

**Letter to the
Editor**

Mobilizing students: A novel solution to tackle child abuse in Pakistan

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Author's Contribution

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Child abuse is rampant in Pakistan.¹ Brushed under the carpet, it may not always present to the legal system.² But it is more likely to present to the healthcare system. Here, the lack of awareness, stigma, fear of accountability, and practically no reporting forensic system⁴ and the fact that healthcare workers are not mandated to report such incidents in place makes healthcare workers misdiagnose or ignore signs of child abuse. Such knowledge must be incorporated at an early level in healthcare education to break this cycle, however, dissipating any such knowledge is merely a mechanical exercise. A novel solution to this gap has emerged from a tertiary care hospital: Child Protection Services (CPS).³

CPS is an organization aimed at tackling child abuse, consisting of healthcare workers and medical students advocating for child rights. This organization has a subgroup which is essentially a student society powered by nursing and medical students, who participate not only as general members but are organized into society wings such as the research and community wing. They have leadership roles at each level of the hierarchy, from the head of the society to the wing leadership. Interested undergraduate students can apply to the society, are shortlisted via their CVs and interviews, and assigned to the wing of their choice. Their work and contribution earn them promotion to leadership positions.

CPS serves to raise awareness amongst students about the importance of child abuse as a social and healthcare issue by its simple presence. It helps harness students' interests in this subject and gives them a chance to interact with like-minded individuals to advocate this cause. The function of the society is even greater; the society generates meaningful research about child abuse, connects students with faculty mentors who are experts in this area, and raises awareness in the community. This includes campaigns in schools, increasing the knowledge of key stakeholders, such as school teachers, and so on.

Child abuse must be reintroduced into the medical curriculum, not only as the forensic and paediatric clinical caveat, but as a social issue, it is and stands to be until groups such as the healthcare workforce are mobilized to advocate for laws, policies, and robust frameworks for reporting child abuse. An example can be via a workshop⁴ so that the whole picture of child abuse is seen instead of being scattered across disciplines. We must be ready to manage and treat patients who have suffered child abuse, with or without a reporting system- the two stand independently. We must, therefore, ensure that not only are diagnosis and management adequately taught but that the importance of the issue and the moral responsibility of students as individuals in society and as healthcare workers is reflected via our curriculum and via co-curricular, such as that of CPS.

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