



EXPLORING THE DETERMINANTS OF PEDOPHILIC BEHAVIOR IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Dr. Zahid Iqbal

Assistant Professor, Department of Commerce, University of Kamalia, Punjab, Pakistan.

Email: zahidiqballak@gmail.com

Dr. Rashid Maqbool

Incharge, Main Library, University of Okara, Punjab, Pakistan

Email: rashid_gee@yahoo.com

Mr. Khalid Mehmood,

PhD Scholar, Department of Education, University of Okara, Lahore, Pakistan.

Email: chkhalidgujjar56@gmail.com

Shazia Akram

PhD Scholar, Time Institute, Multan, Punjab, Pakistan.

Email: shaziaakramnayaab98@gmail.com

Abstract

This research aims to identify the factors causing the phenomenon of pedophilia in Religious Institutions (Islamic Religious Schools) in District Bahawalnagar, Punjab, Pakistan. Considering the complexity and sensitivity of the subject, this research will use a qualitative research method to examine the phenomenon through the experiences, opinions, and knowledge of the people involved/pedophilia indirect/ direct incidents in Religious Institutions. In the analysis of this study, the author intends to use a phenomenological approach, and the primary data will be collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with a selected special audience comprising pedophilia victims, accused perpetrators, family members of victims, and police psychologists, medical officers, and police officers who are working/ have worked in related fields. This research intends to identify the individual, socio-psychological, institutional, and environmental factors of pedophilia in the Religious Institution. This study, based on the findings, will attempt to offer some plausible suggestions to address the issue of pedophilia, as well as to provide a basis for the prevention of future research on pedophilia in Religious Schools in Pakistan. Finally, the results will be provided to the relevant advocates, policymakers, and educational administrators to assist in the development of policies that will protect children from Religious Educational Institutions.

Keywords: *Pedophilia, Religious Education, Religious Institutions, Juvenile, and Harassment*

1. Introduction

During the period of 2020-2025, the data concerning the rise of reports of child sexual abuse in the religious educational institutions of Pakistan is very alarming. Among them are religious institutions. In the first 6 months of 2023 alone, a child protection NGO, Sahil, processed 2,227 cases of child sexual abuse. This accounts for an average of 12 cases a day. Children are very much at risk, and this is evidenced by the fact that 22 cases were recorded at Religious Institutions. A detailed report by the Sustainable Social Development Organization (SSDO) states that during the period of 2019-2023, 5,398 cases of child sexual abuse were recorded in Pakistan. Of these, 62% are from the province of Punjab. In 2023, the reported cases increased by 220% compared to the data of 2019. This is a clearly emerging crisis. The issue of sexual abuse in Religious Institutions is multi-factorial. Most religious institutions function with little to no government regulation. This coupled with the fact that the religious leaders have to a



large extent, unsupervised control which makes it very difficult to bring these perpetrators to justice (Kausar & Iftikhar, 2024). Also, the culture of silence surrounding the abuse, fear of social stigma, and retaliation especially affects families of the victims. Lastly, these factors contribute to the challenge of dealing with this phenomenon. There is an evident need for child protection reforms within religious educational institutions in Pakistan. Ahmed and Yasmin (2025) suggest that mechanisms for supervision and accountability need to be paired with the protection of reporting and abuse to strengthen the religious institutions' child protection framework.

My research shows that from 2019 to 2023, Pakistan, for the first time, reported numerous sexual child abuse incidents, totaling 5,398. With 3,323 reported cases, Punjab leads the way, followed by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (PK) with 1,360, Sindh with 458, and Baluchistan with 257. Most alarmingly, the cases jumped by 220% in 2019 alone, revealing the rapid escalation of the crisis. The Government of Pakistan is in need of its first effective systematic child victim protective policies and the first effective systematic child sexual abuser policies in Pakistan (Grigoropoulos, 2025). Similarly, other South Asian nations deal with the child sexual abuse epidemic. Nearly one in eight girls, amounting to more than 370 million in the world, have faced sexual abuse before the age of 18, and this figure is particularly alarming for the South Asian region. In the Philippines, for example, even after the age of consent was raised from 12 to 16, there is still little to no protection for children due to the social and judicial systems. The aforementioned instances confirm that while legal reforms are necessary, combating child sexual abuse also requires significant social and institutional reforms (Qadeer et al., 2023).

Additionally, religious organizations frequently assist needy families in Pakistan, providing free shelter and food for poor children (Chan, 2022). These institutions' children are socioeconomically vulnerable and, thus, more vulnerable to exploitation (Bilal, 2024a). Under the stress and sexual frustration, clerics may target vulnerable children, knowing that they can easily claim sexual abuse, which discourages reporting due to the belief that the claim is unfounded, thus perpetuating the abuse cycle (Nadeem et al., 2021). There is no primary oversight body for Religious Institutions, leading to greater leniency (Masood & Rafique, 2020). politically motivated abuse of religion needle and the leaders of religious abuse use their authority to stop the abuse of religion It is politically motivated to stop the leaders of religion abuse of religion The leaders of religion use their authority to stop the abuse of religion The leaders of According to the use of religion, abuse is politically motivated to stop the leaders of religion abuse of religion It is politically motivated to stop the leaders of religion abuse of religion and the leaders of religion Use of religion is politically motivated to stop the abuse of religion The leaders of religion abuse. It is politically motivated to stop the leaders of religion abuse of religion Use of religion is used to stop the abuse of religion. Khan et al., 2024a. In addition, the occurrence of child sexual abuse within Religious Institutions is also strongly influenced by psychosocial attributes (Khan & Noor, 2024). Perpetrators of child sexual abuse are more likely to have experienced victimization in underage years, use drugs, and watch sexual elements in films (Abbas et al., 2023). These elements, along with some sociological contextualization, reinforce the ideas about social seclusion and reinforce the social to the probability of individuals partaking in abusive behavior (Bilal, 2024b).

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Interdisciplinary studies in pedagogy, sociology, and policy studies suggest that there are significant, yet unexplored, issues regarding the educational practices and institutional framework of Religious Institutions in Pakistan. More specifically, the understanding and identification of the determinants of the sexually abusive behavior of teachers toward students is an educational and psychological phenomenon that lacks empirical research. The potential of research to develop a framework to address the reasons for such abuse is central to this research. The primary and secondary data collected from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with Religious Institutions teachers, students, parents, and cross-disciplinary professionals (physicians and police officers) concerning the phenomenon of teacher-student sexual abuse in Religions Institutions will be the central research data. It is the primary data (perspective of the students and victims) that will lead to the identification and understanding of the psychological and behavioral characteristics of the abusers and the multidimensional institutional, cultural, and/or socioeconomic reasons for the abusive behavior in the context of the religious school pedagogy. The input from the physician and police officer will be invaluable for understanding the problem from a clinical and legal perspective. The addition of the parents and students will provide insight into the social and emotional ramifications of the abuse.

The various aspects of holistically analyzing the phenomena of structural weaknesses, policies gaps, and cultural barriers which reinforce this behavior will be able to move beyond mere definitional understandings. The analysis will be able to capture, in broad strokes, the phenomena being analyzed, in such a way as to reinforce the academic rigor of the analysis and, with the analysis, be able to put an academically defensible set of prevention and intervention strategies policies for consideration, as its contribution to the academic literature. This analysis is aimed at furthering the academic discourse on the construct and determinants of the phenomenon of pedophilia in Religious Institutions and on the discourse of the child protection mechanisms with in religious institutions. The recommendations of this analysis will be of considerable value to the religious boards, policy makers, civil society organizations, and the law enforcement agencies to develop a value based, accountable, institutional,



psychologically safe and secure protective systems for the students of the religious schools in Pakistan.

The subsequent sections detail how the paper will be structured. Section 2 discusses the available literature. Section 3 outlines the research methodology, including the techniques used, such as qualitative design, and the expert interview process aligned with the research objectives. Section 4 articulates the results and analyses from the expert feedback, outlining the key factors and analyses of the pedophilia behavior. Finally, Section 5 outlines the conclusions, managerial implications, research limitations, and potential for future research.

2. Literature Review

The literature portrays the varying nature of the interplay between culture, structures, and the economy surrounding the factors of pedophilia in the education of Religious Institutions. Hence, the concerns highlighted in the literature would need a more systematic approach in terms of law, society, and supervision to mitigate and control the risk in religious education institutions to the abused and to hold the institutions accountable. The child sexual abuse in Religious Institutions of Pakistan is a largely unreported phenomenon and is seen as extremely problematic given the social and cultural boundaries, and the social positioning of the religious clerics (Rizwan, 2023). As for the Islamic clerics, an AP investigation identified a number of them who are said to have religiously abused other clerics and have gone unreported, primarily because of fear of the religious clerics and the social order (Siddiqui, 2022). There are no registered Religious Institutions, and even in places where Religious Institutions are unregistered, there is no supervision, which indicates a severe lack of control and the inability to be held accountable (Abrams et al., 2020). Besides, some experts say that a number of clerics are driven to the abuse of children because of their mental stress and sexual frustration (Nottingham, 2020). Dr. Lahore Clinical Psychologist, Naila Aziz, described how some clerics, as a show of extreme faith, suppress their sexual urges which, in turn, may lead to acting out in an abusive manner towards children (Armaly et al, 2022). Aziz further explains how the societal respect given to clerics, combined with the stigma around sexual abuse, results in an unwillingness to report abuse, thus making it easier for clerics to abuse children without facing consequences (Rehman, 2021).

Likewise, the strong influence of Islamic clergy in Pakistan results in the Religions Institution's lack of accountability (Mirza, 2020). Abuse inquiries are often in impaired by clerical power, where religious leaders can such their power to stop investigations and will victim (Wareham, 2022). Also, the Pakistan's judicial system allows victims' relatives to "forgive" the perpetrators in consideration of "blood money," causing low indictment rates and persistent violence (Chambers, 2022). Nevertheless, the poverty, which often provides free education, meals, and accommodations, is one of the main elements that motivates parents to send their children to Religious Institutions (Trzebiatowska & Bruce, 2025b). This economic reliance discourages families to report violence because of the fear of losing such advantages and getting socially isolated (Kattula et al., 2025). This is cycle is further deepened by the lack of poor regions' access to other educational options (Toor et al., 2021). The cultural taboo regarding the discussion of sexual violence is, in addition to the fear of being accused of blasphemy, is silencing victims and discouraging reporting (Qayyoom et al., 2022). These dynamics are often exploited by clerics to avoid accountability, using the narrative that accusations are assaults on Islam (Rashid & Barron, 2023). It is this culture of silence that allows the ongoing abuse within religious institutions to continue (Kumari et al., 2024). The absence of the absence of centralized authority managing Religious Institutions results in



varying curricula and absence of uniform child protection policies (Ramadhan, 2023). Numerous Religious Institutions function without any formal regulation, which causes a lack of child safety reforms and compliance monitoring (Zulfiqar & Badshah, 2021).

Therefore, the forensics systems in Pakistan are unable to assist in the investigation and prosecution of abuse cases (Okah, 2025). There is only one forensic laboratory in Pakistan, and processes that require forensics take an extraordinarily long time, which contributes to the length of legal processes, and increases the likelihood that the families of victims will feel pressure to drop their complaints (Cohen & Enayat, 2023). The attention of media and civil society has been critically important for the identification of cases of abuse in the Religious Systems (Sultan & Mohamed, 2023). Investigative journalism, and campaigns in social media, show that, in addition to high profile cases, the government has the ability to take action when the community demands it (Panah et al., 2025). The government of Pakistan has recognized the need for reform in Religious Institutions and suggested reform in the areas of greater control and active modernization of the curricula (Gülerce & Yapar, 2020). Change has been slow, and the resistance of religious institutions has been a barrier to change of any significance (Kausar & Iftikhar, 2024). In order to tackle the factors that contribute to the presence of pedophilia in the education of Religious Institutions, the following should be done: Develop an independent governing body to legislate and regulate Religious Institutions, implement child protection measures, and set a minimum standard for child protection (Bilal, 2024a). Strengthen and extend the laws of child protection, remove any laws that allow for the settlement of litigation by blood money (i.e., compensation paid for the killing of a relative), and ensure that perpetrators are prosecuted and punished with little delay (Ahmed & Yasmin, 2025). Build and improve forensic facilities. Support investigations and process evidence more quickly (Masood & Rafique, 2020). Community education programs should be implemented to reduce stigma around conversations about the sexual abuse, and empower victims to report (Trzebiatowska & Bruce, 2025a). To aid in the healing process and to achieve justice, legal support and psychological counseling should be offered to survivors and their families (Qadeer et al., 2023).

3. Methodology

The present study analyzes the causes of child sexual abuse in Religious Institutions (Islamic religious schools) in Pakistan using qualitative methodology as it is most applicable when exploring the causes of highly sensitive issues and exploring social phenomena that are not highly studied (Nottingham, 2020). Participants in this study issued accusations of sexual abuse and in this regard, the family of the victims, medical doctors, and psychologists, police investigators, and teachers or administrators of Religious Institutions, and are representatives of different professions and numerous fields of activity. The diversity of participants is one of the contributing factors to the comprehensive analysis of the issue proposed from different, but relevant, psychological, social, medical, legal, and institutional dimensions. The insights of accused persons are valuable and help understand the behavioral and situational causes of abuse. Family members of the victims assist in understanding the social and emotional dimensions of the phenomenon and assist in comprehending the social and emotional dimensions of the phenomenon. The input from medical doctors and psychologists is important from the perspective of physical and psychological (mental) health. Police officers describe the legal dimensions of the phenomenon and the problems of the structure and the school of religion. Each and every one of the social institutional religious child educational abuse settings police the religious educational settings, abuse of children the social institutional religious child educational abuse settings police the religious educational settings, abuse of children. The



diversity of backgrounds is important in understanding the context of religious educational settings, child sexual abuse. (Armaly et al., 2022).

Moreover, as endorsed by Wareham (2022), data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The author emphasizes the significance of individual narratives and social perspectives, especially with regard to complex and highly stigmatized issues. Semi-structured interviews permitted participants to describe their personal accounts, while focus group discussions stimulated and allowed participants to contemplate and discuss their collective experiences (Chambers, 2022). Thematic analysis within the six-phase framework set out by Braun and Clarke (2006) was employed to analyze the data. This involved the author becoming fully immersed in the data, generating preliminary codes, and then constructing, reviewing, and refining the themes to explain and report most coherently. The author then defined and named each of the themes in the report. Trzebiatowska & Bruce (2025b) report that analysis of qualitative data using thematic analysis is both systematic and highly flexible, resulting in a 'data driven' report that is aligned with the objectives of the research.

4. Results and Analysis

The phenomenon of pedophilia within Religious Institutions is underpinned by different variables of a psychosocial and institutional nature, and by the structures and sociocultural contexts within which these Institutions operate. Stigma and social silence surrounding the phenomenon create environments where reporting and disclosure are socially discouraged and personally dangerous. In the absence of perpetrator psychosocial support and screening, these phenomena remain unaddressed (Kattula et. al. 2025). In the religio-moral and ideological domains, the unequal power relations between the senior/authoritarian figures and the juniors/students, towards the abuse of the religious and moral power, are seemingly justified by the institutional neglect and the absence of a robust regulatory framework. Normalized obedience, coupled with fear, is a mechanism by which resistance and reporting are further discouraged, thus 'opening the door' to the possibility of abuse, and rendering such abuse invisible (Toor et. al. 2021). The neglect and denial of the phenomenon operate at multiple social, institutional, and geopolitical levels, and result in the further victimization of the victims of abuse, as in the case of severe and chronic psychopathic abuse and emotional suffering of parents (Rashid, Barron, 2023) due to the stress, fear and socio-psychological coping mechanisms, shame, and the social protective mechanisms in the community that create a "justice-avoiding" social/runtime framework. Teachers face a moral dilemma as they are forced to act out of professional responsibility and, as a result, secure the institutional status quo. In response to institutional pressure, students remain silent due to their dependency and fear of potential consequences. The denial and minimization at the community level are further victims of the phenomenon of abuse, by creating a silence about the malady and a resistance to acknowledging its existence (Kumari, et. al. 2024).

The role of community norms and administrative actions can either encourage or hinder abuse. An administrator can choose to stay idle for the sake of a personal interest, and that gives the offender freedom to do as they please (Ramadhan, 2023). Religious figures should not be questioned and this silence allows them to do as they please. Also, for the most part, the community favors the organization for protection, and not the children. Because of the culture of silence surrounding a person's reproductive health, coupled with the blame to the victim, the person who suffers and their relatives can lose the will to speak out (Okah, 2025). The challenges of the medical field and law enforcement when it comes to pedophilia are many. The courts are too slow, and when they finally get to it, it has already expired the evidence that



should have been collected (Cohen & Enayat, 2023). They are either not child sensitive when it comes to their investigation strategies, or they have been put some ceilings that restrict how far a child's case can go. The laws when it comes to children are bad, and when it comes to the prosecution, they are weak and when it comes to the people, they are afraid—especially when it comes to the bigger and more powerful people who are involved—so the children are not given justice, and there is no accountability (Sultan & Mohamed, 2023).

The current safeguarding systems in Religious Institutions are both ineffective and uneven. Policies surrounding child protection are non-existent and complaint mechanisms are ineffective, limiting early detection and response. Staff training and background checks are lacking, as are control and monitoring systems, which all reduce institutional accountability (Panah et al., 2025). Informal systems of conflict resolution are often prioritizing reconciliation over justice which leaves victims and unaddressed systemic problems unprotected. The need for culturally appropriate and comprehensive strategies as demonstrated in the findings, is both the most practical and the most effective (Abbas et al., 2023). Abuse is more likely to happen when child protection policies are inadequate, along with weaker reporting mechanisms and laws in place. Teacher and administrator training is necessary to raise levels of accountability and promote dual reporting, while community-wide initiatives are most likely to reduce the culture of silence surrounding these issues (Aslam, 2023). Furthermore, long-term healing and the prevention of further violence will require psychological support and rehabilitation for victims and perpetrators (Kattula et al., 2025).



Table-I: Themes Descriptions

Sr.	Main Theme	Sub-Categories / Sub-Themes	Indicative Focus
1	Determinants of Pedophilic Behavior in Religious Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sociocultural silence and stigma.• Psychological vulnerabilities of perpetrators.• Power asymmetry and authority misuse.• Institutional neglect and weak oversight.• Normalization of obedience and fear	How social norms, psychological traits, and institutional structures interact to facilitate abuse
2	Lived Experiences and Perceptions of Stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Victim trauma and long-term psychological impact• Parents' fear, shame, and coping strategies.• Teachers' awareness and moral dilemmas.• Students' silence and dependency.• Community denial and minimization	How different stakeholders experience, perceive, and interpret child sexual abuse
3	Role of Religious Institutions Administration and Community Norms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Administrative inaction and conflict of interest.• Influence of religious authority and reverence.• Community protection of institutional reputation.• Cultural taboos around sexuality.• Victim-blaming and social pressure	How institutional leadership and community culture enable or prevent abuse
4	Medical and Law Enforcement Responses and Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Delayed reporting and evidence loss.• Lack of child-sensitive investigation procedures.• Medical underreporting and ethical constraints.• Legal loopholes and weak prosecution.• Fear of retaliation and institutional pressure	Barriers faced by professionals in detection, reporting, and prosecution
5	Child Safeguarding Mechanisms in Religious Institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Absence of formal child protection policies.• Ineffective complaint and reporting systems.• Lack of staff training and background checks.	Effectiveness and limitations of existing protection systems



	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Weak monitoring and accountability structures.• Dependence on informal conflict resolution	
6 Preventive and Policy-Oriented Solution	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Child protection policy reforms.• Mandatory reporting and legal enforcement.• Training for teachers and administrators.• Community awareness and destigmatization.• Psychological support and rehabilitation services.	Culturally sensitive and evidence-based strategies for prevention and response

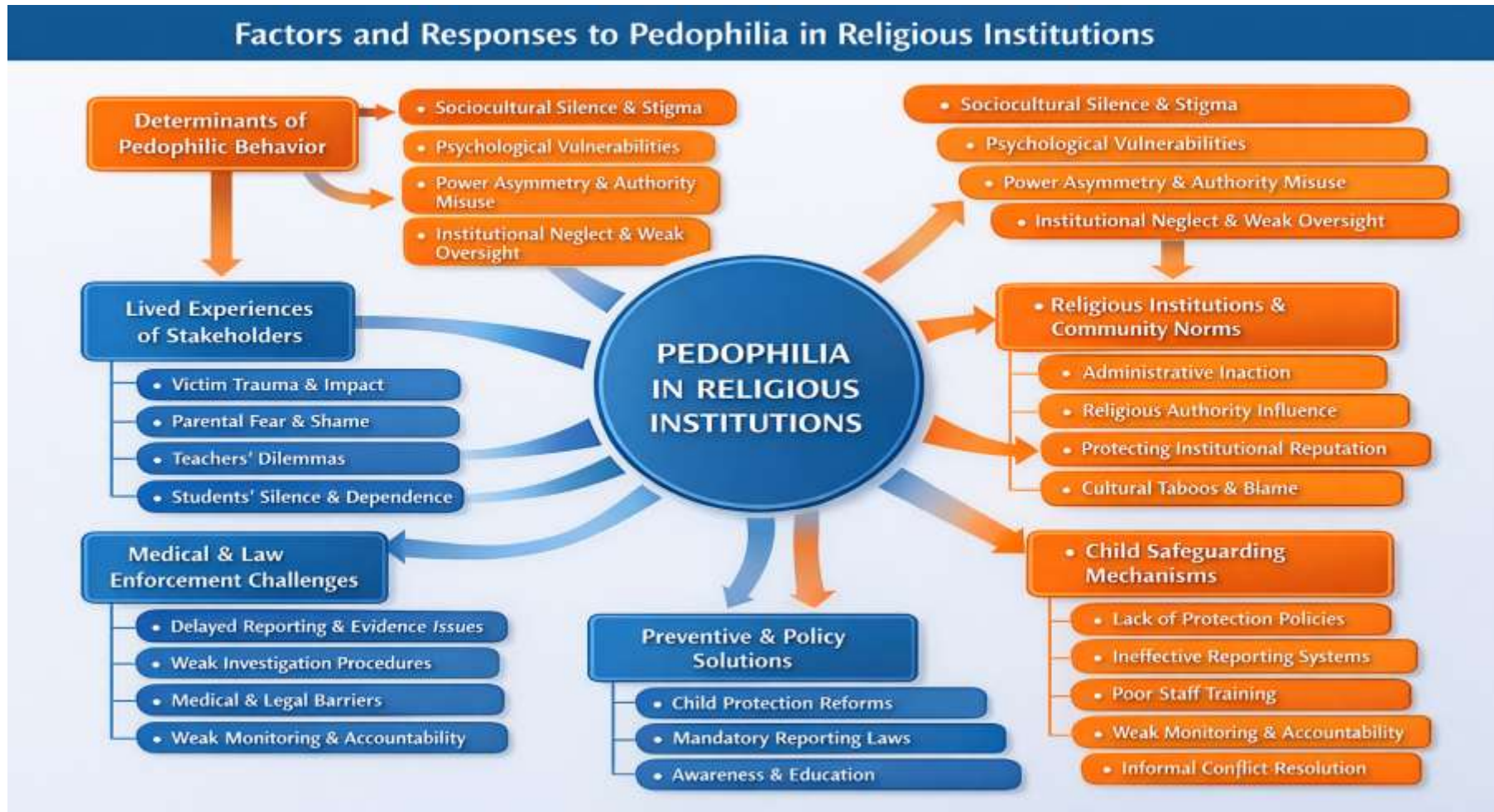


Figure-1: Main and Sub-Themes Descriptions



5. Discussion

The pedophilic behavior evaluation within Religious Institutions in Pakistan shows that it is a multidimensional phenomenon and result of sociocultural, psychological, and institutional factors. Silences within the culture surrounding the stigma of sexuality and obedience to the veil of religious authority illustrate the phenomenon of social-normalized abuse. Abuse could happen, with little to no observation, within the authority student abuse asymmetry and institutional apathy neglect and under developing protection policies. The victim and victim's family experience the psychosocial consequences of reinv trauma, social ostracism, and the fear of being exposed, teachers, and administrators of the institution, the ecstasy of the institution, and the community pet. The psychosocial consequences of reinv trauma, social ostracism, and the fear of being exposed, teachers and administrators of the institution face the ecstasy of the institution, and the community pet, morally speaking. The psychosocial consequences of reinv trauma, social ostracism, and the fear of being exposed, teachers and administrators of the institution, the ecstasy of the institution, and the community pet, morally speaking. Religious veneration, resulting in community silence and organizational paralysis, explains the underreporting and persistence of the phenomenon of child sexual abuse in religious educational institutions.

The examination of the systemic difficulties regarding the medical and police responses focus to the problems of all of the following: the medical responses and police report and the child sensitive investigative procedures (if there are any), and law-related barriers to prosecution (if any). Threats, whether systemic or informal, against the police or any professional that are involved to closely and seriously ascribe to the investigations of the child or the case reinforce impunity. Systemic absence of child protection, poor reporting mechanisms, and informal resolutions to disputes, all characterized the protection efforts are ineffective. Systems of informal child protection are ineffective, and reporting Mechanisms are poor. The author stresses the need for integrated and culturally sensitive systems that go along with comprehensive policy, mandatory reporting, training of professionals, raising the community's consciousness, and the establishment of psychological services. Interventions to tackle pedophilia in Religious Institutions are intertwined with the need of communities for legal and administrative changes and with the need of the community for attitudinal changes and the accountability of the Institutions to systemic changes in order to be effective in protecting children.

5.1. Practical/Managerial Implications

The results of this study provide some significant insights for Religious Institutions, policymakers, educators, healthcare practitioners, and law enforcement. First, sociocultural silence, power asymmetry, and institutional neglect emphasize the most critical gap in the Religious Institutions' child protection policies. Religious Institutions must implement formal child protection policies, and code-of-conduct policies, along with child protection, reporting, and monitoring policies. Teaching, administering, and leading o f religions must be trained about the protection and the ethics of children, along with the warning signs of abuse. The result also indicates the need for Religious Institutions to strengthen memos with health care providers and law enforcement, particularly for adult reporting, and child-sensitive interviewing and prosecuting. It is important to raise community awareness in order to combat stigma, victim blaming, and the cultural silence around child sexual abuse, to ultimately promote disclosures and support for child sexual abuse victims and the families. In addition, provide accessible trauma counseling and rehabilitation for victims and offenders to address



trauma and defuse the risk for re-offending. All the suggestions will result in a more accountable and transparent institutional environment that is also centered on the needs of children. This will help Religious Institutions in Pakistan to honor their moral and educational responsibilities.

5.3. Limitations and Avenue for Further Studies

This study despite its contributions has a number of limitations and to an extent negative impacts for future research. The qualitative nature of the study and the purposive sampling, which in this case seem adequately used to study the sensitive and understudied, certainly limits the findings to the sampled Religious Institutions and stakeholders. Due to the nature of the questions i.e. the power dynamics and the child sexual abuse stigma, social desirability bias, stigma and the institute pressure may have affected participants answers. The inability to access the accused and the victims may have outined certain perspectives. Furthermore, the Islamic religious schools in Pakistan the study is concerned about, may not cross the findings of the rest of the faith-based and secular educational institutions, nor will they reflect on other Pakistani schools. Mixed methods research or other forms of large-scale quantitative research would be of value in addressing the said limitations and to test the established themes, positively or negatively in other populations and geographical. The contextual knowledge may be positively improved in comparative research of the diverse religious faiths, geographical regions, or educational systems. Longitudinal studies may be developed to establish the psychological, social, and legal impacts, and, the outcomes sorphed of the victims, and the effects of the implemented safeguarding policies in the course of time. Additionally, subsequent studies should analyze the viewpoints of policymakers, as well as religious leaders, more comprehensively, and assess the effectiveness of intervention frameworks focusing on prevention, reporting, and rehabilitation, thus strengthening evidence-based strategies for the protection of children.

6. Refeences

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