

Child Labor in Karachi: Situation and Realities Behind Increased Number of Working Children



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Abstract: *The number of working children in Karachi is increasing day by day, and the objective of this research study was to highlight the situation and explore the reasons behind it. For this purpose, using sequential exploratory research design, data was collected from working children and parents of some of the children and was analyzed using SPSS. It is concluded that parents and their children have a wish for education but because of the cost of education and other reasons are unable.*

Key Words: Child-Labour, Karachi, Predicators & Increased numbers

Introduction and Literature Review

Child labour is not a new occurrence in today's culture. Children have been used in several human cultures throughout history, and they continue to be exploited today, particularly in poor countries like Pakistan. As per International Labor Organization (ILO), approximately 215 million children are working in the world between the ages of five and fourteen, with 179 million of them working in difficult situations and performing dangerous works which could affect their health, at their workplace, they are humiliated and forced to work for more time than fixed. (International Labour Organization, 2019). Child labour is a complex socio-political-economic issue that society continues to grapple with moreover a difficult and upsetting reality. There is a dearth of comprehensive data collection processes and a lack of macro surveys, therefore is no exact statistical data about child labour available in Pakistan. In 1996, Pakistan performed its first and largest child labour survey. According to data, more than 3.3 million children aged 5 to 14 are employed and work in various sectors across the country, out of a total of 40 million children. Furthermore, in 1999-200, the survey of LFS indicates that children working as labourers aged 10 to 14 make approximately 22 to

24% of the entire population, with Punjab having the greatest rate (11.83%) and Sindh having the lowest (8.5%). [Suddique and Patrinos \(1995\)](#) have discovered that according to several studies conducted by organizations and individuals, a large number of children start working at a very early stage of their lives, sacrificing their education and the age to play and enjoy, mostly they start working in the informal job sector, i.e. domestic work or agriculture and only a few are found working in the formal sector. Male children are primarily engaged in metropolitan locations which are considered the part of the informal job market, i.e. tea cafes, cobblers, grocery stores, auto repairing points, and so on, whereas young ladies are mostly employed in those works which are performed in the houses of rich people, i.e. babysitters, cooks, and housekeepers. A word which is frequently used by the masters and the visitors for working children in Pakistani society is "Chhota (child worker)," and these children (Chottas) are working in almost all business hubs, i.e. tea-stalls, auto mechanics workshops, and manufacturing industries in urban areas, while agriculture fields and bricks making industry in rural areas are the key sectors absorbing children in Pakistan. [Khan \(2000\)](#) has highlighted that

as an agrarian country, agriculture, forestry, dairy, and poultry farming employ a large number of young people, assisting their parents in making a living. [Awan et al. \(1992\)](#) write that children are also found in manufacturing sectors small scale/cottage industries being established at home s like power looms, carpet weaving, sports and surgical equipment making industries. Children are found working as domestic hirelings, shoemakers, watchmakers, circuit repairmen, mechanics, painters, tin packers, paper pickers, garbage pickers, inn and eatery administrators, garment stores, hair parlours, fitting and weaving companies, and so on (Ali & Hamid, 2003). Children regularly work in the country's unofficial or undeclared job market where no law is implemented by the governments since the creation of Pakistan; therefore, no record is maintained. Since its creation, Pakistani governments have also taken several steps liking has signed an agreement with the United Nations Organization in convention on rights of children in 1990 and has also prepared & implemented Employment of Children Act 1991, but no results are found. According to this law, anyone (male or female) below the age of fourteen will fall under the category of a child. Therefore minimum age fixed to consider a male or a female to be a child is fourteen years in Pakistan compared to 16 in other industrialized countries.

Approaches Regarding Child-Labor

The theoretical debate has centred on child labour's supply-side elements, as well as its ramifications, implications, and effects. Therefore, well-known tendencies in the debate over supply-side drivers of child labour, even though some techniques have been developed and discussed below, moreover these techniques are more popular among social scientists.

Roots of Child Labor

The study's qualitative settings are based on the theoretical research presented in this section. [Ali and Khan \(2010\)](#) investigated the consequences of child labour in Pakistan's urban and rural areas. The study discovered that child labour has diverse reasons in Pakistan's urban and rural locations. In both cases, gender discrimination, intimate family views, and parental misunderstanding are the main sources of child bias. [Ali and Khan \(2010\)](#) studied supply-side features in Pakistani cities. Due to socio-religious concerns, females are holding better positions in job

markets and are less involved in jobs, according to the study's conclusions. Boys' prospects of finding work improve dramatically when they own assets or manage a family business. To eradicate child labour, the research recommends eliminating poverty in the country and raising adult worker wages. As a result, kids will be more motivated to go to school. [Karim \(1995\)](#) investigated how parents make employment decisions for their children and why they are forced to work, and they found that a large number of children, a lack of parental education, a low family income, and the big family size was found to be the most important motivators for children to work. [Ali and Hamid \(2004\)](#) researched Multan on female child labour, focusing on the factors that lead to female child labour in well-off and educated families. The information was acquired from sixty young women who worked as maids, babysitters, and performed other domestic duties. The findings suggest that poor economic circumstances, such as large family sizes and low parental income, push girls to work rather than attend school since they have no other option. In Multan and Sukkur, Pakistan, Malik et al. (2012) looked into the supply side variables of child labour. They discovered that, while poverty is a primary motivator for children to work, parents' decisions to send their children to work to improve their financial situation; moreover, father and mother education levels also play a significant role in this regard. In both areas, child labourer households are more likely to have a large family and a lower household income. The financial wealth of household heads, however, hampered schooling in both regions. Poverty can be alleviated by credit schemes or by giving financial benefits to those parents who send their children to schools instead of for jobs or earning for the family. Data from 547 child labourers in Pakistan's southern Punjab area was used by Khalid and Shahnaz (2004), and the children that took part in the poll were of ages from 11 to 14. This research revealed that families having more numbers of members in metropolitan regions are the primary source of child labour when it is compared with families living in rural areas. Other factors such as the father's salary, family measures, guardians' abilities, children developing a passion for work when finding family in difficult financial circumstances, or find no way to go ahead, or families sacrifice their children education on their needs, and these were the central tenet behind young people working, particularly in urban areas. Arfan et al. (2016) investigate that

socioeconomic factors are the reason behind child labour in brick kilns in Jhang, Pakistan. In-depth interviews with youngsters from brick kilns were conducted by the writers, who utilized a qualitative method. Due to financial constraints, the family must seek the help of their children to supplement the family's income by working alongside them in brick kilns. Brick kiln labour is categorized as bonded labour in Pakistan as some poor families borrow money from brick kiln owners to cover their necessities, and in exchange, the entire family is forced to work in brick kilns to pay the amount back with a huge amount in the form of interest. Although in Pakistan, this bonded labour is declared against the law, it persists due to government incompetence, bureaucracy, and a lack of control of the institutions or organizations which are supposed to implement the law. Chronic household poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, and parental education all have worsened child labour in Sargodha's automobile industry (Mumtaz et al., 2012). The findings revealed from this study based on interviews with 200 boys that the vast majority of boys begin working when they are eight years old. In addition, many guys did not go to school because their parents are uneducated, and they do not understand the importance of education. The majority of boys reported having large families with 5-7 people, with the majority of boys working, due to their parents' poverty and financial constraints. Haider and Qureshi (2015) discovered that poverty, in combination with the father's income, family size, and parental credentials, was the main driver of child labour in specific areas of South Punjab, Pakistan. According to the study, children's interest in labour is influenced by family duties, a lack of educational opportunities for children from disadvantaged homes, and household poverty as a cost of learning. Children are forced to labour and assist their families since their families are unable to support themselves due to poverty. According to Kashif and Hussain (2013), several critical elements such as an uncertain job market, inflation, a low standard of living, a weak economy, civic negligence, and parental illiteracy force young people into the labour market. According to them, child labour is determined by family income, parent employment status, and education level of the parents because their education directly influences on importance of education; moreover, it is observed and highlighted by several critics that when a family is having low income and living from hand to mouth,

then they force their children to go and earn for a family in any of the fields without giving due consideration to the risk associated with it. Working children's supply-side features were studied by Awan et al. (2011). According to their study, children are driven to workplaces because their mothers have low levels of education, have large families, and have low family finances, all of which are detrimental to their development. Child labourers' parents are often unemployed or underemployed, according to the data, and they are in severe need of steady employment and financial support. Tanvir et al. (2014) discovered that the majority of children in Lahore between the ages of 12 and 15 actively participated in the task. According to their survey, around 56% of working children are illiterate and underpaid, and the reasons for working in the low family income and ultimately children are forced, or they start working to contribute in the family income. Fasih (2007) looked at the rules governing children's employment and how they related to Pakistan's Children Employment Act of 1991 and analyzed the secondary data set from the Pakistan integrated survey of 1991 using a natural experiment approach. The empirical findings of the study demonstrate that Act 1991 has the greatest impact on boys, whereas Act 1991 has the least impact on females because they are involved in domestic activities and are not part of the formal economic realm. The available literature indicates that the majority of the research on child labour in Pakistan is based on case studies and short surveys that involve only a few towns, villages, and small organizations, suggesting that research or survey at large scales throughout Pakistan needs to be conducted so to have a real picture how many children are involved in child labour, where do they work, how much do they earn, and what are the factors/reasons which force them to start working at the very early stage of their life. But most of the studies have concluded that poverty is the leading driver of child labour in Pakistan.

Edmonds & Pavcnik (2003) have found in the research study that poverty, the most essential and well-known supply-side predictor, is the most common predictor of child labour. At both the local and macro levels, poverty has a large supply-side impact. Working children represent a reduced proportion of the aggregate work constraint as total national production (GDP) per capita expands at the full-scale level; at the smaller scale level, poverty factors have a direct impact on the family unit.

However, some researchers feel that poverty may be dissected into social and sex components. Other than poverty, war, disease, and natural disasters increase child labour on the whole. While some researchers believe poverty is a contributing factor in children's labour (Rosati & Tzannatos 2003), the literature also demonstrates a persistent "neediness trap" that must not be overlooked. At any age, young people who do not work do not go to school and do not develop any abilities. The study of Akabayashi & Psacharopoulos (1999) reveals that as a result, when they become guardians, they send their children to work, perpetuating the cycle. This never-ending cycle is known as the "neediness trap."

One of the most basic ways for analyzing the supply side of child labour is the family decision approach. Traditionally, child labour has been viewed as a way for families to supplement their income. Basu (1998) finds a link between household decisions and child labour in his study; the study focuses on household conditions, parental traits, and the interplay between child and adult labour. A family consists of at least one adult and at least one child in the majority of circumstances. Only adults will work if market compensation is appropriate and fulfils family subsistence needs; however, children will be forced to labour if market compensation declines and falls below family subsistence levels. As a result, it establishes two alternate harmonies: one where compensation is ample and only adults labour, and the other when compensation is insufficient, and children must work (Basu & Van 1998). In this one-of-a-kind setting, children are seen as motivational resources. Taking advantage of a family's advantages frequently necessitates the participation of children.

Statement of the Problem

For this study, child labour is defined as all forms of activities performed by a child for monetary gain, whether hazardous or non-harmful, up to the age of fourteen. As a result, any child under the age of 14 who works for a monetary reward is considered to be involved in child labour, regardless of whether the occupation is simple or dangerous to their health. Keeping in view the above-set standards and compare the market situation of Karachi, we find the many young people working at different places fall under violation of child-labour rules.

Research Objective

The main objective of this research study was to find out the situation and the realities which are behind the increasing number of children working at different positions in the market for monetary benefits.

Research Questions

Following research questions guided this research study:

- Does the ratio of children working for monetary benefits increasing the job market of Karachi?
- What are the reasons behind this increased ratio of working children?

Research Methodology

In the present research study, both quantitative and qualitative research approaches were adopted, and for data collection and a questionnaire having ten close-ended questions was formed to collect data from working children in Karachi and questions were developed for semi-structured interviews of their parents. The researchers filled the questionnaire by asking the questions and filling the questionnaire by themselves because most of the respondents were uneducated.

Research Design

The study employed a sequential exploratory research design because the purpose was to verify the reasons for child labour from parents in Karachi. Because it is the design used by researchers when looking to verify quantitative results with qualitative collected data.

Population

The population of this research study was the young boys and girls of age 14 years or below because according to the Employment of Children Act of 1991, boys or girls employed under age fourteen are considered children and their parents.

Sampling Procedure and Sample

A stratified random sampling procedure was adopted for the selection of respondents in the present research study as age, socioeconomic divisions, nationality, religion, educational achievements and other such classifications fall under this sampling procedure. The

the population was divided into two main groups, i.e. boys and girls, then boys working at tea-stalls, hotels, workshops, cobblers (shoe polish), garbage collectors, cleaners etc. and girls working as maids, babysitters, and housekeepers etc.

Data was collected from one hundred and eighty respondents (twenty each/120 boys & 60 girls), and using convenience sampling procedure, data was also collected from fifty-four parents using a questionnaire having 10 items (six each group, three fathers and three mothers). While twenty-seven parents (fathers/mothers) were interviewed.

Data Collection and Analysis

Children Responses Quantitative Analysis

The data was collected by using a questionnaire having ten items with five options. Likert scale was used to collect data. The researchers themselves visited and filled the questionnaire after taking opinions from the respondents/children working at different positions/places.

The analysis of quantitative responses are as under:

Permanent Residency

In response to a question related to the permanent residence following were the responses:

Table 1.

Permanent Residency				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Local	28	17.5	17.5	17.5
Valid Migrated from other Cities	132	82.5	82.5	100.0
Total	160	100.0	100.0	

Karachi is a city where a large number of people of residing who are migrated from far-flung areas of Sindh or other provinces of Pakistan to earn their living. The same is reflecting from the data in Table-1 that 82.5% of working children are migrated from other cities or villages.

Ownership of Residence

In response to the question related to the ownership of the residence, the responses are as under:

Table 2.

Ownership of Residence				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Own	33	20.6	20.6	20.6
Rented	99	61.9	61.9	82.5
Valid Hut/Temporarily Constructed Residence	28	17.5	17.5	100.0
Total	160	100.0	100.0	

It is a common observation that the majority of residents of Karachi are emigrants; they are either migrated from India at the time of partition or migrated/migrating from other cities of Pakistan in search of jobs. That's why are living in rented houses (61.9%) or have constructed or made huts, or temporary residence (17.5%) on the available vacant

places which were once routes for natural follow of water as shown in Table-2.

Parents Status

In response to the question related to the status of parents, the responses are shown in the table below:

Table 3.

Parents Status				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Both father & mother alive	20	12.5	12.5	12.5

Only Mother alive	62	38.8	38.8	51.3
Only Father alive	35	21.9	21.9	73.1
Divorced Mother	43	26.9	26.9	100.0
Total	160	100.0	100.0	

The data in Table-3 reveals that most of the working children are either orphans (38.8% & 21.9%) or are having a single parent (mother, 26.9%). This is the reality that when children are forced to live with mother and mother is uneducated or unskilled; then ultimately children try to support the family by

Working with mother if working as a maid in the house.

Parents Job Status

When working children were asked about their parents' jobs, their responses are shown in the table below:

Table 4.

Parents' Job Status		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Only Father Works	68	42.5	42.5	42.5
	Only Mother Works	69	43.1	43.1	85.6
	Both Work	23	14.4	14.4	100.0
	Total	160	100.0	100.0	

Most the children start working to support the family in meeting the day to day expenses as shown in Table-4 that 85.6% (42.5 + 43.1) children either only father or mother are having jobs and when it is difficult to meet the expenses then children by themselves or with the will of their parents start working at the early stage of their life.

Number of Siblings

It is a common trend in Pakistan that parents are not careful about the number of children; they consider it '*the will of Allah*', and because of the large number of family members, it becomes difficult for them to survive. The responses about siblings are shown in the table below:

Table 5.

		Number of Siblings			
No. of Children		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	8	5.0	5.0	5.0
	3	48	30.0	30.0	35.0
	4	26	16.3	16.3	51.3
	More than 4	78	48.8	48.8	100.0
	Total	160	100.0	100.0	

It is a common observation that parents with more children, when unable to afford the expenses, send them to earn and support them. Table-5 indicates that 65.1% (16.3 & 48.8) working children are having four or more siblings.

Studies Record

The responses of working children about their studies track are as under:

Table 6.

		Studies Record			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Never Enrolled	98	61.3	61.3	61.3
	Left	52	32.5	32.5	93.8

Studies Record				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Still Study	10	6.3	6.3	100.0
Total	160	100.0	100.0	

The data in Table-6 reveals that 61.3% of working children never visited a school in their life while 32.5% may have seen a school but of the finance or any other reason could have left. But 6.3% of such children were also found who are supporting parents besides their educational endeavours.

Continue their Studies

The responses of working children about the start of studies or continuation of their studies are given in the table below:

Table 7.

Continuation/Start of Studies

Continuation/Start of Studies				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	21	13.0	13.1
	Yes	95	58.6	72.5
	May be	44	27.2	100.0
	Total	160	98.8	100.0

The data in Table-7 reflects that only 13% of working children disclosed that they are not anymore interested in the studies, but 58.6% used the option ‘Yes’ means if they will get the opportunity to study, they will not let it go wasted, while 27.2% used the option ‘May be’ means they an indication of the interest in education again.

Reason(s) disliking for education

Sixty-five (65) participants, twenty-one (21) who used the option “No” and forty-four (44) who used the option ‘May be’ were asked that why do they have something like a disliking feeling for studies. Their responses are analyzed in the table below:

Table 8.

Feelings for Studies				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Unable to Afford the Expenses	26	16.0	40.0
	Difficult to Understand	13	8.0	60.0
	Teachers' Attitude	15	9.3	83.1
	Don't Know	11	6.8	100.0
	Total	65	40.1	100.0

The data in Table-8 indicates that 40% feel their parents will not be able to bear the expenses of education but 23.1% working children also not like because of the teachers’ attitude and 20% as they find studies hard to understand.

Monthly Earning

The responses related to monthly earning as under:

Table 9.

Monthly Earning				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	3000 to 6000	9	5.6	5.6
	7000 to 9000	8	5.0	10.6
	10000 to 12000	97	60.6	71.3

Monthly Earning				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
13000 and above	46	28.8	28.8	100.0
Total	160	100.0	100.0	

The data in Table-9 reveals that 60.6% of the working children earn only 10 to 12 thousands per month which is not enough to meet the routine expenses; therefore, they cannot spare their children for their studies.

Utilization of Earning

Almost all working children replied that they gave the earning to their parents

Parents Responses Qualitative Analysis

The responses of the parents were sorted, labelled and then quantified for a better understanding of the situation.

In response to the first question, which was about their wish for their children's education. They all expressed their deep worries and wished for the education of their children.

In response to the second question that why do they send their children to earn instead of getting an education, almost all respondents were somehow

having the same answer that they are unable to provide necessities to their children then how can they fulfil their educational needs.

Conclusion

It is concluded that the majority of children working in Karachi are not residents; they are living in rented houses or temporarily constructed huts/houses on open lands in Karachi, working to support families because of low-income resources which are not enough to meet the expenses of a large family of four or more siblings. Most of the working children were never enrolled in any educational institute, those who were enrolled wish to continue their studies, at the same time who dislike continuing their studies disclosed that because of the teachers' attitude, they don't like to continue their studies. The monthly earning of the majority of children is from 10,000 to 12,000PKR, which again make them live from hand to mouth.

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