference of reporting of news stories on the basis of protection of privacy

of child sexual abuse cases among Geo News, ARY News, and Dunya News. Findings have revealed that as $p > .00$ so there is significant difference in the protection of privacy concerns of victim in news stories on child sexual abuse cases among selected TV news channels $F(2,51)$, $p = .00$. Although results exhibited that statistically there is significant difference in the protection of privacy of news stories on child sexual abuse cases between Geo News, ARY News and Dunya News. The actual difference in mean scores between the groups was large. The effect size was calculated using eta square and it was .40. These findings have supported H_{1b} that there is difference between selected TV news channels reporting in terms of privacy protection of victim in child sexual abuse news stories.

Hc: There is difference between selected TV news channels reporting in terms of tone of child sexual abuse news story.

Table 4
Difference of Reporting on the Basis of Tone of News Story

Measure	Geo News		ARY News		Dunya News		F(2,51)	η^2	Sig.
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
Tone of News Story	2.10	.718	2.56	.814	2.72	.752	3.462	0.14	.039

One way ANOVA was applied to test H_{1c} and check the difference between tone of news story on child sexual abuse among Geo News ARY News and Dunya News. Findings shows that there is significant difference as $p < .05$ in the tone of news stories on child sexual abuse cases among selected TV news channels $F(2,51)$, $p = .039$. Although results showed a statistically significant difference of tone of news story on child sexual abuse cases between Geo News, ARY News and Dunya News the actual difference in mean scores between the groups was large. The effect size was calculated using eta square and it was 0.14. These findings have supported H_{1c} there is difference between selected TV news channels reporting in terms of tone of child sexual abuse news story.

Hd: There is difference between selected TV news channels reporting in terms of background sound of news story on child sexual abuse cases.

Table 5
Difference of Reporting on the Basis of Background Sound of the News Story

Measure	Geo News		ARY News		Dunya News		F(2,51)	η^2	Sig.
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
Background Sound	42.17	13.205	42.93	10.771	34.75	10.108	1.676	0.060	0.153

One way ANOVA was applied to test H_{1a} and check the difference of news stories on the basis of headlines related to child sexual abuse among Geo News, ARY News, and Dunya News. Findings have demonstrated that as $p > .05$ so there is no significant difference in the headlines of news stories on child sexual abuse cases among selected TV news channels $F(2,51)$, $p = .153$. Although results showed that statistically there is no significant difference in the headlines of news stories on child sexual abuse cases between Geo News, ARY News, and Dunya News. The actual difference in mean scores between the groups was small. The effect size was calculated using eta square and it was .06. These findings have not supported H_{1a} that there is difference between selected TV news channels reporting in terms of news headline of child sexual abuse news stories.

He: There is difference between selected TV news channels reporting on child sexual abuse cases in terms of visuals of news story on child sexual abuse cases.

Table 6
Difference of Reporting on the Basis of Visuals of News Story

Measure	Geo News		ARY News		Dunya News		F(2,51)	η^2	Sig.
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
Visuals of News	37.47	10.044	34.04	8.303	34.75	10.108	1.676	0.060	0.153

In order to test H_{1j} One-way ANOVA was applied to check the difference of visuals of news stories on child sexual abuse among Geo News, ARY News, and Dunya News. Findings have demonstrated that as $p > 0.15$. So there is no significant difference in the visuals of news stories on child sexual abuse cases among selected TV news channels $F(2,51)$, $p = .15$. Although results have validated that statistically there is no significant difference in the visuals of news stories on child sexual abuse cases between Geo News, ARY News, and Dunya News. The actual difference in mean scores between the groups was small. The effect size was calculated using eta square and it was .06. These findings have not supported that there is difference between selected TV news channels reporting in terms of visuals of child sexual abuse news stories.

Discussion

The study aimed to investigate how sensitive issues related to child sexual abuse cases are being covered and reported by mainstream media. The news stories from selected sample of news channels were watched, observed and analyzed critically to investigate the reporting for content analysis. The research questions were used to assess the quality and quantity of content and were coded as per the determined criteria of coding directions. In this study ten coding categories were used to judge and analyze the selected sample of videos and coded accordingly. Finally the data was interpreted on the basis of selected criteria the results and interpretations of content analysis have been discussed and analyzed below by keeping in consideration the theoretical framework, literature, objectives, research questions and other significant fundamental determinants and elements of this study.

As per the findings and interpretations of results accumulated by conducting content analysis it has been observed that since contemporarily news channels have adopted competitive approach for news dissemination, they try to cover most of the news to gain competitive advantage and to keep their impression as the most prompt one. So there was significant difference in the coverage of news stories as almost all the selected news channels tried their best to cover each story of sexual abuse of children in order to engage their viewers and keep their hype against their opponent channels to maintain their ratings. Although the percentage of covering child sexual abuse news stories, Geo News gave more news stories about child sexual abuse cases, according to the Figure 5.1 On Geo news 37.04% (20) news were related to child sexual abuse. ARY 29.63% (18) and Dunya news 33.33% (16) covered the news about child sexual abuse cases.

Data regarding CSA cases was collected from prime time news bulletin 9'o clock of three leading TV news channels Geo, ARY and Dunya News from Jan 1st to 31st 2020. Five categories were made and hypothesis was used for testing each category exclusively. As per the results of test of One-Way ANOVA, three of the total five categories validated and supported and three categories including news headlines, visuals of news story and background sound did not supported the proposed hypothesis that there is a significant difference in the reporting of news stories related to cases of child sexual abuse by the mainstream news channels of Pakistan. From total 54 news

stories on CSA, the handling of privacy concerns in 35 news stories on child sexual abuse (CSA) in selected TV news channels includes unnecessary disclosure of personal information or details concerning victims, perpetrators, or other involved persons. Background music and sound of CSA news stories were very gloomy and depressive which was so intense for viewers particularly the children and parents

Conclusion

. The analysis shows that almost all the news channels used similar styles of visual presentation in reporting news stories related to child abuse cases. The treatment of privacy concerns and usage of language was intense. Background music and sound was very gloomy, depressive and sometimes miserable which was so intense for viewers particularly the children and parents. Visuals were also not appropriate in some news stories. These findings have analyzed that most of the news channels used these news stories for their TRP rather than employing a cautious approach considering the gravity and sensitivity of the issue. The stories were covered in dramatic and filmy style with gloomy background music, heart wrenching visuals, and uncensored pictures of victims. This approach by news channels need to be condemned in anyway because it did more harm than good instead of raising awareness it highlighted the dire need to reconsider privacy issues for affected victims and their families. It also raised the issue of ethical concerns by media. The study strongly recommends that all the media outlets, journalists, reporters and anyone covering or reporting such sensitive issues must adopt cautious approach as they may have serious effects on audiences particularly children and parents. Media plays crucial role in raising awareness among people by covering sensitive issues and the best approach for it can be employed by using social responsibility role in mind. Media houses must have regulation policies and guidelines which must be seriously observed during coverage of such news stories. Government, policy makers, law enforcement institutions and media all need to come forward to highlight this issue, raise awareness, ensure maximum efforts for protection of children as first priority.

Recommendations

The study strongly recommends that all media outlets and regulatory authorities need to develop ethical guidelines and professional code of ethics for reporting sensitive issues such as child sexual abuse keeping social responsibility role of media in consideration. Media professionals, journalists and reporters must get professional training to cover these cases. Media, parents, government officials, policy makers, child protection bureaus all stake holders must come together and work in collaboration to raise awareness regarding child protection and curb heinous crimes against innocent souls to make this world a secure place for them.

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