

CHILD LABOUR IN PAKISTAN AND OTHER DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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Abstract: Child labor has been acknowledged as a serious and challenging issue in the civilized societies around the globe. Its continued existence remains a source of concern for all segments of human society. In spite of the threats of trade barriers, in spite of the call of moral understanding of the issue and active participation of government employers, workers and NGO's, the prevalence of child labor in the developing nations is one proof that practical dependence on working children still has an alarming sound around the world.

Keywords: labour, child, Pakistan.

I. INTRODUCTION

Child labor¹⁰ has been acknowledged as a serious and challenging issue in the civilized societies around the globe. Its continued existence remains a source of concern for all segments of human society. Different socio-economic factors can be held responsible for the prevailing poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, lack of family planning, dissatisfaction about education system, absence of social security mechanism and many others. Now it is the responsibility of the government to provide children with their rights and to protect them from all sorts of exploitation, because the future of mankind and civilization lies in children. Their protection from physical and social hazards is a pre-requisite for proper development of children to ensure future progress and prosperity of mankind (Shah, 1997). Unfortunately a large number of children all over the world especially in developing countries are deprived of education and other facilities of life. The socio-economic pressure compels these children to work and as a result they face harsh realities of subordinate work simply for tiny monetary gains. The developing countries have been facing the crisis of child labor, due to poor economic and social conditions. Children in these countries work for longer hours in hazardous and life threatening conditions (Grant, 1983). A healthy child is an asset for a nation. It should be ensured that today's children are physically, emotionally and educationally equipped for the future. Our responsibility is to meet their needs for health care, protection, economic support and education. This vision today is gaining popularity amongst the nations of the world and for quite sometime the intelligential has been trying to convince the world that protection of the most vulnerable and particularly growing minds and bodies of young children is both a moral imperative and a practical

¹⁰ "Child labor" is, generally speaking, work for a child that harms them or exploits them in some way: physically, mentally, morally, or by blocking access to education.

pre-condition for sustained economic growth and social progress (Ashraf, 1994).

The aim of this study to investigate: **What are the worst forms of child labour? Who are child laborers and how many are there?** Why children work? **Where do child laborers live** and **what do child laborers do?** What is the evidence regarding child labour in case of Pakistan? **What are some of the myths or misunderstandings about child labor?**

2. WHY CHILDREN WORK?

Children are often prompted to work by their parents. According to one study, parents represent 62 percent of the source of induction into employment. Children make their own decisions to work only 8 percent of the time (Syed et al. 1991). In fact, a possible reason parents in developing countries have children is because they can be profitable. Children seem to be much less of an economic burden in developing versus developed countries. Children in developing countries also contribute more time to a household than they deplete as compared to their counterparts in developed countries (Lindert 1976). Therefore, parents in developing countries make use of children's ability to work.

2.1. The Supply Side: what pushes children into work?

Poverty

The main reason why children start work instead of attending school, or leave school before completing their primary education is that their families are poor and cannot pay the basic costs of food and housing without their child earning something as well. Around the world, the details vary but the story is the same. There is not enough money for families to survive without some or all of their children working.

Family breakdown

Families break down for many reasons, leaving the household short of income. Sometimes divorce leaves one parent looking after more children than she or he can afford to feed. Divorce is sometimes brought about by domestic violence, which also directly drives children to leave home when they are still young. The death of either parent precipitates economic disaster for many households. In parts of Africa, this has now become all too common as a result of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

HIV/AIDS

By 2001, the UN estimated that 13 million children around the world under the age of 15 had lost either one or both parents to HIV/AIDS. About half become orphans before they are 10. The result of the premature death of one or both parents is that children take on the responsibility of seeking an income to support themselves and their younger brothers and sisters. A survey in 2002 of girls working as domestic servants in the Ethiopian capital, Addis Ababa, found that more than three-quarters were orphans. More than a third of those questioned were not attending school¹¹.

Attitudes to girls

In most parts of the world, gender is also a crucial factor: girls are discouraged from staying at school beyond puberty (and are sometimes withdrawn much earlier) and are propelled into adulthood much younger than boys, either into work or an early marriage. In some countries, school is a threatening place for teenage girls, where they

¹¹ Quote from UNICEF DHAKA, 28-6-2002, UNICEF (online magazine).

are at risk of sexual harassment from male classmates and teachers, and sidelined by prejudice and poor curricula.

2.2. The demand: why employers want children?

Alongside factors which push children into earning money are others which pull children into the world of work.

Cheap and obedient

The relatively low wages paid to children are often a reason why employers prefer them to adult workers. Some children work unpaid, particularly as domestic workers, in conditions that would be denounced as “slavery” if they involved adults. Employers find children more obedient and easier to control. Unlike older workers, they are unlikely to initiate protests or form trade unions.

Inadequate laws

More than 130 countries have signed an international convention saying that children may not work full-time before 14 or 15 years of age. However, in some of the countries concerned, laws on this are confusing or vague and not enforced.

Poor infrastructure

Another factor is the practical difficulty of establishing a child’s actual age in countries where the infrastructure may not be in place for e.g. systematic birth registration. This can disadvantage children in many ways – law enforcers are hampered because they do not have the means to absolutely establish the ages of e.g. teenagers, and, without appropriate documentation, young people may also be denied access to state services such as schools.

The role of education

Children who receive little or no school education miss out on the knowledge that can create options for them later in life. Without it, they make less contribution as adults and are more exposed to exploitation and abuse. Not attending school is consequently both a cause and effect of child labour.

3. CHILD LABOUR IN PAKISTAN

Pakistan's high population growth rate of 2.77 percent poses multiple challenges, problems and threatens to constrain the limited resources and economic and social development of the country. Thirty percent of the country's population lives below the poverty line. Pakistan's per capita GNP is around US\$490 per annum, but income is not equally distributed. The overall literacy rate is estimated at 40 percent: 51 percent for men and 28 percent for women. Given the high rate of population growth, a large workforce seeking employment is regularly being inducted into the labour market of the country. A large young labour force has emerged and competes with the adult workers for the limited employment opportunities.

Child Labour is a humanitarian issue with roots in poverty, high rate of population growth and unequal distribution of wealth in the society. The data given in Table 1 indicates the disparities in the distribution of income in the country. The inequalities in the distribution of wealth forces the families to resort to desperate measures including the use of children to earn extra income for the family. The data in Table 2 provides a comparison of the income distribution pattern in Pakistan with those in the neighboring countries. The Lorenz Curve of household income distribution depicts the inequalities in the household incomes.

According to the National Survey of Child Labour conducted in 1996 by the Federal Bureau of Statistics with the collaboration of ILO, the total number of children in Pakistan in the age groups of 5-14 was 40 million. The total number of economically active children was found to be 3.3 million (or 8.3% of the total children) in the country. Majority of the child workers (73%) were found to be boys, while 27% were girls. Majority of the child workers (58.6% or 1.94 million) were found in Punjab. The distribution of the child labour according to the economic sector is given in the Figure given on the following page.

The survey also found that children's involvement in work in the rural areas is about 8 times greater than in the urban areas. One third of the working children are literate, boys being more educated than girls and urban children more than the rural children. Employment status by broad categories indicates that about 70% of the working children are unpaid family helpers. Significant urban-rural differentials are observed in their employment status. In rural areas, three fourth of the working children are working as unpaid family members, while in the urban areas it is one third. About 46% of the working children work more than 35 hours per week and a good proportion work 56 hours or more. According to most of the parents surveyed, children work in order to assist in the household enterprises.

3.1. Provincial Comparison of Child Labour

Although majority of the child workers were found in Punjab, but as shown by the provincial comparison of the ratios of child labour, the highest ratio was found in the NWFP (Table 1).

Table no 1: Province-wise Comparison of Child Labour

Province	Total No. of Children in age group of 5-14 years (millions)	Total No. of Economically Active Children in Age Group of 5-14 years (millions)	Ratio of Child Labour
Punjab	22.63	1.94	8.6%
Sindh	8.62	0.30	3.5%
NWFP	6.71	1.06	15.8%
Baluchistan	2.07	0.01	0.5%
Pakistan	40.03	3.31	8.3%

Source: <http://www.dolpunjab.gov.pk/r1.htm#a1>

3.2. Participation of the Economically Active Children in the Labour Force in Pakistan

As the figure below shows the majority (67%) of child labour works in agricultural sector. Manufacturing sector accounts for 11%. The total number of economically active children in labour force in Pakistan is 3.3 million.

3.3. A Case Study in Pakistan

This study was conducted in the city of Bannu in NWFP. Bannu is a centre of trade and commerce lying on Peshawar – D.I.Khan Road. A large number of activities with child labor are prevalent in the city. These include activities like carpet making, mechanical workshops, hotels, shoemaking, tailoring, trunk making, snuff-making, shoe shining, electronic workshops, and other shops, etc. An informal survey was conducted in the first week of August 2001 and activities involving child labour were

listed and the number and names of children working in these activities were noted. In the second stage, 20% of the children were selected for data collection. The sample population and sample respondents are given in Table 2.

Table no 2 Sample Population and Sample Size

S. No.	Nature of Activity	Total No. of Children Working	No. of Children interviewed
1.	Auto repairing workshops	50	10
2.	Wood and Furniture	38	8
3.	Cycle Repairing	25	5
4.	Restaurants/Hotels	23	5
5.	Retail Trade	60	12
6.	Whole Sale Trade	48	9
7.	Carpet Industry	12	2
8.	Tailoring	50	10
9.	Other (Shoe shine boys and garbage collection)	23	5
	All	329	66

Source: Survey

The sample size consisted of 66 children. Sample respondents in each activity were interviewed in accordance with their proportion in the universe. Data were collected with the help of a pre-tested interview schedule which was pre-tested before data collection.

3.3.1. Child Laborers and Socio-Economic Characteristics of their Households

A large member (48%) of the households had no land and was categorized as landless. Among all, 41% of the sample households operated farm area up to 10 kanals. Only a small proportion (11%) of the households operated land of 10 and above kanals. This implies that majority of households were poor because income and landholdings are positively related. This claim is supported by our findings as 71% of working children were from households with either no land or with land of up to 10 kanals. A vast majority (82%) of the working children belonged to households with monthly income of up to Rs.3,500. Only a small proportion (6%) of households had monthly income of Rs.4,500 and above. This was followed by 12% which had monthly income in the range of Rs.3,500-4,500. The data show an inverse relationship between household incomes and prevalence of child labour. Majority (73%) of the working children had illiterate fathers. Only 27% of the working children had literate fathers.

Analysis of child labour was also performed simultaneously by parent's income and their literacy status (Table 3). The data show that in all income groups illiterate fathers had more working children which means that more and working children had illiterate fathers. Looking from another angle it is evident that as income of households increases the number of working children decreases. The data point out two phenomena simultaneously (i) child labour was more prevalent in households where fathers were illiterate, and (ii) household income had an inverse relationship with the number of working children. These are important findings and pose threats to policy makers and planners.

Table no 3. Prevalence of Child Labour by Parent’s Income and Literacy Status

Income Group	Literate	Illiterate	All
≤ 1,500	5	14	19
1,500 – 2,500	6	14	20
2,500 – 3,500	4	11	15
3,500 – 4,500	2	6	8
4,500 & above	1	3	4
All	18	48	66

Source: Survey

Table 4 shows working children distinguished by age. The data show that majority (57%) of the working children belonged to age group from 8-12 years. More than one-fifth of the sample respondents were in age group of 6-8 and 12-14 years, respectively. It can be inferred from the table that as many as 77% of the sample respondents were below the age of 12 years.

Table no 4. Working Children Distinguished by Age

Age (years)	Number	Percent
6 – 8	13	20
8 – 10	20	30
10 – 12	18	27
12 – 14	15	23
All	66	100

Source: Survey

Majority (55%) of the child laborers were illiterate and amongst those 73 percent were educated only up to primary level. This can be caused by many factors. The working children, when asked what their main hurdle in getting education was, reported a number of reasons for not going to school. About half (48%) of them considered their families’ poor economic conditions as the biggest cause of discontinuation of their education. More than one-fifth (23%) of them stated that they left school because of their poor academic performance. This in turn may be due to the reason that they did not have proper facilities for getting education including non-availability of books, uniform and coaching by either parents or tutors. This resulted in their poor performance in education. Similarly 18% of the sample respondents thought fear of teacher as a causing factor of leaving school. They stated that they were being beaten by their teachers which may be due to their poor performance in school. All factors compelling children to discontinue education may be attributed to lack of affordability by their parents as they were financially poor (Table 5).

Table no 5. Working Children Stating Factors Responsible for Discontinuation of their Education

Reasons	Number	Percent
Poor Economic Conditions	32	48
Fear of Teacher	12	18
Don’t like to go to school	7	11
Poor Academic performance	15	23
All	66	100

Source: Survey

Poor economic conditions may not only cause leaving school or discontinuation of education by children. They may also force them to work below their legal age of work. More than seventy (72%) of the working children reported that their daily working hours ranged from 8 to 10 hours. A small proportion (6%) reported that they worked up to 5 hours as daily basis.

The maximum weekly earnings amounted to above Rs.70. But this was reported by only 10% of the working children. The lowest weekly earnings were up to Rs.30 as reported by 17% of the respondents. Majority of them 73% were earning in the range of Rs.30-70 on weekly basis. In the wake of high inflation the weekly earnings by working children constituted only meager and low. This poses serious questions and threats to policy challenges.

When asked how much of their earning did the working children get as pocket money, it was reported that they almost got nothing. One-third (30%) of the working children did not get any pocket money, 18% got Rs.1-3 per week and only 8% got above Rs.10 as their pocket money. About half (44%) of them had pocket money of Rs.4-10 in week.

Working relation between employees and the employer assumes an important role. Bad working relations between labour and employers results in unrest and disputes. Child labour is no exception in this regard. This was also observed and confirmed by our data (Table 6). A small proportion (11%) and 21% ranked their employer's behavior and dealing with them as good and very good, respectively. Maximum number (30%) reported that they were being worst treated/dealt with by their employers. Similarly 38% of the working children rated their employer's behavior as bad and very bad. The negative and harsh dealing of the employers may have negative impact upon children's mind and future career.

Table no 6. Sample Respondents Describing Employer's Behavior

Behavior	Number	Percent
Very Good	14	21
Good	7	11
Bad	10	15
Very Bad	15	23
Worst	20	30
All	66	100

Source: Survey

Majority (62%) of the working children were not satisfied from their job. Only 38% reported that they were satisfied with their job and their employers. The working children, when asked for causes of their dissatisfaction with their job, reported the employer's harsh behavior as the main reason. This was reported by 60% of those who were not satisfied with their job. More than one-fifth (23%) termed long working hours as their major difficulty. The other difficulties faced by working children during their job were their bad health conditions, no leisure time and difficult work (Table 7). Based on their responses and observations, it was concluded that the child labour was ill-treated and the employer's behavior was harsh with working children. This may cause disappointment, discouragement, mental pressure and torture for working children.

force children to work. Literacy status (D_1) was also found a significant determinant of child labour. The negative coefficient of D_1 shows that if the father is literate the intercept decreases by 0.35 and it is significant at 1%. In addition to dummy variable for literacy, another dummy (D_2) was also used as an explanatory variable which captured ethnic background of the household. $D_2 = 1$ if the family belongs to high cast (Pathan or Pakhtoon) and $D_2 = 0$ if it belongs to lower castes (including carpenter, blacksmith, barbour, shoemaker etc). It was hypothesized that usually Pathan family would tend not to send or send lesser number of children to work as compared to other lower castes. The estimated coefficient (-0.57) confirmed this hypothesis but was not statistically significant.

The above estimated model shows that three coefficients are highly significant. The whole regression model is also significant as based on the value of F-statistic. The explanatory power of model is not bad also because the $R^2 = 0.465$ indicating that about half of the total variation in dependent variable is explained by the explanatory variables.

If we analyze the estimated coefficients of the model it poses serious policy challenges. Firstly, the positive correlation between child labour and household size implies that the larger the population the lower the head income and land area per family. This would in turn result in child labour. So population growth rates need to be reduced. Secondly, the negative correlation between family income and child labour also necessitates that efforts be done to increase income per capita. This could be done through introducing and implementing income generating activities. Thirdly, the negative relation between households' land holding and child labour implies that as population increases, the available land would be subdivided and fragmented in small pieces. This would lead to food insecurity and lower incomes and resultantly more and more child labour. Fourthly, the negative coefficient of literacy status dummy shows that if literacy rate is low more and more children would be sent to work, the opportunity cost of which may be very high and would be socially costly.

4. WHAT ARE SOME "MYTHS" OR MISUNDERSTANDINGS ABOUT CHILD LABOR?

The UNICEF has listed four "myths" which are as follows (UNICEF, 1997):

(1) It is a myth that child labor is only a problem in developing countries. "But in fact, children routinely work in all industrialized countries, and hazardous forms of child labour can be found in many countries. In the US, for example, children are employed in agriculture, a high proportion of them from immigrant or ethnic-minority families. A 1990 survey of Mexican-American children working in the farms of New York State showed that almost half had worked in fields still wet with pesticides and over a third had themselves been sprayed."

(2) It is a myth that child labor will only disappear when poverty disappears. Hazardous labor can, and should be eliminated by even the poorest countries.

(3) It is a myth that most child laborers work in sweatshops making goods for export. "Soccer balls made by children in Pakistan for use by children in industrialized countries may provide a compelling symbol, but in fact, only a very small proportion of all child workers are employed in export industries - probably less than 5 per cent. Most of the world's child laborers actually are to be found in the informal sector - selling on the street, at work in agriculture or hidden away in houses - far from the reach of official labour inspectors and from media scrutiny."

(4) It is a myth that "the only way to make headway against child labour is for consumers and governments to apply pressure through sanctions and boycotts. While international commitment and pressure are important, boycotts and other sweeping measures can only affect export sectors, which are relatively small exploiters of child labour. Such measures are also blunt instruments with long-term consequences that can actually harm rather than help the children involved."

5. WHAT ARE SOME SOLUTIONS TO CHILD LABOR? HOW WAS CHILD LABOR REDUCED IN TODAY'S DEVELOPED COUNTRIES?

Four main changes took place to reduce child labour in today's developed countries:

1. Economic development that raised family incomes and living standards,
2. Widespread, affordable, required and relevant education,
3. Enforcement of anti-child labor laws (along with compulsory education laws),
4. Changes in public attitudes toward children that elevated the importance of education.

Factors, that can play a significant role is curtailing child labour, may include:

- Increased family incomes,
- Education — that helps children learn skills that will help them earn a living
- Social services — that help children and families survive crises, such as disease, or loss of home and shelter,
- Family control of fertility — so that families are not burdened by children.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis above leads to certain implications for the international community:

- a) Collect/study child labor data and devise interventions that allow for the possibility of children being in school and working;
- b) Improve the quality of schooling by investing in education so as to increase its value to children and parents;
- c) Provide subsidies to poor families prone to having working children so they can afford their children's schooling (income subsidies, nutritional supplements); and
- d) Establish partnerships of international organizations dedicated to improving children's lives.

Some recent efforts to protect jobs in developed countries are misguided. Competition from developing countries is probably not the cause of unemployment in developed countries. Under the guise of protecting workers' rights, some developed countries propose that minimum global labor standards be adopted by the GATT successor, the World Trade Organization. Among the issues proposed is the prohibition of child labor.

Developing countries argue that such measures would rob them of their comparative advantage: lower labor costs. Many see the issue as just that: rich nations attempting to wipe away developing countries' comparative advantage by arguing for human rights. Genuine human rights concerns are important, but protectionism is not the answer. High levels of unemployment have many causes other than trade, so labor standards in one country may not affect levels of employment in another.

Threatening trade restrictions based on labor standards is not justified. The problem with such a stance is that (i) not all forms of child labor are exploitive or cruel; (ii) the age deemed "child" labor is not clear; (iii) poor countries cannot necessarily afford such measures; (iv) levels poverty would increase; and (v) school attendance would decline. Furthermore, free trade is probably part of the solution to eradicating child labor. This is because a free trade regime promotes development worldwide. And as countries develop the incidence of child labor decreases substantially.

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