

## **Editorial**

### **Child Abuse in the Punjab: Myth and Reality**

In Pakistan, the Juvenile Justice System Ordinance (JJSO) was enacted in 2000 while child protection legislations are also enacted recently at provincial level. The NGOs and UN agencies have been active in this field for the past fifteen to twenty years. They have been providing training for capacity building, conducting awareness sessions and organizing seminars for sensitizing the stakeholders on child rights, child protection and child abuse issues. Media campaigns have also been launched on a massive scale. However, one of the most terrible incidents of child sexual abuse took place in such a province, Punjab, which is the largest in terms of population and resources. The literacy rate is higher in the Punjab than the other provinces.

This is not the first time that such a sad and horrible incident of child abuse took place in the Punjab. First, it was Javed Iqbal Mughal (Murki) in 1999 with 100 child sexual abuses and their strangulation, and now it is an organized gang with more than 250 child molestations and sexual abuse in district Kasur.

The question arises: Whether it is the media openness that such incidents are being reported from the Punjab or apparently the human rights violations like police torture, woman and child abuse are more prevalent in the Punjab which is relatively more tolerant and educated society as compared to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan and Sindh?

The Punjab LEAs are not faced with terrorism, extortion, kidnapping and the likes serious crimes that happen in Karachi, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. KP and Karachi LEAs can argue that as they pay more attention to terrorism and radicalism, so that they cannot focus on ordinary crimes. For example, more than 500 cases of kidnapping for ransom and more than 500 cases of extortion were registered only in KP in the last five years. Likewise, more than 2000 cases of terrorism occurred in KP that took the lives of almost 3000 people in the last five years including police, FC, army and civilian population (Official statistics from Central Police Office, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Peshawar) . But why the Punjab? The Punjab LEAs are not faced with the similar kind of serious problems which are being faced by KP, Balochistan and Karachi.

The incidents point to some grave myths and realities in Pakistan. Many jokes and sarcasms are prevalent in Pakistan regarding the people of KP and Balochistan. The myth is, Child abuse happen more in KP and Balochsitan. The reality, on the other hand, is that Javed Iqbal Murki with 100 child abuse and strangulation and Kasur incident with more than 250 child sexual abuse and molestation took place in the Punjab.

We are not making an assessment or value-loaded decision on the myth and reality as evident from the two mega child abuse cases. However, we further invite researchers to critically evaluate the above-mentioned ‘myth and reality’ as far as child protection and child abuse are concerned. Are the LEAs fully aware and equipped to address these issues effectively in other provinces or it is the openness and media assertion in the Punjab which brought such horrifying incidents to light? Are social taboos and social control mechanisms more effective in the rest of the county or modernization and urbanization have weakened our traditional societies in the cities like Lahore and Kasur? Such questions will keep researchers perturbed till we find some empirically tested answers to them.

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