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Child Rights Crisis Intensifies in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

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Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) faces a dire child protection crisis, with 402 reported child rights violations in the first half of 2025, surpassing the 392 cases recorded throughout 2024, according to the KP Child Protection and Welfare Commission (KPCPWC). This alarming surge underscores systemic failures in safeguarding vulnerable children amid rising militancy and social neglect.

The KPCPWC report details a grim spectrum of abuses, including 40 cases of missing children, 40 instances of sexual violence, 26

runaways, 17 cases of child labor, 14 reports of corporal punishment, seven child murders, and two cases of child pornography, with 286 boys and 116 girls affected. These figures reflect a deeper societal malaise, where cultural stigmas often silence victims. “In many communities, abuse is swept under the rug to preserve family ‘honor,’” said social activist Rakhshanda Sajid, highlighting how outdated norms shield perpetrators and deter justice. The province’s sole functional child protection unit in Peshawar struggles to serve over four million children, exposing the government’s inadequate response.

Critics point to the KP Child Protection and Welfare Act of 2010 as a hollow promise, with most districts lacking dedicated child courts or leadership to enforce it. “Without serious commitment and funding, these laws are just paper,” child rights activist Imran Takkar told Dawn News, criticizing the provincial government’s lethargy. The recent arrest of a madressah teacher in Haripur for abusing a visually impaired five-year-old further fueled public outrage, spotlighting a “sick-minded society,” as one observer noted on X. Rising militancy, including attacks linked to the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), compounds the crisis, with schools targeted and children vulnerable to radicalization.

The government’s response, including a helpline and proposed legislation for street children, falls short of addressing systemic gaps. KP’s Minister for Social Welfare, Qasim Ali Shah, promised a “beggar-free” province, but implementation lags. With poverty rates at 40% and weak judicial oversight, children remain easy prey for exploitation. Pakistan’s ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1990 rings hollow as enforcement falters, leaving KP’s youth trapped in a cycle of violence and neglect, demanding urgent action to restore their safety and dignity.