

# CHILD LABOUR IN PAKISTAN- A TIP OF AN ICEBERG

Nosheen Zaidi<sup>1</sup>, Najma Javed<sup>2</sup>, Mohammad Shoaib Khan<sup>3</sup>

## ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** To study the basic demographic characteristics of child laborers and to ascertain their working conditions

**Methodology:** This cross sectional study was conducted in district Rawalpindi from January to September 2008 and 700 children between 4 - 18 years were enrolled after taking informed consent from both children and their masters. Information on demography and work details was recorded on a structured performa.

**Results:** Total 700 children 4-18 years old with mean age of 13.5 years were enrolled. Male:Female ratio was 5.4:1. Most of the children (401) had a family size of 5-8 members. In 634 cases, 1-4 family members were earning while 05 had 10-12 earning members. Only 479 (68%) children ever attended school, mostly (291, 42%) till primary level. 258 children's families had monthly income of more than PKR 8000, 210 PKR 6000-8000, 167 PKR 4000-5000 and 63 families were earning less than PKR 3000/ month. Mostly (270) worked in shops. Reason of work was low family income in 222 and poverty in 207 children. 283 children worked for 7-10 hours per day, 216 for 07 days, 115 for 4-6 hours, 45 for more than 12 hours and 39 for 1-3 hours. Maximum monthly pay was 1000- 2000 rupees in 187 and minimum 500 rupees per month in 106 children. 284 cases sustained injury while at work.

**Conclusion:** Most child labourers are male with a family size of 5-8 members, never attended any school and living in a family whose monthly income is less than 8000 Pakistani Rupee. The major reason of work was low family income and poverty.

**Key Words:** Child labour, Millennium goals, Pakistani population.

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## INTRODUCTION

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention, child labour is defined as harmful occupations or work activities in all children below 18 in the labour market or their own

household; all children undertaking work in the labour market or household interfering with their primary education; all children under 15 in full time employment; and all children under 13 in part time work. Child labour is defined not by the activity but by the effect this activity has on the child<sup>1</sup>.

Child labour is most concentrated in Asia and Africa, which together account for more than 90 percent of total child employment<sup>2</sup>. Though there are more child workers in Asia than anywhere else, a higher percentage of African children participate in the labor force<sup>5</sup>. Asia is led by India which has 44 million child laborers, giving it the largest child workforce in the world<sup>2</sup>. In Pakistan, 10 percent of all workers are between the ages of 10 and 14 years<sup>2</sup>. Nigeria has 12 million child workers. Child labor is also common in South America, 7 million children working in Brazil<sup>3</sup>.

Pakistan has a per-capita income of approximately \$1900. A middle class person in Pakistan earns around \$5 a day on average. The average Pakistani has to feed nine or ten people with their daily wage.

<sup>1</sup> Department of Community Medicine, Foundation Medical University, Islamabad - Pakistan.

<sup>2</sup> Pakistan Medical Research Council, Islamabad - Pakistan.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Biochemistry, Bannu Medical College, Bannu - Pakistan.

### Address for Correspondence:

**Dr, Najma Javed,**  
Senior Medical Officer,  
Pakistan Medical Research Council,  
Islamabad - Pakistan.  
Email: javed\_najma@yahoo.com

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Further there is high inflation rate to contend with<sup>4</sup>. In 2008, 17.2% of the total population lived below the poverty line, which was the lowest figure in the history of Pakistan<sup>5</sup>. Social Policy Development Centre (SPDC) Karachi has stated in one of its reports that the percentage of people living in poverty in Pakistan was 33% during 1999 that increased in 38% within two years<sup>6</sup>.

The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan estimated in the 1990s that 11 million children were working in the country, half of them were under the age of ten. In 1996, the median age for a child entering the work force was seven, down from eight years old 2 years prior. It was estimated that one quarter of the countries work force was made up of child laborers<sup>7</sup>.

Pakistan has recently passed laws limiting child labor and indentured servitude, but the laws are universally ignored, and some 11 million children, aged four to fourteen, keep that country's factories operating, often working in brutal and squalid conditions<sup>8,9</sup>.

This study explored key demographic features of children working as labourers in various localities of Rawalpindi and discussed basic factors compelling them to work at such a tender age.

## METHODOLOGY

This was a cross-sectional community based study. A total of 700 hundred children were selected. Areas surveyed included Commercial market, Pir Widhaee, Kamran Market, Tipu Road Automobile Workshops, Airport road, Sawan, Murree Road (aka BB road), Saddar, China Market, Food Street and some residential areas of district Rawalpindi.

In this study, stretching for 09 months from January to September 2008, over 1000 child labourers were identified at random and invited to participate in a questionnaire based study. A total of 700 children agreed to participate ( over 300 were excluded

owing to difficulties in speaking and understanding or partly as they were afraid of their masters). Only those who understood the nature of study, could answer questions being asked from them and agreed for consent were included in the study. Demographic details of the child and details on child family members, earning members, education status, reason for work at this age, total family income /month, total money earned by child/month, place of work, nature of job, time spent at job and punishment at workplace were recorded on a structured performa. Data collected was entered in computer for analysis using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

Study was ethically reviewed and approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee, Foundation Medical University Rawalpindi.

## RESULTS

A total of 700 working children between 4-18 years of age with a mean age of 13.5 years, were enrolled. Male to female ratio was 5.4:1. Majority of the children had a family size of 5-8 members while 126 belonged to a family having 9-12. 634 children had 1-4 earning family members while only 5 child laborers were from families having 10-12 earning members. Regarding the education, 479 children out of 700 study population ever attended the school as compared to 221 (32%) who never went to school. Majority of children (291, 42%) attended school till primary level followed by preschool level (141, 20%) and only (67, 10%) could continue till secondary level (Table 1). Details of various reasons for not attending or leaving school are given in the table 2.

Two fifty eight (36.9%) children's families had monthly income of more than PKR 8000/ month, 210 (30%) PKR 6000-8000/ month, 167 (23.9%) PKR 4000-5000/ month and 63 (0.9%) families were earning less than PKR 3000/ month. Data showed that majority (38.65) of children worked in shops followed by workshops and homes 28.9% and 15.4% respectively. Nine percent children worked as garbage collectors in streets.

**Table 1: Level of school attended by the children**

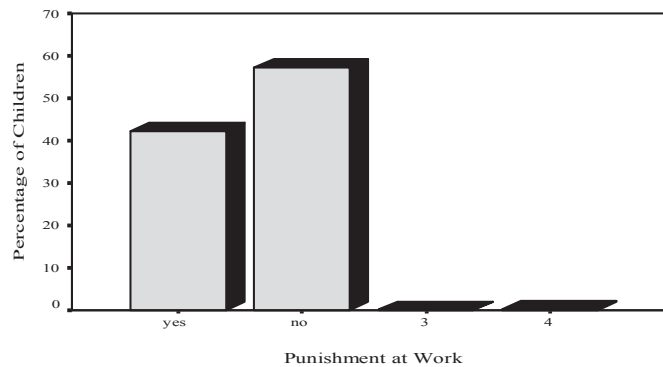
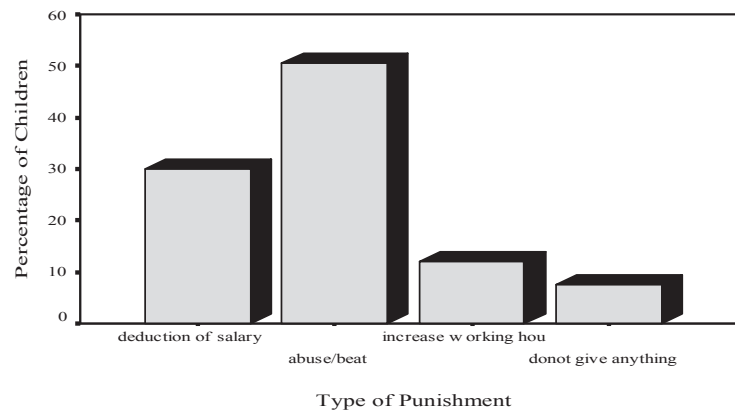
	Frequency	Percent
Pre-school	141	20.1
Primary	291	41.6
Secondary	67	9.6
Total	499	71.3
Never went to school	201	28.7
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>700</b>	<b>100.0</b>

**Table 2: Reasons for leaving/not attending school by the children**

	Frequency	Percent
Can not afford	262	37.4
Do not want to study	163	23.3
To work for pay	150	21.4
Help at home with household chores	29	4.1
Other	19	2.7
School is too far	16	2.3
Illness	11	1.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>650</b>	<b>92.9</b>

**Table 3: Total working hours at workplace of children**

Working hours	Frequency	Percent
1-3 hours	39	5.6
4-6 hours	115	16.4
7-10 hours	283	40.4
12 hours	216	30.9
>12 hours	45	6.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>698</b>	<b>99.7</b>

**Figure 1: Frequency of punishment at workplace****Figure 2: Types of punishment among child laborers**

Majority of the children (222, 31.7%) were working due to low income of the family and poverty 207 (12.6%) while in 106 (15.1%) children, working at younger age was a trend in their families. Lack of support was another factor in 79 (13.1%) children that forced them to work followed by lack of education responsible for 59 (8.4%) children to work.

Total time spent by these children at their respective workplaces is shown in table 3. Majority of the children 283 (40.4%) were found to work 7-10 hours per day, followed by 216 (30.9%) who work for the whole week while 115 (16.4%) work for 4-6 hours, 45 (6.4%) for more than 12 hours and 39 (5.6%) for 1-3 hours only, mostly on weekends and in homes.

Results of the study showed that monthly income of working children was less than 1000 rupees in most of the cases (33.3%). Twenty seven percent had income between 1000- 2000 rupees, 22% less than 500 rupees and 15% were getting 500 rupees per month only. Frequency and types of punishments being given to these children are shown in figure 1 and 2 respectively.

When asked about work related injuries sustained during the past 12 months, response was yes in 284 (40.6%) while 416 (59.4%) denied of having any injury in this time period.

## DISCUSSION

According to UNICEF most working children are aged 11 to 14 years old, but as many as 60 million are between the ages of 5 and 11. In our study age of study population ranged from 4-18 years with a mean of 13.5 years. Last year, the Federal Bureau of Statistics released the results of its survey funded by ILO's IPEC (International Program on the Elimination of Child Labour). According to the findings, 3.8 million children of age group 5-14 years were working in Pakistan out of total 40 million children in this age group; fifty percent of these economically active children were in age group of 5 to 9 years<sup>10</sup>. Results of current study are in accordance with this.

Hundreds of thousands of children are forced to work as labourers due to the poverty before they ever enter school and majority of them leave school in the middle of study to become labourers. The problem of child labour is closely associated with poverty and underdevelopment. As in all the developing countries including India, China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Papua New Guinea, Ethiopia, Uganda, Mozambique, Malawi, Sudan, and Chad, the prevalence of poverty is high and therefore, child labour in these developing countries, particularly in Asia and Africa, does exist to a larger extent<sup>11</sup>. Same

is reflected in our results where majority of children were working as laborers due to low family income and poverty (222 and 207 respectively). Furthermore out of 700 children enrolled in study, 479 (68.4%) were attending school before they started working and afterwards 291 of them left school at primary level due to their commitment at workplace. Banning children from school and putting them to work, disrupts their normal development, education and relationships. In a survey of Pakistan's sports goods industry, over 72 percent of workers who did not attend school did so because they could not afford school fees<sup>12</sup>. Same is found in current study. Many countries, like Egypt and Zimbabwe, that have rapidly expanded their primary school coverage, have seen a considerable increase in primary school enrollment which results in a reduction of child labour<sup>13</sup>. However in Pakistan, lack of educational facilities and the socio-economic relevance of education is an essential factor that explains the increase in child labour.

Bequele and Boyden reported in their study that children worked the longest hours and were the worst paid of all labourers. In our study 305 (46.6%) children worked for the whole week and daily for 12 hours (216, 30.9%). A study conducted by ILO in Pakistan reflected that working children came from large families and in the low-income category. The average household size of working children was found to be eight members, which is higher than the national average. Current study also revealed that majority of the workers were from families having 10-12 family members<sup>14</sup>.

Last year, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) estimated that a child can be found in every factory, every workshop, every field and earn on average one third of the adult age. Our study results are same where majority of the children work in shops and workshops and 22.5% of the study population earn less than PKR 500/month (USD 6/month).

## CONCLUSION

Majority of the child labourers are compelled to work due to poverty and having large families. They work more as compared to money they receive in return.

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#### CONTRIBUTORS

NZ conceived the idea, planned and wrote the manuscript of the study. NJ & MSK assisted in the analysis and interpretation of data. All the authors contributed significantly to the research that resulted in the submitted manuscript.