



## South Asian Print Media and Children's Rights Discourse: A Critical Analysis of Pakistan – India Press

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### Abstract

*Children's rights are highlighted by various authors, columnist and media persons from time to time. The purpose of this study is to identify the imperative issues of children in South Asia especially Pakistan and India. This research article aims to provide information to the advisers and policy makers to shift particular difficulties of children's rights to the forefront of public conscience. For this purpose, two dailies, The Nation from Pakistan and The Hindu from India were selected to find out the value given to children's rights. The study shows that the coverage of children's rights of education, health, safety and development rights were hardly covered in Pakistan and India's print media and it is rarely prominent to identify the important issues related to children rights. This survey also examines that there are significant difference in the coverage of India and Pakistan newspapers which reports to the children's issues.*

**Key Words:** South Asia, Children, Rights, Newspaper, India, Pakistan, Perception

### Introduction

A major part of any population includes children; it is indeed a very sensitive issue as the future of any society depends on children. It is important to protect the basic rights of children so that they can become creative members of that society in future. Children are often deprived of the basic rights and their rights are considered to be more complex than the rights of adults (Siraj, 2010).

However, Burke (2007) summarized children's rights into three parts: the right to existence, the right to protection and the right to development. South Asia is a developing region with high population density. The majority of the population have an average source of income and some countries majority of the population is below poverty line (Venkateswarlu et al., 2003). As far as Pakistan and India are concerned, due to low income families there are issues of malnutrition and child mortality rate is high (Hirani, 2012). The issues of children's rights in Pakistan are complex and profound. They need multiple services at the sociocultural and legislative levels. Some of the problems faced by children especially in terms of violations of rights are so entrenched and deeply rooted in society; they require very serious structural and systemic changes (Lane, Bair-Merritt, & Dubowitz, 2011).

The media is supposed to play an important role in shaping public opinion and influencing policy development and legislation, they can help to draw attention towards children's problems by highlighting the issues. Media participation is needed to succeed in this area. If these rights are incorporated into different forms of mass communication the children's rights can be part of Pakistan's political and social agendas (Nikku, 2013). As early as 1978, UNESCO stated in its declaration the basic contribution of the mass media in educating people is to promote human rights and other aspects for international peace. In addition, the Convention on the Rights

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of the Child emphasizes the need to address the children's needs and concerns more comprehensively by highlighting the importance of mass media participation in promoting children's rights (Ciorciari, 2012).

It is recognized that mass communication plays an important role in improving human's rights awareness among the general population and especially in promoting the child's rights agenda (Jabeen, 2014). Some people have argued that there is a need to mobilize the media to contribute towards the human rights agenda especially when it comes to children's rights (Javid, Arshad, & Khalid, 2011). The media has the ability and capable to highlight people's problems, issues and concerns to inspire what the government must do for the people. Therefore, the media can serve as a bridge between the government and the people. However, some people think that the media is not aware of the rights of children, although the way the media represents and even the possibility of ignoring children's issues may influence the decisions they make on their behalf and how society views them (Tomison & Larsen, 2011).

The Children's Rights Movement is a historical movement dedicated to recognizing, expanding and/or regression to the rights of children around the world. On November 12, 1990, Pakistan ratified the Convention. It entered into force in Pakistan on December 12, 1990. Since then, the Pakistani government has recognized and promoted children's rights at different stages. (Dunne et al., 2015). To protect and rehabilitation of abused children and to make a children's protection institution framework, Child Protection Act was drafted in 2006. Cases of child abuse are not only widespread in Pakistan, but many of the third world countries and developed countries are also facing similar situation. (Lane et al., 2011).

The problems in the field of juvenile justice in Pakistan are diverse and often complex; everything is critical as far as the children's rights are concerned. Regulations in Justice System for children were promulgated in 2000. The educational situation of children in Pakistan is discouraging and there are 10 million children involved in laborious work. Insufficient infrastructure and lack of educational systems makes children out of school. Since 2004, Sindh government schools have banned corporal punishment (Farooq, 2013).

Despite all these measures, physical violence, government and private schools are widespread and institutions have failed to make major changes in banning this practice. Understanding, accepting and implementing children's rights can gradually eliminate violence against children in all forms and throughout the institution. Most children have basic deficiencies in their health care. This is forgiven and is not surprisingly indicative of the poor health indicators of Pakistani children, which are inevitably reflected in national health and economic productivity statistics. The infant mortality rate is 84 deaths per 1,000 live births, and the mortality rate for children under five is 125 per 1,000. 38% of children under five are underweight and can only fail to perform their basic duties (Hirani, 2012).

## **Condition of Children in the World**

Atrocities against children are constantly being neglected by the international community, and major reason of these increasing atrocities is the use of power to solve the differences and use of war to handle the opponent. Many of the leaders and professionals are not familiar with the Convention on the Protection of Children's Human Rights, the how could the general public be aware of this convention. Children are facing terrible violence and living their lives in miserable condition and pressure groups are not allowing the governments to look at the condition on children (Sharma & Joshi, 2013).

According to the UNICEF (2005) report, children are suffered from poverty more than another segment of society. More than 500 million children (40% of the total) live on under \$1 for a day in developing countries (Hirani & Kenner, 2011). Just because of lack of health facilities, more than 50% of the 10 million children die at home. 2 million children die of respiratory infections per year, followed by tuberculosis, neonatal tetanus, measles, malaria and diarrhea. Child labor is still out of control in developing countries and more than 250 million children who are working are from age 5 to 14 (Nikku, 2013).

## **Condition of Children in Pakistan and India**

The conditions of children are worse in India and Pakistan as compared to rest of the Asia. One of the major reasons for this is that governments of both countries could not implement legislation and international conventions to improve child conditions. Studies have shown that poverty, poor drinking water, physical and

sexual abuse and trafficking in children are among the areas in which society and the governments failed to create good conditions for children (Nikku, 2013). Statistics have also confirmed the claims of the study. The governments in developing countries are working to improve the rights of children the overall media attention whether government or private is not in line with government policies. Interestingly, the print media in developed and developing countries have different reports on children's rights. In mainstream media in developing countries there is a complete lack of meaningful and relevant coverage of children's issues (Venkateswarlu et al., 2003).

## **Rationale of the Study**

The study is an investigative study to identify whether the print media in Pakistan and India highlight the issues related to children's rights and try to practice it as a part of the political and social agenda of the public and policy makers or not.

## **Issues relating to Children's Rights in South Asia**

In Pakistan, children under the age of 19 comprise more than half of the total population (Hirani & Kenner, 2011). Although Pakistan ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1990, since then different laws have been enacted for the development of children but Pakistan is still far behind fulfilling its commitments in this regard (Mahmood, 2015). The conditions of children are still not satisfactory and the issues related to children's rights are still under review. Basic child's rights such as health care, education, freedom from violence (sexual exploitation, corporal punishment, killing, kidnapping, kidnapping and trafficking), birth registration and child labour elimination, require serious policy decisions. Ironically, in South Asia Pakistan is also included in those countries that have not conducted any systematic studies for the protection of children's rights (Jabeen, 2014).

In developed countries democracy is very strong and children have access to all basic rights. However, in developing countries (Morrow & Pells, 2012), the financial crisis within poor families is the main cause of child labor. Although parents who are in a bad social position know that child labor is illegal, they find themselves unable to do anything in the face of the financial crisis so they send their children to work in order to meet the basic needs of the family. In developing countries, nearly 250 million children are engaged in child labour. The types of work vary depending on the region they belong. In the city, children work in the construction of factories and homes. In rural areas, they work as domestic servants in the field (Lane et al., 2011). The issue of child labour is an undesirable phenomenon in the context of global human rights. In Pakistan, a large number of children were forced to work because of the financial crisis before the family entered school (Farooq, 2013).

Health and education are two major sectors that are often overlooked. In fact, there are no systematic formulas to ensure children's health and education rights. Pakistan's health problems are at an extreme. The infant mortality rate is high due to inadequate sanitation facilities in government hospitals. Infant mortality has raised due to inadequate sanitation facilities in government hospitals. According to the 2011 National Nutrition Survey (NNS), Pakistani children have very poor sanitation facilities. The survey also referred to substandard medical facilities for children in Pakistan. The nutritional status of children is also not satisfactory. Although the Pakistani government has done a lot of work in the past year and a half much effort is still needed to address child malnutrition (Hirani, 2012).

## **Children's Education in Pakistan and India**

Children from the poor have no access to basic education facilities. Education is divided into different standards. The public and private sectors have different courses, standards and facilities. Public schools do not meet international education standards. As a result, nearly 47% of children are out of school in primary schooling level because they cannot afford the expenses of private schools. There are no adequate infrastructure such as drinking water for primary schools, clean water, electricity and toilets. The Pakistani government has failed to provide appropriate systems and infrastructure for children in schools. The poor allocation and distribution of educational resources for children is the main cause of illiteracy in Pakistan (Boateng, 2017).

Child sexual abuse and corporal punishment are also common in Pakistan. Macroeconomic risk factors such as poverty, weak legal protection, illiteracy, family size and unemployment have created an enabling environment for violence against children. Due to the lack of empirical data, the severity of the problem cannot be properly assessed (Lane et al., 2011). In the past few years, many incidents have shown terrible violations of children's rights.

## **Theoretical Framework**

According to theory of social responsibility, the press has the responsibility to report all important information in an accurate and objective manner throughout the day. Theory of social responsibility proves the view of media's private ownership in the public interest. For the private sector, theory defines different ethical codes of conduct and professional standards in various types of courts and councils, and handles individual complaints against media groups through different commissions. But all these accountability processes of media houses should be self-regulating, which is the main feature of theory (Jabeen, 2014).

In this regard, the role of the media is not to promote the government or political parties they like but to promote social change by promoting racial tolerance, women's rights, health, education and the broadcasting of healthy political ideas. In this case, media professionals should provide the right information at the right time and must be objective and fair when it comes to reporting the children's issues. Journalists must pay great attention to all aspects of national interests when propagating news, such as peace, social progress, human rights and democracy (Oyero & Salawu, 2018). The media must perform with the concept of social responsibility, as its ability to influence society has increased significantly over the past two decades. The study examines the social responsibility of the media through an analysis of news items on children's rights issues. It seeks to determine whether newspapers have framed child rights issues in a positive way with suggesting steps to build awareness among the public or simply exaggerating the problem without suggesting any solution.

## **Research Questions**

**RQ1.** What was the slant of newspapers in coverage of children related stories?

**RQ2.** What are the themes of newspaper stories while covering children issues?

## **Hypothesis**

**H1:** Indian press is perceived more positive towards children rights as compared to Pakistani press?

## **Research Methodology**

The study measured all news reports, editorials, columns and features published in a period of one year. The two major India and Pakistan newspapers "The Nation" of Pakistan and "The Hindu" of India from January 1 to December 2018 were considered in this study. The researchers used probability sampling to select samples from the population by composite sampling by selecting the first week of January, the second week of February, the third week of March and the fourth week of April. The cycle starts again after every fourth week. Through this formula you can include all the days of the week, all the weeks of each month and all the months of the year.

## **Conceptualization of Categories**

These issues fall into nine categories: Child Education, Child Protection, Childcare, Funding, Schooling and Advert for Foster Careers, Adoption, Mental Health and Child Abuse. All news content related to primary education, free education and government school facilities is considered a "child education" category. Content regarding any child-based violence, such as child sexual abuse, corporal punishment, kidnapping, trafficking and abduction of children falls within the category of "children's abuses". In the "Children's Health" category all news content on child health is considered such as polio campaigns, food shortages, malnutrition, infant mortality and facilities available to government hospital children. All contents on child labour such as child labor such as forced labor.

All stories are included in the “child labour category” and all contents about child’s annual budget allocation are included in the “child budget” category. Published reports in these dailies regarding children’s rights issues are studied in three ways: frequency, prominence and direction. Frequency is measured by the number of occurrences of news items related to children’s rights issues. Within the news item the prominence is measured in three different ways, pages, locations and pictures on the page. The news item on the homepage has given score of four points. Similarly, if the news is located on the back page, the city and other pages it has given score of three, two and one points respectively. If the news is placed in the upper half of the page the score is two and if news is placed in the lower half of the page than the score of one is given. If any picture is placed with the news, the score is one otherwise there will be no score. The index of the maximum prominence is calculated as 7 and the minimum prominence is calculated as 2. Therefore, if the score is greater than 5, it is considered to be high prominence, and if it is lower than 5 then it is considered as less prominent.

The direction of the content is measured in editorials, features and columns by two-point scales positive and negative. Any editorial, column or feature that debates about the positive steps taken to address the rights of children and also recommends the steps to address the problems faced by children in Pakistan is considered as positive. However, any editorial, column or feature that only highlight the children’s right issues without mentioning / suggesting any clear solutions is considered as negative.

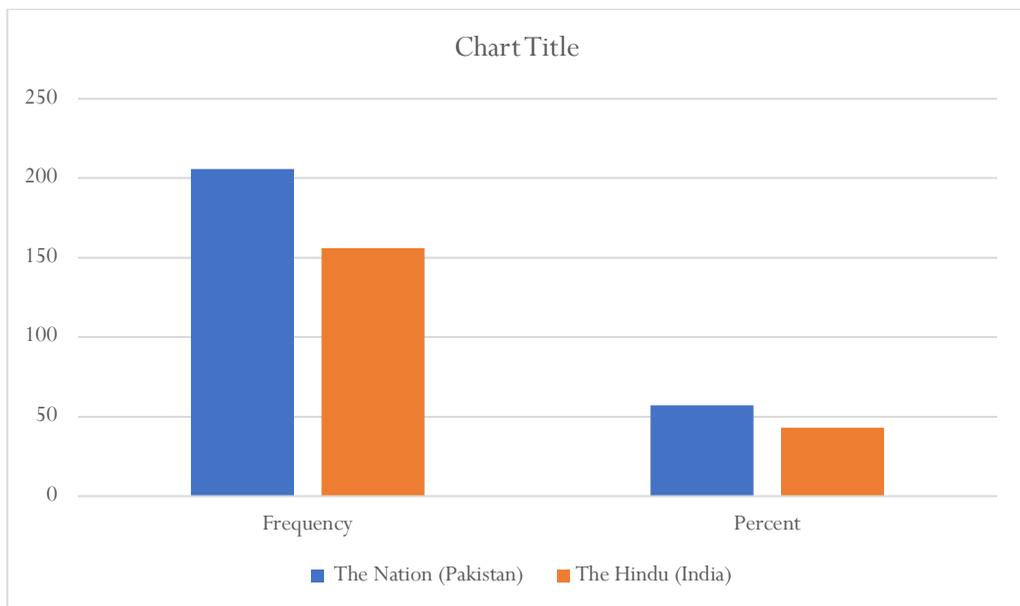
## Results

Following results were obtained after the tabulation of data to investigate how child rights is dealt in Pakistani and Indian media.

**Table 1.** Dailies-Wise: Frequency & Percentage of News Items

Serial	Newspaper	Frequency	Percent
	The Nation (Pakistan)	206	57%
	The Hindu (India)	156	43%

N=362

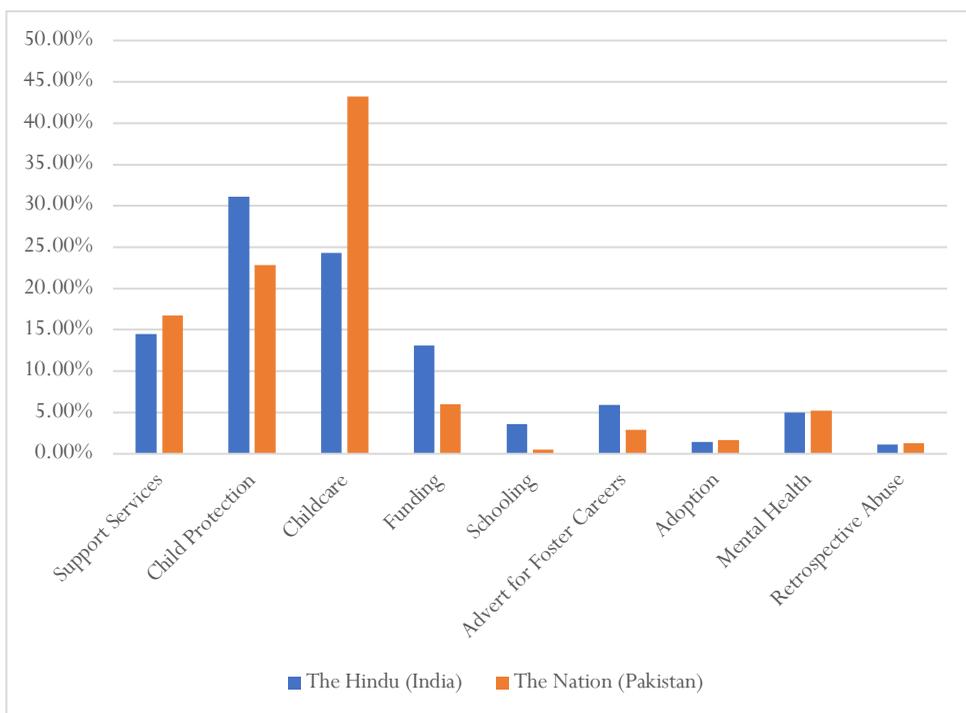


**Graph 1:** Shows Dailies-Wise: Frequency & Percentage of News Items Graphically

Result shows that out of total of 362 news items, in the leading dailies 206 from The Nation (Pakistan) and 156 dailies of The Hindu (India) news items were published.

**Table 2.** Theme-Wise Frequency and Percentage of Children's Rights

Serial	Themes	The Hindu (India)	The Nation (Pakistan)
	Child Education	14.50%	16.70%
	Child Protection	31.10%	22.80%
	Childcare	24.30%	43.20%
	Funding	13.10%	6.00%
	Schooling	3.60%	0.50%
	Advert for Foster Careers	5.90%	2.90%
	Adoption	1.40%	1.70%
	Mental Health	5%	5.20%
	Child Abuse	1.10%	1.30%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>156 (100%)</b>	<b>206 (100%)</b>

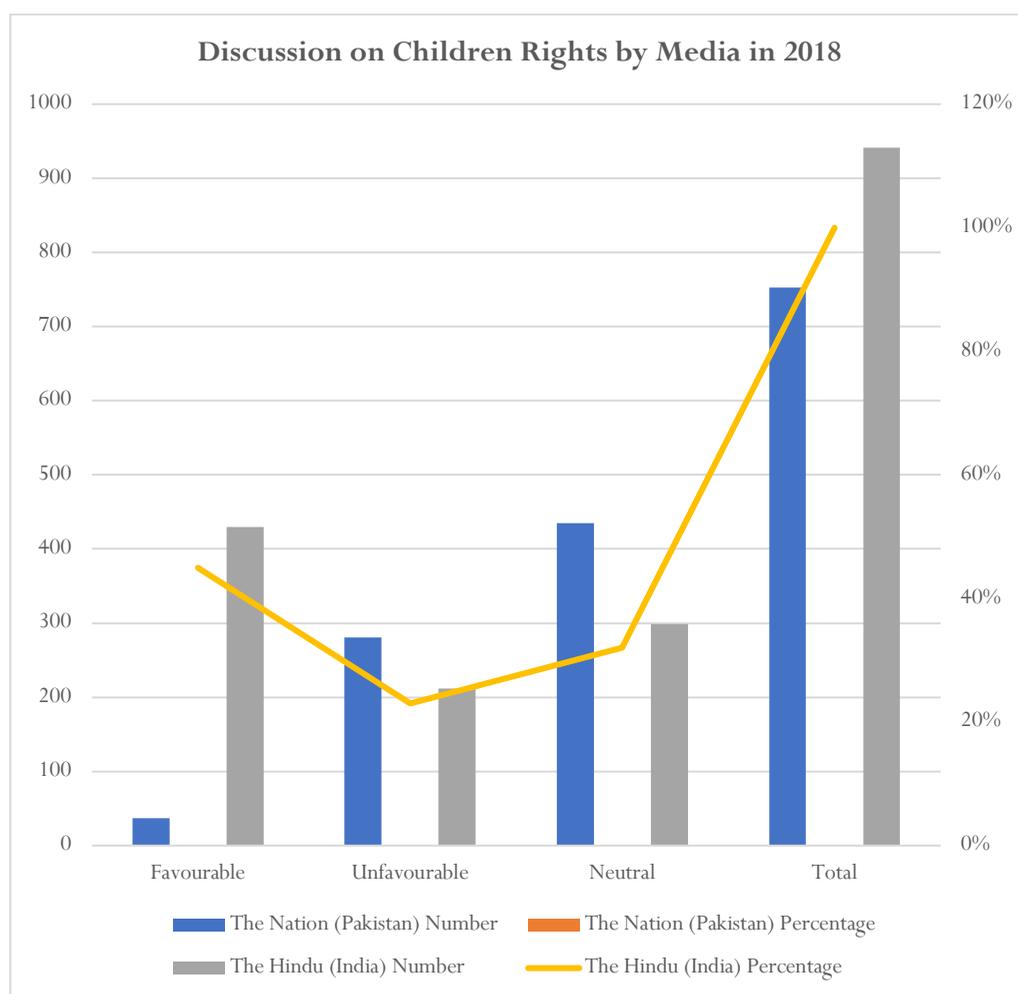


**Graph 2:** Shows Theme-Wise Frequency and Percentage of Children's Rights Graphically

These issues fall into nine categories: Child Education, Child Protection, Childcare, Funding, Schooling and Advert for Foster Careers, Adoption, Mental Health and Child Abuse. The percentage comparison of the content in newspaper is given in the above table.

**Table 3.** Discussion on Children Rights by Media in 2018

Serial	Category	The Nation (Pakistan)		The Hindu (India)	
		Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
	Favorable	37	5%	430	45%
	Unfavorable	281	37%	212	23%
	Neutral	435	58%	299	32%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>753</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>941</b>	<b>100%</b>



**Graph 3:** Discussion on Children Rights by Media in 2018

### Criteria for Favorable Category

Articles were considered favorable if the author and/or people considered the article in favor of rights of children or in support of all the agencies, workers or interventions who are working for rights of children. All the articles which appreciated the efforts of different agencies, workers and interventions for the protection of children's rights were taken as favorable.

### Criteria for Unfavorable Category

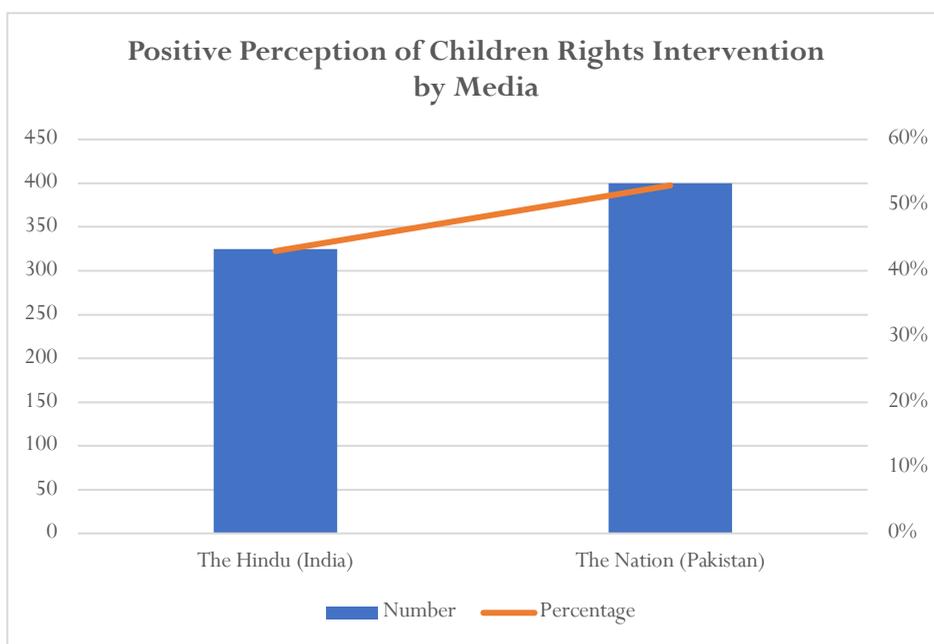
Articles were considered unfavorable if the author and/or people considered the article is not in favor of rights of children or in support of all the agencies, workers or interventions who are working for rights of children. All the articles in which the agencies, workers or interventions for the protection of children's rights were criticized were taken as unfavorable.

### Criteria for Neutral Category

Articles were categorized as neutral if the author and/or people cited for the article were neither in support of or lacked support the child rights intervention, worker, or agency, including how the case was managed. The articles which were neither criticizing nor praising the efforts of agencies, workers or other interventions for the protection of children's rights and these articles were based on sheer objectivity.

**Table 4** Positive Perception of Children Rights Intervention by Media

Serial	Category	Number	Percentage
	The Hindu (India)	325	45%
	The Nation (Pakistan)	400	55%
	Total	725	100%



**Graph 4:** Graphically showing the Positive Perception of Children Rights Intervention by Media

## Criteria for inclusion in the Category Positive

Articles were categorized as Positive if the audience perceived that author regarded the child rights intervention, action, management of the case, or decision making as having a desirable outcome. The survey results show that there is no significant difference between The Hindu (India) and The Nation (Pakistan) Daily in terms of the number of news reports published about children issues. 325 (45%) of the respondent perceived the efforts of Indian press as positive and 400 (55%) perceived as stories of Pakistani press more positive towards protection of children rights. However, there is a significant difference in the frequency of news published on children rights issues in the Nation (Pakistan) dailies as compared to The Hindu (India) dailies. The coverage of news items of child abuses in The Nation (Pakistan) dailies is far more frequent than The Hindu (India) dailies. The Hindu (India) dailies have published more news stories about children's education, health and the budget allocation for children development.

## Conclusion and Discussion

### Research Questions

#### RQ1. What was the Slant of Newspapers in Coverage of Children Related Stories?

Pakistani press gave 37 (5%) stories with a slant of favorable for the rights of children and 281 (37%) stories with unfavorable slant. There were 435 (58%) stories with a neutral slant in the Pakistani press (See Table 3). This result shows that Neutral is the major slant and it is significant to observe that unfavorable slant is more than favorable slant.

Indian press gave 430 (45%) stories with a slant of favorable for the rights of children and 212 (23%) stories with unfavorable slant. There were 299 (32%) stories with a neutral slant in the Pakistani press (See Table 3). This result shows that Indian press has used favorable slant for the children rights more than any other slant.

#### RQ2. What are the themes of Newspaper Stories while Covering Children Issues?

Results show that the theme on the top of Indian newspaper was "Child Protection" (31.10%), while covering the children issues. Second most abundant theme was "Child Care" (24.30%) and third most found theme was "Child Education" (14.50%). Theme of "Funding" for the children got significance (13.10%) (See Table 2)

On the other hand, Pakistani press gave maximum importance to "Child Care" (43.20%). second important theme was "Child Protection" (22.80%) and third most important theme in the coverage of children rights was "Child Education" (16.70%) (See Table: 2). the theme of "Funding" could not get as much importance as it got in Indian press.

## Test of Hypothesis

### H1: Indian press is perceived more positive towards Children rights as compared to Pakistani Press?

Results show that 325 (45%) of the respondent perceived the efforts of Indian press as positive and 400 (55%) perceived as stories of Pakistani press more positive towards protection of children rights (See Table: 4); the result clearly rejects the hypothesis; hence H1 is a null hypothesis.

## Discussion

In The Nation (Pakistan), the issues of children's rights are multifarious. In order to solve these problems, very strict structural and systematic changes are required. Social, political, economic and institutional involvement is also required for betterment of the system. The International Development Agency put emphasis that the media plays a key role in measuring public support for human rights, especially children's rights (Oyero & Salawu, 2018). The media can play a very effective role in providing information that enables viewers/readers to take action and act accordingly. If the media responsibly play its role in providing information and education to the public, it can be quite possible in bringing social change to the rights of children.

The purpose of this study was to determine the role of the Pakistani print media in the issue of children's rights in Pakistan. The results of the survey show that the reports on children's issues in India and Pakistan Daily are very insignificant. The dailies do not have any clear agenda and position to raise awareness regarding violations of children's rights. It has not played nor playing any role in shaping public opinion and also influencing policy development and legislation. In order to promote the country's children's rights agenda, the media has characteristics and capability that effectively influence the public and political agenda. The requirement is to develop and implement a strategy to integrate the media into deep-rooted aspects of promoting children's rights and addressing the violations of children's rights. The media is expected to play a more socially responsible role in this part of society. As a powerful social institution, media can help to raise awareness in society by highlighting children's rights issues. In addition, it is recommended that in order to meet the needs and services of children and to protect them from any further exploitation, certain ethical standards should be maintained while reporting their problems.

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