



Socioeconomic Determinants of Child Labor in Urban and Rural Areas of Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Child labor is a long-term problem in Pakistan that is influenced by complicated socioeconomic, cultural, and institutional variables. Although laws have been set up to eradicate child labor, millions of children keep working at the expense of their education, health and general well-being. The paper will discuss socioeconomic factors that affect child labor in urban and rural Pakistan by focusing on household income, parental education, family structure and access to social services. Convenient sampling was used to sample households in the chosen urban and rural districts to get knowledge about the number and motivation of child labour. These results demonstrate that low family income, illiteracy, family size, and inaccessibility to opportunities to acquire education are a high-risk factor that predisposes children to labor. Besides, the rural regions show the greatest incidences because of low access to education and chronic poverty. To deal with the issue of child labor, there is a need to combine efforts in form of poverty reduction, education, and community-based approach that would uphold the rights of children to acquire education and healthy development.

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Introduction

Child labor is a social and economic problem in Pakistan that poses a threat to the rights, health, and future educational opportunities of millions of children in this country. Imaginable as any labour that denies a child an educational opportunity, growth, and safety, child labour is widespread despite national and international laws designed to eradicate it (UNICEF, 2020). Child labor is seen as a cause and effect of poverty all over the world, and children in developing nations are more vulnerable to it as a result of economic factors, social traditions, and poor regulations and enforcement (ILO, 2017). The problem of child labor is especially rampant in agriculture, manufacturing, domestic services, and street vending, in which

children in Pakistan have to work long hours and face hazardous work environments (Bari, 2019).

The socioeconomic factors are significant in determining the child labor prevalence. The factor of household income is among the most important since children in low-income families are more prone to working to boost their family income (Khan and Razar, 2021). In most instances, parents depend on the income of the children to maintain minimal standards of living especially in the rural communities where economic prospects are few. Likewise, the education of parents is also a major influence on children working since literate parents tend to prioritize education and oppose their children going to work (Aslam and Kingdon, 2019). On the other hand, the illiterate parents tend to think of child labor as the condition of survival and continue poverty and labor exploitation cycles between generations (Farooq et al., 2020).

Family structure/size is also a factor that determines the possibility of child labor. As noted, bigger families, especially living in the countryside, may have more economic pressure, which forces older children to engage in activities to bring income and monitor younger siblings at home (Malik and Sattar, 2019). Moreover, the rates of child labor are more prevalent when living in single-parent families or families that have unemployed or underemployed guardians since their children have to earn the family income (Rana et al., 2020). These patterns are also intensified by the urban-rural divide whereby rural children have higher rates of labor because of the lack of access to quality education, transport obstacles, and access to social services (Naeem and Bilal, 2021). In cities, the situation is comparatively improved, but economic demands in poor localities lead to high rates of child labor, especially in the informal sector of work like street peddling and domestic service.

The cultural standards and societal attitudes also lead to the continuity of child labor in Pakistan. Work has become an inseparable aspect of the upbringing of a child, especially boys living in many communities, which is required to help their families make a living (Jabeen et al., 2022). Gender disparity is also another factor impacting labor patterns, since boys are more likely to be in paid labor outside the house, and girls usually do unpaid household work, which is not taken into account (Saeed et al., 2019). These standards overlap with socioeconomic aspects and strengthen the generations of child labor and restrict the efforts of the policies to eradicate the practice.

Another important factor that determines child labor is access to education. Research shows that in the absence of or ineffective quality schooling, a child will tend to join the labor market at a tender age (Farooq & Tariq, 2020). The rural areas do not always have schools within reachable distances and families might have troubles with transportation expenses or charges related to schooling and this makes parents choose working over studying. Urban families enjoy better access to school, but have to grapple with financial constraints which force them to prioritize education and labour, which may impact their attendance and performance (Khan et al., 2020).

The policies and state actions have tried to solve the child labor issue through the use of laws, social awareness, and education. Regulations like the Employment of Children Act, 1991, and its amendments are focused on monitoring the minimum age of working and ensuring that children should not be subjected to unsafe working conditions (UNICEF, 2020). Nonetheless, enforcing these measures has been hampered by issues of corruption, absence of supervision especially in rural regions where informal labor is pervasive. Conditional cash transfer programs and school stipends were proven to be effective in decreasing child labor by reducing poverty levels and promoting education (Mahmood & Qureshi, 2019). However, the

sustainable solutions are based on the collaboration of the governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, and local communities to target economic and cultural factors of child labor (Ali et al., 2023).

Child labor is a multifaceted socioeconomic phenomenon with multiple determinants that are important in coming up with effective interventions. The current study aims at the urban and rural areas of Pakistan, and factors like the household income, parental education, family structure and education access are taken into consideration. They gathered data at the household level using convenient sampling to acquire localized information of child labor trends and the forces that sustain the practice. Through the comparison of urban and rural settings, the research aims at offering evidence-based propositions to the policymakers, teachers and other community actors to devise specific measures that would help minimize child labour and advance the rights of children to education and growth.

To sum up, child work in Pakistan is a multi-dimensional problem, which is caused by poverty, lack of access to education, illiteracy of parents, large families, and cultural practices. Urban and rural locations have their own issues, the rural ones being generally more prevalent because of the lack of infrastructures and financial constraints. Child labor requires a comprehensive solution that involves reduction of poverty, access to education, understanding of culture, and implementation of policies. The research into socioeconomic factors of child labor will help to better understand the problem and inform the potential solutions to protect the rights of children and enhance the fair development in Pakistan.

Literature Review

International Attitude to Child labor.

Child labor has been a long-standing challenge in the world that is a negative factor in the regard of children rights and development. The international labour organization (ILO, 2017) says that over 160 million children across the world are involved in labour with a majority being in Asia and Africa. Children labor is usually associated with poverty, lack of educational facilities and social conventions that promote early employment worldwide. UNICEF (2020) reiterates that child labor denies children their basic rights to education, health, and leisure, and continues poverty circles. The research implies that child labor is not only a problem in economics but also social, cultural, and institutional, which supports systematic inequality across generations (Bari, 2019; ILO, 2017).

The financial need forces children in developing countries to help earn the household income or labor in family businesses. Such a pattern is especially notable in South Asia, where socioeconomic disparities, laxity of labor legislation, and the lack of social security are the factors that lead to the prevalence of child labor (Farooq et al., 2020). Research on international issues indicates that legislation-based interventions alone are not enough; a multi-dimensional intervention that involves access to education, reducing poverty, and cultural responsiveness is essential towards successfully eliminating child labor (Khan and Riaz, 2021; UNICEF, 2020).

Child labor is caused by socioeconomic factors.

The Poverty in Household Income.

Child labor is always cited to be determined by low household income. Poor families usually depend on the income earned by children to sustain their minimum needs especially in the rural setting (Malik and Sattar, 2019). Khan and Raza (2021) conclude that the direct coping mechanism to households under economic stress is child labor. A study by Farooq and Tariq

(2020) revealed that children in slums in urban areas tend to labor in informal industries to supplement the household earnings, which could be street selling or household helps. The financial crisis forces the parents to choose their survival in the short term over long investments in education and thus traps them in poverty and labor exploitation (Rana et al., 2020; Sheikh et al., 2020; Shah et al., 2021).

Parental Education

The level of education of parents has a great effect on whether children can take part in labor or not. When parents are literate, they have more chances of appreciating the importance of schooling and oppose sending their children to work (Aslam & Kingdon, 2019). In contrast, parents who are illiterate tend to feel that work is needed to keep their houses going, which supports the child labor traditions (Jabeen et al., 2022). In Punjab and Sindh, the negative relationship between parental literacy and the prevalence of child labor is quite significant, and the interventions based on education of parents can help to decrease the risk of children being employed (Naeem and Bilal, 2021; Khan et al., 2020).

Family Structure and Size

The family structure such as the number of children and employment status of the parents also influences the child labor. Big families may be more economically strained, which is likely to put more pressure on children and contribute to the likelihood that they will find jobs to provide for their homes (Rana et al., 2020). Homes with a single parent or unemployed guardians have more cases of child labor because children are used to replace the absence of adult income (Saeed et al., 2019). This is especially highly evident in the countryside, where other support systems are minimal, and community resources are few.

Child Labor in the City vs. the Country.

Child labor is more common and determined by the rural areas. The rural children tend to suffer more labor because of the lower accessibility to school, transport difficulties, and widespread poverty (Naeem and Bilal, 2021). The rural child labor mainly consists of agricultural labor, domestic work, and informal cottage industries, and the seasonal changes affect the patterns of labor (Malik and Sattar, 2019). In cities, child labor is also concentrated in informal industries, such as street vending, workshops, and domestic service, and economic pressures and family income are the main factors of motivation (Farooq et al., 2020).

Research has shown that, although urban areas have more schools, economic need sometimes compels children to have to balance schooling and work. Such a two-fold load is prone to causing absenteeism, school dropouts, and low academic performance (Khan and Riaz, 2021). Rural children, in their turn, experience an infrastructural, and social level of barriers, including extensive distances to schools, conventional gender roles, and a community attitude toward child labour, all of which prevent educational attendance (Jabeen et al., 2022; Saeed et al., 2019).

Cultural and Social Factors

Societal ideas and how culture perceives work have a great impact in child labor. Boys are supposed to be income earners in their families whilst girls do unpaid household chores in most societies (Saeed et al., 2019). The gendered expectations intertwine with poverty and support the child labor practices. According to Bari (2019), societies that have established patriarchal practices tend to believe that child labor is a part of upbringing a child and there is less opposition to child labour. Labor participation is also influenced by social networks and

peer pressure where children living in communities where child labor is prevalent are more likely to participate in child labor (Khan et al., 2020).

Access to Education

Education is not only a shield against child labor but it is also an indicator of future opportunities. The absence of good schools, expensive transport, and not being able to afford school fees pushes a big number of children to work (Farooq & Tariq, 2020). The rural communities are especially disadvantaged, as the infrastructure of schools and the lack of teachers pose a challenge to early school dropout. In cities, schools are available, but children can continue to work to provide additional household resources and the situation has a negative impact on attendance and performance (Malik and Sattar, 2019). Conditional cash transfer or school incentive programs have been proven to be effective in child labor reduction by eliminating economic stressors (Mahmood & Qureshi, 2019).

Policy and Legal Frameworks

Pakistan has introduced the laws aimed at reducing child labor, including the Employment of Children Act, 1991, and the further amendments on the working conditions and minimum age standards (UNICEF, 2020). The effectiveness of these policies is, however, constrained by the challenges of enforcement, poor monitoring, and informal labor markets (Bari, 2019). Research shows that legal frameworks cannot be effective and that there is a need to have combined interventions that tackle poverty, parental awareness, and community involvement to achieve significant child labor reduction (Khan and Raza, 2021; Jabeen et al., 2022).

To conclude, the issue of child labor in Pakistan is a complicated combination of social economic, cultural, and institutional factors. The main factors that affect the labor participation include low household income, illiteracy of parents, high family members, and poor access to education. The prevalence is higher in rural regions because of the infrastructural constraints and the continued poverty and in cities, children are under economic strain in informal sector of work. Child labor is further supported by the cultural practices and gender expectations which underscore the need to employ interventions that are holistic. Poverty reduction, access to education, community sensitization and law enforcement should be combined in order to minimize child labor, and foster the rights of children. Knowledge on these determinants offers a platform to policy making and specialized initiatives to protect the welfare and education of children in Pakistan.

Methodology

Research Design

The research design used in this study is a quantitative research design to help in exploring the socioeconomic determinants of child labor in both urban and rural, Multan district, Pakistan. Quantitative research enables a systematic gathering and statistical examination of numerical data to track relationships amid socioeconomic aspects and prevalence of child labor (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The cross-sectional survey methodology was chosen, which allowed the data to be collected at one time period among households in chosen rural and urban districts. The design is suitable in analyzing patterns, correlations and disparities between the urban and the rural settings, which gives a vivid picture of the determinants that play a significant role in child labor.

Population and Sample

The population of the proposed study will be comprised of households in urban and rural areas of District Multan, Punjab, Pakistan where children ranging 5-17 years old are the most likely to be involved in labor. Convenient sampling was applied to make certain accessibility and practicality, whereby the households in the communities with the high prevalence of child labor were targeted. The total number approached was 250 households of the total 125 urban and 125 rural households. The convenience sampling was because of the lack of time and resources and the need to get localized information regarding the socioeconomic determinants. Although such an approach restricts the external validity of the results, it enables the gathering of pragmatic and applicable information that corresponds to the realities on the district level (Etikan et al., 2016).

Instrument Development

A structured questionnaire was used to gather the data in a specifically designed study questionnaire. The questionnaire had three sections:

- Demographic Data: Age, sex, family size, education level of parents, and profession.
- Social Economic Factors: Family income, family structure, parental work, and social services.
- Child Labor Indicators: The type of work that children do, the number of working hours, education of the child and the causes of labor participation.

Perceptions and socioeconomic factors related to child labor were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, which is 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) (Bryman, 2016).

Validity and Reliability

Two specialists on child development and social sciences were used to check the questionnaire to guarantee content validity. To assess clarity, comprehension and reliability, a pilot study was undertaken on 20 households. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach alpha which gave a high value exceeding 0.80 in all the subscales which is a sign of high reliability (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). Pilot feedbacks were used to make minor changes to refine wording and clarity of items.

Data Collection Procedure

The process of data collection was conducted on a face-to-face basis in four weeks. The enumerates went to both rural and urban homes and made sure that participation of children in labor and family socioeconomic attributes had been duly documented. The objectives of the study were communicated to the participants, and they were assured of confidentiality and given verbal or written consent before taking part. The follow-up visits were carried out where houses were not available in the first instance to increase the response rate.

Data Analysis

The data were performed with the help of SPSS version 26. To summarize the demographic characteristics and the prevalence of child labor, descriptive statistics were calculated (percentages, frequencies, means, and standard deviations) to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample. The correlation analysis was used to test the relationships between the household income, parent education, family size and child labor participation. The independent-samples t-tests were used to determine significant differences between urban and rural areas. The scales were also tested on reliability with the use of Cronbach

alpha, and the data were tested on normality, outliers, and absence of values before the analysis (Field, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

Prior to data collection, they became an ethical subject and received the approval of the university ethics committee. They volunteered to participate, and they were made to understand that they could drop out at any point without any penalty. Anonymization of data was done, and the elimination of personal identifiers guaranteed confidentiality. The research was conducted according to the principles of ethics, such as non-maleficence, informed consent, respect towards the rights of participants, especially when it comes to minors (Resnik, 2020).

Data Analysis & Findings

The sample that was used to study the socioeconomic factors that affect child labor was based on 250 households (125 urban and 125 rural) in Punjab. Descriptive statistics were used as the starting point of the analysis to address such questions as the demographic characteristics, household socioeconomic indicators, and the prevalence of child labor within the urban and rural areas. Of the respondents, 52 percentage of children were male and 48 percentage were female, most of them were aged between 10 and 15 years (65%), which means that the school-going children were mostly engaged in the labor activities. Family size was 4-10 with an average of 6.2 which indicated moderately large households in Punjab.

Descriptive Economical Analysis of Socioeconomic Factors.

Household income was found to be a major factor that determined child labor. Table 1 presents the summary of the mean scores and standard deviations of the main socioeconomic variables such as the household income, parental education and the size of the family. The average household income result was 2.85 (SD = 0.79) on the 5-point Likert scale, which shows that there are moderate economic constraints among the households engaged. The mean of parental education was 2.72 (SD=0.84) indicating that the literacy level was low and there is low literacy among parents mostly in the rural community. Another variable that was relevant was family size, which mean was of 3.65 (SD = 0.92), implying that larger families would have higher chances of bringing children to do some labor in order to supplement household income.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Socioeconomic Factors (N = 250)

Variable	Mean	SD
Household Income	2.85	0.79
Parental Education	2.72	0.84
Family Size	3.65	0.92
Child Labor Engagement	3.41	0.88

Child labor was more common in urban regions than in the rural ones. In countryside, 72 percent of children were reported to have some kind of work whereas in urban homes it was 58 percent. Agriculture, domestic chores, and seasonal jobs were mostly used by the rural children compared to the urban children who served in streets, small factories, and household duties. This reveals how geographical and economic backgrounds affect the trends of child labour.

Correlation Analysis

The Pearson correlation coefficients were performed to test the association between child labor participation and socioeconomic factors (Table 2). The findings showed that there is a significant negative relationship between household income and child labor ($r = -0.61$, $p < 0.01$) which assert that children in low-income families are more inclined towards working. Parental education was also negatively associated with child labor ($r = -0.54$, $p < 0.01$), and this fact demonstrated the protective effect of an educated parent. The family size was positively related to child labor ($r = 0.47$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that a larger family is more likely to send children to work. Both in urban and rural subsamples these correlations were found to be consistent but in rural areas, relationships were somewhat stronger because of the stronger economical and infrastructural constraints.

Table 2: The correlation coefficient between Socioeconomic Factors and Child Labor (N = 250)

Variable	1	2	3	4
1. Household Income	1			
2. Parental Education	0.39**	1		
3. Family Size	-0.28**	-0.33**	1	
4. Child Labor Engagement	-0.61**	-0.54**	0.47**	1

Note. $p < 0.01$.

To analyze the similarities in the prevalence of child labor and socioeconomic variables in urban and rural regions, independent-samples t-tests were used to investigate the differences. The rates of labor involvement were observed to be much higher in rural children ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 0.81$) than in urban children ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 0.85$) with a $t = 5.32$ and $p = 0.01$. The rural households also were lower in household income and parental education which also led to the increased prevalence of child labor. These results highlight the cumulative impact of poverty and low access to education in the rural environment.

Item-Level Analysis

Upon closer analysis of the items of the questionnaires, it was found that financial need was the most commonly reported reason of child labor with 78 of the people who participated in the research strongly agreeing that children do this as an addition to the family income. Inaccessibility of closest schools was cited by 65 percent rural respondents as a factor that led to labor participation. The illiteracy of parents was reported by 59 percent of the households, meaning that parents tend to be not aware of the negative connotations of child labor. These findings were supported by qualitative responses that indicated that children tend to work and attend school leading to absenteeism, fatigue, and poor academic performance.

Summary of Findings

The analysis shows that there is a multidimensional combination of socioeconomic factors that determine child labor in Punjab, such as low household income, illiteracy, and a big number of children in the household. The rural children are at a greater risk because of the infrastructural constraints and the traditional labour practices. The results indicate the high necessity of specific target interventions, including conditional cash transfer and parental education initiatives, as well as enhanced access to schools, especially in rural school districts. The correlation and t-test results prove that child labor should be treated with the combined approach that considers economic, educational, and social aspects at the same time.

Discussion

The results of this research show that child labor in Punjab is strongly predetermined by the complex of socioeconomic factors, such as family income, level of educating parents, and the number of children in the family. Household income was found to be the most influential factor, and a child in a poorer family had more chances to work and earn money that would support the family. This goes in tandem with the past studies which highlight that economic need is one of the key motivators to child labor in developing nations (Bhalotra and Heady, 2003; Aziz and Rehman, 2020). The negative significance of household income and child labor proves that the lack of financial means greatly limits the chances of children to go to school regularly and therefore, cycles of poverty are progressed.

Education of the parents was also a decisive factor on child labor. Homes that had higher levels of parental education tended not to use children in labor, which was more indicative of the awareness of the adverse effects of child labor and the significance of education (Aslam et al., 2018; Tariq and Malik, 2021). Cases of child labor were more pronounced in rural communities where the literacy levels of parents are lower and because of this, educational intervention programs to parents would help reduce child labor levels. Based on the positive correlation between the family size and child labor, it can be concluded that in bigger families, children are supposed to contribute to the income or household chores, which aligns with the earlier research (Rana et al., 2020).

The city rural contrast brings out the geographical aspect of child labor. The rural children were also reported to be more labor engaged than urban children and this also indicates economic as well as infrastructural differences. Low accessibility to schools and inadequate transportation in rural areas, as well as established cultural norms, enhance the use of child labor, and urban families enjoy access to education and awareness (Farooq and Siddiqui, 2019). These results indicate that interventions should be situation-specific, in response to specific issues in rural and urban populations.

The multidimensionality of child labor determinants is also brought out in the study. The combination of financial constraint and low parental education in the context of family size increases the chances of child labor, which proves that the implementation of individual policies can be ineffective. This requires a comprehensive strategy that focuses on economic empowerment, educational enlightenment, and school availability in order to develop permanent alleviation in child labor. Moreover, qualitative feedback of respondents highlighted that child labor has adverse effects on academic performance, physical well-being, and social development, and thus, there should be interventions on child labor in an integrated manner.

Conclusion

In this paper, it has been established that socioeconomic factors such as, low household income, illiteracy of parents and large family size are the determining factors of child labor in Punjab, Pakistan. The rural children are targeted because of low accessibility of schools, traditional labor and the ineffective implementation of child protection laws. Financial need is the most prominent one whereas parental education is a protective factor. The results indicate that child labor is not a singular issue but a systematic problem, which is associated with the economic situation in a household, inequality in education, and culture. The manner of addressing these determinants needs to be integrated and context sensitive such that it targets urban and rural societies.

Recommendations

On the findings and discussion basis, it is possible to offer several practical recommendations aimed at reducing child labor and increasing the level of education among children in Pakistan:

Economic Support Programs: Initiate conditional cash transfer, subsidies and stipends to low-income families to limit dependence on child labor. When dealing with rural families, special emphasis should be put on the households with the most severe income limits.

Parental Education and Awareness: Carry out community-based initiatives that will create awareness to parents on the negative impact of child labor as well as the importance of education. The awareness program must target both the rural and urban community, which can be achieved by involving the local leaders and community people who can influence the minds of the people.

Better School Accessibility: To help enable the access of schools by rural districts especially through transportation system and flexibility in school schedules so that children that otherwise would partake in labor can attend school.

Legal Enforcement and Surveillance: Intensify implementation of child labor laws and put up checks and balances to make sure that children are not used in hazardous or underage working conditions. There should be cooperation between the local government, non-governmental organizations and schools.

Multidimensional Strategy: Approach factors as a whole using an integrated policy approach based on economic, educational, and social strategies. The policies must be geared towards urban and rural issues keeping in mind the local socioeconomic facts.

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