



Forgotten Childhoods: Investigating the Causes and Contributing Factors of Child Abandonment in District Peshawar

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ABSTRACT

Childhood is a crucial stage of human development in which children require stable family relationships, care, protection, and support to ensure their well-being and healthy development. When children are deprived of parental care or abandoned, they may face significant social, emotional, economic, and developmental challenges. Child abandonment is therefore a complex social and child protection issue influenced by multiple family, socioeconomic, cultural, and structural factors. This study explored the underlying causes and contributing factors of child abandonment in District Peshawar, Pakistan. A qualitative approach was employed, using purposive sampling to select 25 participants, including 15 abandoned children, six institutional staff members, and four child protection officials. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and observations and analyzed using thematic analysis. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory was used as the conceptual framework to examine that a child's development and well-being are influenced by multiple interconnected environmental systems rather than by the immediate family alone and the findings demonstrated that child abandonment was not merely a family-level issue but results from the interaction of vulnerabilities operating across different ecological systems. The study found that family conflict, domestic violence, parental remarriage, property disputes, poverty, parental illness or death, substance abuse, displacement, migration, and weak family support contributed to children's separation from parental care. The findings also highlighted care abandonment, in which children had living parents but lacked adequate care and support. The study concludes that child abandonment results from interconnected vulnerabilities rather than a single cause. It recommends a family-centered preventive approach involving socioeconomic support, family counseling, and coordinated child protection services to strengthen vulnerable families and prevent unnecessary separation.

Keywords: Child Abandonment, Family Instability, Socioeconomic Factors, Child Protection, District Peshawar

Introduction

Throughout the world, children are considered an asset of every country; however, certain socio-economic and parental conditions push them into vulnerable situations. Children mean trust and grace from God Almighty, which must be maintained because they have values, dignity, and human rights as human resources for the development of the country and the next generation of the nation's ideals. It is very hard to be an abandon for any child because it is accompanied by much vulnerability such as poverty, illiteracy, begging, exclusion, and break down from the family (Farhat ullah et al., 2020). The



Vol. 4 No. 3 (Mar) (2026)

abandonment of children is a heartbreaking reality that affects countless lives. It is a problem that requires a multifaceted approach, involving not only government agencies but also community organizations and individuals. Abandoned children have many experiences that come from harsh environments and not all of them are accepted by society. As a society, we have a moral, ethical, political, and legal obligation to protect our children and provide resources and support to families in need so that they can provide a stable and loving home for children (Marius Marici et al., 2023).

Childhood is a critical stage of development requiring stable parental care, protection, and support. When children experience abandonment, these needs may be disrupted, increasing their vulnerability to neglect, exploitation, poverty, and social exclusion. In Pakistan, child protection is an important social welfare concern, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), where socioeconomic hardship, family instability, displacement, and limited social support may increase the risk of separation from parental care.

Child abandonment refers to situations in which children are deprived of adequate parental or caregiver care and protection. It may involve deliberate desertion or circumstances in which parents are unable to provide the physical, emotional, social, or financial support required for children's well-being (UNICEF, 2019, 2021). In KP, the Child Protection and Welfare Act, 2010 provides a legal framework for protecting children deprived of parental care through services such as shelter, registration, legal assistance, and rehabilitation (Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 2010).

In District Peshawar, abandonment must be understood within its wider family, social, and economic context. Poverty, family conflict, parental instability, cultural stigma, displacement, and weak social support can contribute to children's separation from parental care and access to institutional or alternative care. These children may subsequently face difficulties in education, healthcare, legal identity, and other essential services.

Child abandonment is therefore a complex phenomenon resulting from interconnected family, socioeconomic, cultural, and structural factors rather than a single cause. Existing literature identifies economic hardship, family conflict, substance abuse, parental vulnerabilities, limited social support, and weaknesses in child protection systems as important contributors (UNICEF, 2021; Dubowitz, 2014). Understanding these interconnected factors is essential for developing effective preventive interventions in District Peshawar.

Objectives:

To explore the underlying family, socioeconomic, cultural, and structural factors contributing to child abandonment in District Peshawar, Pakistan.

To examine the experiences and perspectives of abandoned children and relevant child protection practitioners regarding the causes and circumstances leading to child abandonment in District Peshawar.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Child Abandonment:

Child abandonment occurs when parents or caregivers fail to adequately care for and support a child, involving neglect, emotional rejection, or lack of protection. It can result from deliberate desertion or caregiver incapacity due to factors like socioeconomic hardship, family instability, and substance abuse (Nuszkiewicz, 2012). This broader perspective is important for understanding the reasons behind child abandonment, particularly in District Peshawar.



Causes of Abandonment:

Child abandonment is a complex social and child protection issue that rarely results from a single factor. Parents or caregivers may experience a combination of family, socioeconomic, cultural, psychological, and structural pressures that affect their ability to provide adequate care. Understanding these underlying factors is essential for developing effective preventive and protective interventions.

Globally, millions of children experience separation from parental or family care because of poverty, conflict, displacement, social instability, and other forms of vulnerability. Some children without adequate family care enter residential institutions or alternative care arrangements, while others remain exposed to neglect, exploitation, and other protection risks. Evidence indicates that poverty and the limited availability of family and social support are important factors influencing children's separation from parental care, particularly in low- and middle-income settings (UNICEF South Asia, 2020).

Nigerian research identifies that child abandonment results from a mix of family, cultural, socioeconomic, and conflict-related factors. Issues such as family conflict, marital breakdown, domestic violence, and unstable relationships can lead to abandonment. Cultural stigma against single mothers, negative beliefs about disabled children, and gender preferences also play a role. Additionally, poverty, unemployment, and the inability to provide basic necessities heighten the risk of abandonment. Conflict and displacement further exacerbate the issue, indicating that abandonment arises from multiple, interconnected factors rather than a single cause (Onyido et al., 2018; Lemin & Sarah, 2008).

A study in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria by Iniobong Eduok et al. (2025) found that socioeconomic and cultural factors have a moderately low influence on baby abandonment. Kim and Yu (2023) noted economic hardship and the desire to conceal childbirth as key factors, heightened by social stigma among vulnerable mothers. Limited social support may compromise caregivers' ability to provide care. Literature indicates that poverty, unemployment, and inadequate support increase children's abandonment risk, with the absence of safety nets worsening these challenges. Furthermore, crises such as war or displacement disrupt familial structures, emphasizing that child abandonment is a complex issue arising from various interacting factors.

Marici et al. (2023) identify parental rejection, neglect, abuse, and dysfunctional parenting as critical factors disrupting parental care. Inadequate emotional responsiveness and unmet needs can damage the parent-child relationship, leading to further experiences of rejection and deprivation. Various forms of abuse increase children's vulnerability and disrupt family dynamics. The authors argue that child abandonment must be viewed in the context of these broader familial issues.

Existing literature from Indonesia indicates that child abandonment is influenced by socioeconomic factors such as poverty, low education levels, and limited job opportunities. Economic hardship affects parents' ability to meet basic needs like food and healthcare. Additionally, parental incompetence and social stigma surrounding unwanted births contribute to child neglect and abandonment. The interplay of these elements highlights the complex nature of child abandonment, rooted in both individual parental capacities and broader social pressures (Tiar Handayani et al., 2024).

Baghdadi et al. (2024) reported that child abandonment in the Maghreb is associated with multiple socioeconomic, family, and social factors. Poverty, unemployment, parental inability to provide adequate care, family and community support breakdown, rural-to-



Vol. 4 No. 3 (Mar) (2026)

urban migration, and stigma against families outside traditional structures increase children's vulnerability to abandonment. The authors also highlighted limited social services and inadequate alternative care options as structural factors that can contribute to the separation of children from their families.

In England, child abandonment and loss of parental care result from a mix of family, parental, socioeconomic, and social factors rather than a single cause. Common reasons for children entering care include abuse, neglect, chronic family dysfunction, and parental illness. Additional risks stem from deprivation, lone-parent households, mental health issues, substance misuse, domestic violence, and insufficient support during crises. Thus, child abandonment in this context is linked to broader issues of family instability and parental challenges, rather than solely cultural practices.

Child abandonment is a multifaceted issue influenced by various socioeconomic, familial, and cultural factors. Key contributors include poverty and unemployment, which hinder parents' ability to care for their children, as well as inadequate social welfare support. Family issues such as marital conflict, domestic violence, and parental death exacerbate the situation. Parental challenges like mental health issues, substance abuse, and imprisonment further diminish caregivers' capacities. Additionally, unwanted pregnancies and social stigmas can increase abandonment risks. External crises like conflict and migration also disrupt caregiving, highlighting the complex interplay of these factors in child abandonment (Jessica Therivel and Laura McLuckey., 2017)

Child abandonment is influenced by a combination of socioeconomic, familial, cultural, and individual factors. A qualitative study in Gondar City, Ethiopia, found that economic hardship, unwanted pregnancies, and sociocultural beliefs contribute significantly to abandonment decisions. Similarly, research in Nigeria identified family conflicts and harmful practices as key factors. Overall, child abandonment results from a complex interaction of economic struggles, family instability, and inadequate social support rather than a single cause.

Child abandonment in Pakistan is driven by a mix of socioeconomic, cultural, familial, and psychological factors. Poverty and unemployment hinder families' ability to care for children, increasing abandonment risks, particularly among female infants due to gender discrimination. Social stigma surrounding unwed pregnancies leads to secret abandonments to avoid shame. Additional factors include family conflict, lack of community support, low literacy, inadequate reproductive health services, and emotional distress among parents. Evidence indicates that abandonment arises from the complex interplay of these issues rather than a single cause.

Child abandonment in District Peshawar, Pakistan stems from an interplay of poverty, family breakdown, cultural practices, Economic hardship, War/ Displacement and Inadequate social protection systems, with no single Peshawar-specific empirical study isolating causal variables. The available evidence draws on broader Pakistani research and cross-national studies that identify recurring determinants applicable to Peshawar's socio-cultural context.

Existing literature indicates that child abandonment is associated with interconnected socioeconomic, familial, cultural, and structural factors. However, empirical research specifically examining the underlying causes and contributing factors of child abandonment in District Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, remains limited. Previous studies have largely focused on broader issues such as child protection, poverty, family instability, neglect, and children living without parental care, while limited attention has been given to how these factors interact within the specific sociocultural and institutional context of Peshawar. Therefore, there is a need for context-specific qualitative research



Vol. 4 No. 3 (Mar) (2026)

to explore the experiences and perspectives surrounding the causes and contributing factors of child abandonment in District Peshawar.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative research approach to explore the underlying causes and contributing factors of child abandonment in District Peshawar, Pakistan. Purposive sampling was used to select 25 participants, including 15 abandoned children aged 12–18 years, six institutional staff members, and four relevant child protection officials from Zamung Kor Model Institute for State Children, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Child Protection and Welfare Commission (KP-CPWC), and related child protection services. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, field observations, and notes. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent, transcribed, and translated from Urdu into English where required. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006) to identify recurring patterns and themes related to the family, socioeconomic, cultural, and structural factors contributing to child abandonment. Ethical principles, including informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation, were maintained throughout the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

DATA PRESENTATION

Socio-Economic Triggers

The societal and financial pressures that destabilize a family unit to the point where abandonment becomes a survival strategy or an unavoidable outcome. Here are the main root causes of the family breaking apart, and as a result, children face abandonment.

The "Second Marriage" Displacement:

During in- depth interviews this component was the major theme of this study in which children are displaced or rejected following the remarriage of one or both parents, most commonly when a step-parent particularly a stepmother refuses to accept children from a previous marriage. In this dataset, remarriage appears as one of the most frequent triggers of domestic rejection, often resulting in children being separated from their families and placed in institutional care.

Research supports the significance of family restructuring as a risk factor for child neglect and abandonment. R. Kelly Raley et al. (2020) note that although remarriage rates have declined, the proportion of marriages that are remarriages remains substantial, and transitions such as divorce and re-partnering continue to negatively affect child well-being. Similarly, D'Onofrio et al. (2019) link family instability including divorce and remarriage with increased risks of emotional distress and behavioral problems among children. Supporting this, Uasheva et al. (2016) identify unstable family histories and lack of support within stepfamilies as key contributing factors to child abandonment, particularly in cases involving rejection by step-parents.

Being victims of these experiences shared by children in this study further illustrate these patterns Child (T) explained:

“When I was around seven or eight years old, I remember that my father used to beat both me and my mother. He was drug addict. One day, he came home very angry and started beating us severely. During the violence, he beat me so badly that my right leg was fractured. After that incident, he divorced my mother. I think one of our neighbors called the police. The police came, arrested him, and put him in jail. They shifted me to the hospital, where I spent three days. Neither any of my relatives nor even my mother was with me at that time. I underwent surgery on my leg during my stay in the hospital.



Vol. 4 No. 3 (Mar) (2026)

After being discharged, I was taken to Dar-ul-Aman, where I lived for about two years until the court issued further orders. Later, I was sent to this institute for my education because the in-charge of Dar-ul-Aman informed me that they were not permitted to keep children there. He told me, 'Now we are shifting you to ZK. You will get education there. My mother remarried and initially did not know about my whereabouts. When she eventually found me, she came to visit me. However, she explained that she lives in swat and she was unable to keep me with her.'

Another Child (SU) narrated that:

"My father remarried and divorced my mother. I have four siblings. From my biological mother, I only have one sister who is currently living with her in Swat. My two brothers and I were separated after our parents' divorce. One of my brothers, who is physically disabled, lives in an institution for children with disabilities, while my younger sister stayed with my mother. After the divorce, my mother took my younger sister and went to live at her brother's home. Meanwhile, my stepmother forced us to do household work and beat us whenever we made mistakes. She used to tell us that we were useless and that our mother did not want us anymore. She repeatedly told my father to send us away to our mother, but he refused. One day, our paternal uncle informed my father about this institute, and within a week my father admitted us here. Since that day, he has never come to visit us."

A child (A) further shared:

"My father was an army officer. He remarried and had five children from his second wife. He used to beat us frequently. After divorcing my mother, we went to live in Dar-ul-Aman with her, where we stayed for around eight years. During that time, my mother started working in different houses, but she could not afford the expenses of our education. Therefore, she admitted all of us here for our studies. After a few months, she remarried. Initially, she used to visit me and bring things for me. However, for the past year, she has not visited and only calls me occasionally to talk on the phone."

Failure of the Kinship Safety Net/Property Feuds:

Some children affected by the breakdown of the extended family system, which is traditionally expected to provide a secondary layer of protection for children when biological parents are unable to do so. In many societies, including Pakistan, extended families (such as uncles and grandparents) are considered a crucial source of care and support for vulnerable children. However, this system often collapses due to financial constraints, lack of emotional willingness, or outright refusal by relatives to assume responsibility.

When this failure intersects with property feuds, the situation becomes more severe when extended family members may perceive children as financial or property liabilities, and personal greed further intensifies this dynamic. As a result, children are increasingly exposed to neglect, marginalization, and, in extreme cases, abandonment or prolonged institutionalization.

Empirical evidence supports this pattern. For instance, Uasheva et al. (2016), in their work on social orphanhood, highlight that the absence of extended family support significantly increases the risk of child abandonment. Similarly, Baghdadi et al. (2023) emphasize how fragmented welfare systems and socio-religious norms weaken both kinship and state support structures, particularly in the Maghreb region, thereby failing to protect vulnerable children. Overall, property disputes within extended families exacerbate child vulnerability, as conflicts over inheritance and assets often override caregiving responsibilities, leading to the exclusion of children from essential care and



Vol. 4 No. 3 (Mar) (2026)

protection systems.

Some children shared the story of their life and one of them being victim of this trauma Child(SU) shared that:

“Before coming to this institute, I used to live with my parents. There were many issues at home, especially conflicts between my father and my paternal uncles over the ownership of the house. My uncles used to harass us frequently because they believed we would eventually give the house to them. These disputes led to daily arguments with my father. Due to this ongoing tension, problems also developed between my parents. One day, during a verbal conflict, my father divorced my mother. A few days later, my paternal uncles again argued with my father and called the police, falsely accusing him of refusing to give them their share of the property. As a result, my father was sent to jail. After that, I started living with my uncles. However, their behavior towards me was very harsh. They bullied me, sometimes beat me, and often did not provide me with enough food. One day, two people came to our house and suggested that I should be sent to this institute. About a week later, they returned, and my uncle sent me with them. That is how I was admitted here.”

Another Child (S) narrated that:

“I used to live with my parents in our home, but the environment was very bad as they used to fight frequently. My father wanted to marry again, but my mother refused. Eventually, my father divorced my mother and sent us away to his home. After that, we went to live at my maternal grandparents’ house. After a few months, my maternal grandmother arranged my mother’s second marriage. However, after their marriage, they did not keep us with them. We then lived at my maternal uncle’s house, but he forced me to work. He also enrolled me in a madrasa, and after a few months, he changed my madrasa. His behavior towards me and my sister was very harsh. He used to force me to work and said that I was now grown up and should earn for myself and my sister. His wife would not give me food if I came home empty-handed. One day, I left my younger sister at my maternal uncle’s house and left. After that, my sister and I spent our days living at different relatives’ houses.”

Conflict Displacement:

The situations in which conflict, violence, or insecurity forces families to flee their homes, often resulting in children becoming separated, neglected, or abandoned. During this process, they may lose their homes, livelihoods, and social support networks, leading to severe economic hardship and social instability. These conditions significantly increase the risk of child abandonment. As noted by Yesuf et al. (2023), conflict-induced displacement disrupts family systems, contributing to separation, neglect, and eventual institutionalization of children. Similarly, research by Udayan Care (2020) highlights that displaced families are particularly vulnerable to child abandonment, framing it as a critical global child protection issue. This underscores that insecurity, economic collapse, and the breakdown of social networks collectively heighten the likelihood of children being left without adequate care.

Child (N) narrated that:

“I lived in Afghanistan. Fighting broke out involving the Taliban, and because of the conflict, the situation became very difficult. My father was a drug addict, and my parents were beggars. They used to beg for money to buy food for us. We were four siblings. During the conflict, the houses of several families were burned, and people migrated from one place to another. We spent many days and nights in open places. I became tired of living in such conditions. There was a man who told me that we should go to Pakistan,



Vol. 4 No. 3 (Mar) (2026)

saying that the situation there was better and there was no fighting. I came with him, but after arriving in Pakistan, he left me at Board Bazaar. I spent around one week on the streets of Board Bazaar. I used to beg for money and buy food for myself. One day, the police came to remove the beggars from that area and took me with them. I stayed with them for two to three days. They provided me with food and treated me kindly. Later, they presented me before the court, and after the court's order, I was sent to this institute (ZK)."

Economic Collapse

Within this study, it is evident that parents frequently place their children in institutional care not out of complete rejection, but as a coping strategy to secure education and better living conditions for them. The situation in which a family's financial condition deteriorates drastically, leaving parents unable to meet the basic needs of their children. This severe economic hardship often results in compromised caregiving, and in many cases, leads to neglect or abandonment.

Socioeconomic vulnerability plays a critical role in shaping patterns of care abandonment. Uasheva et al. (2016) identify poverty, unemployment, and lack of housing as key structural factors contributing to child abandonment, supporting the findings of this study where financial instability limits parents' ability to provide adequate care and supervision.

In addition to structural constraints, the psychological impact of economic hardship is also significant. Kim & Yu (2023) highlight that economic hardship is a major driver of abandonment, particularly in cases involving infants, where factors such as young maternal age and concealed childbirth further intensify vulnerability. Their findings also point toward gaps in legal and social support systems, emphasizing the need for preventive policies and assistance for at-risk families.

Similarly, Cruz et al. (2022), through the framework of developmental trauma, demonstrate that prolonged socioeconomic stress is closely associated with emotional disruption, neglect, and adverse developmental outcomes. Their research underscores that such conditions can have long-lasting effects on children's mental, emotional, and physical well-being, particularly when experienced during critical stages of development. The lived experiences of children in this study further illustrate these patterns. One of them, Child (S), shared:

"We used to live with our parents. Initially, my father was working, but then he became ill and passed away after two years. After his death, my mother left our paternal home because our paternal relatives used to beat us. She took us with her and moved to Dar-ul-Aman, where we spent one year. During that time, my mother started working in different houses, but she could not afford our education. Therefore, she admitted us to this institute for our studies and well-being, and she continues to visit us."

Another Child (M) narrated:

"Initially, my father was a driver, but later he became ill and passed away after a few months. After his death, my mother left our paternal home because our paternal relatives used to beat us. She took us with her and moved to Dar-ul-Aman, where we spent one year. During that time, my mother started working at SOS Village Institute, but she could not afford our education and was not able to keep us with her. Therefore, she admitted us to this institute for our studies and well-being, and she continues to visit us. She lives and works at SOS Village, and my sister also lives with her there."

Theoretical Framework



Vol. 4 No. 3 (Mar) (2026)

This chapter explains Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory as the conceptual framework for understanding the underlying causes and contributing factors of child abandonment. The theory argues that a child's development and well-being are influenced by multiple interconnected environmental systems rather than by the immediate family alone. In this study, child abandonment is understood as the result of interacting family, social, institutional, legal, cultural, and structural factors. At the microsystem level, family conflict, domestic violence, parental rejection, step-parent problems, inadequate care, and poor parent-child relationships may contribute to abandonment; at the mesosystem level, weak relationships and coordination among family, school, relatives, community, and social services may increase children's vulnerability; at the exosystem level, poverty, parental unemployment or imprisonment, limited social services, and institutional weaknesses, including police, courts, and child-protection agencies, may influence children's living conditions; at the macrosystem level, cultural stigma, attitudes toward illegitimacy, gender norms, family power dynamics, inheritance practices, and social attitudes toward abandoned children may affect decisions regarding their care; and at the chronosystem level, war, conflict, displacement, parental death, remarriage, family breakdown, and changing socioeconomic circumstances may increase the risk of abandonment over time. Overall, the findings demonstrate that child abandonment in District Peshawar is not merely a family-level issue but is shaped by the interaction of family, social, economic, cultural, institutional, and legal factors operating across different ecological systems.

Participants' narratives demonstrated the practical relevance of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory by showing how experiences at different ecological levels interact and contribute to children's vulnerability to abandonment and institutionalization. Family conflict, domestic violence, parental rejection, and disrupted caregiving reflected microsystem influences, while interactions and breakdowns among relatives and other social support networks reflected mesosystem factors. Poverty, police intervention, court involvement, institutional placement, and limited post-care support illustrated the influence of the exosystem. Cultural expectations, inheritance disputes, family power dynamics, and social attitudes represented macrosystem influences, while parental death, remarriage, divorce, displacement, and other major life changes reflected the chronosystem. Thus, the participants' experiences demonstrate that abandonment emerges through the interaction of multiple ecological systems rather than from a single family-level factor.

Children's narratives revealed significant fear and uncertainty about leaving institutional care, particularly regarding housing, employment, financial security, and limited skills.

One child (Kh) described the fear associated with leaving institutional care, stating: "I feel afraid when I think about leaving this place because I don't know where I will live or who will support me after I turn 18." This reflects deep uncertainty regarding housing and post-care support systems. Another participant (M) emphasized concerns about employment and financial survival, explaining: "After leaving the institution, I will need to earn my own money, but I don't have any skills or training. I am worried I will not be able to manage my expenses."

Another child (Z) detailed his traumatic experiences following "His grandmother's death, leading to physical abuse by relatives and forced labor, eventually resulting in institutionalization". Similarly, child (T) described enduring domestic violence "After his father remarried, prompting hospitalization for a broken leg and subsequent placement in a care institution after his father's arrest". Both children faced significant physical and emotional challenges due to domestic violence and familial instability.



Vol. 4 No. 3 (Mar) (2026)

In extreme instances of family violence, a practitioner recounted a tragic case where “A child endured severe abuse after the mother was accused of infidelity. The mother and her children were relocated to the maternal family, but the maternal uncle subsequently murdered the mother and sister, attempting to kill the child as well”. The child, critically injured, survived and was later placed in protective custody and institutional care by court order.

Participants noted that law enforcement and child protection authorities often facilitated their placement in protective institutions when family support was lacking.

This narrative illustrates how intra-family property conflicts led to familial breakdown for a child, identified as Child (SU) “The child recounted experiences of harassment from uncles over property issues, which escalated tensions between parents, culminating in divorce and police involvement. This chain of events resulted in the child's relocation to an abusive environment with their uncle before being placed in an institution”.

Similarly, one child (S) recounted disruptions in caregiving within an extended family, highlighting how instability shifted responsibilities rather than providing protection. “After his parents' divorce, he was sent between relatives, facing neglect and forced labor”.

Other children were found abandoned in public and placed in institutional care, often due to their families refusing responsibility. One child (F) described “Being abandoned by an informal guardian, illustrating the lack of legal safeguards in informal arrangements”.

The findings show that child abandonment in District Peshawar is influenced by interconnected factors at family, social, institutional, economic, cultural, and legal levels. Severe family conflict, violence, and the absence of stable family support can disrupt children's protective environment and long-term development, while exosystem institutions such as police, courts, and child-protection agencies influence their lives through intervention and services. Macrosystem factors, including inheritance norms, family power dynamics, cultural attitudes, and gaps in the implementation of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Child Protection and Welfare Act 2010, further increase children's vulnerability. Thus, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory demonstrates that child abandonment is not merely a family-level issue but a result of interactions among multiple social and environmental systems.

CONCLUSION

This study finds that child abandonment in District Peshawar stems from multiple interacting factors, including family problems, socioeconomic challenges, and social vulnerabilities. Key contributing factors include family conflict, domestic violence, parental remarriage, property disputes, poverty, homelessness, parental illness or death, substance abuse, migration, conflict-related displacement, and weak family support. The study also identifies care abandonment, in which children experience inadequate care despite having living parents. Unsafe home environments and peer influence further contribute to children's separation from parental care. The study emphasizes the need for both protective institutional responses and preventive interventions that strengthen family stability, reduce socioeconomic vulnerabilities, support parents in crisis, and improve access to community-based child protection services.

Recommendation:

Strengthen family-centred prevention through socioeconomic assistance and family counselling to address the root causes of family separation.



Vol. 4 No. 3 (Mar) (2026)

Improve child protection services through coordinated, accessible, and community-based support for vulnerable children and families.

Strengthen implementation of child protection policies to ensure timely intervention and protection of children at risk of abandonment.

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Vol. 4 No. 3 (Mar) (2026)

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