Combating Child Laboure In Pakistan's Agriculture Sector: Current Scenario And Emerging Policy Challenges

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Abstract

This study aims to comprehend the hardships child labourers endure in the agricultural territory. This study unveiled that children entrapped in child labour were deprived of education, which can affect their future drastically, deeming it impossible for them to have better jobs for a living in future. Children engaged in labour have a significant role in lessening the financial burden of their parents. Poverty is the main reason behind child labour, and that is why this issue is more prominent in the developing world. The focus of this study was to bring concerns of child labourers between the ages of 5 and 15 to light. This research utilized stratified random sampling to select 160 participants from rural areas of Faisalabad, conducting in-depth interviews with each participant in a confidential environment. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and supplemented with field notes to ensure data accuracy and saturation. From the findings of this research we established that child labourers in agricultural territories are facing several problems demanding urgent solutions. The main cause of child labour is poverty, so if we give low-income families the means to send their children to school, we can break the cycle of poverty for them by providing them with education. There is a gaping need for robust policies for children's rights protection. If we provide their families with other sources of income and free education for the children, we can help improve the situation of these families and the future of children.

Key words: Child labor, Agricultural sector, Policy challenges, Current scenario.

Introduction

Child labour is a prominent issue worldwide, especially in agricultural areas. In the agricultural world, several children are exploited and put into dangerous work conditions. Even with all the policies and practices to eliminate child labour all over the world, it is still intact in the agricultural world. Child labour practices present complicated challenges, requiring forming new and better policies to obliterate them. This study provides a good look into the present situation of child labour in the agricultural world, emphasizing demographic points, traditions, and the need for new policies to tackle the challenges.

It has been declared by the International Office of Labor that any activity other than play for a child is considered child labour. The ILO has estimated that approximately 200 million children are engaged in some form of labour, with over 8 million children being forced to work in exploitative and hazardous conditions. Pakistan is known to have a significant number of children involved in child labour. There is formal child labour, where children work for agricultural land owners, but there is also informal child labour, like selling newspapers or cigarettes on the street.

Currently, there is a massive amount of child labour in agriculture; almost 108 million children between the ages of 5 to 17 are employed in agricultural work worldwide (ILO, 2020). These children are often involved in dangerous work conditions, working for long hours, performing activities like crops, rearing livestock, fishing, etc (UNICEF, 2021). After the pandemic, economic downfall and increased poverty levels have made child labour practices even more common (ILO, 2020).

Significant production policy changes are required to combat the issue of child labour in agricultural areas. Recent climate changes have had a colossal negative impact on families depending on agriculture for a living, which has pressured them into being dependent on child labour for financial gains (World Bank, 2019). Migration is also one of the factors playing a significant role in child labour. Migrated families are usually unable to find better ways of

income, and they are forced to rely on the labour of their children in agriculture to keep the food on the table (UNICEF, 2021). Also, technological advancements have played a significant role in child labour, as it is easier to operate machines, and employing children to do these tasks saves labour costs (Bachman, 2020).

Child labour in agricultural areas of Pakistan is a noteworthy matter. Millions of children in agricultural areas of Pakistan are exploited and forced to work in less than optimal work conditions.

In this study, we have provided an overview of this saddening situation with references:

Agriculture is the largest sector of Pakistan's economy, requiring a massive workforce, which, unfortunately, includes children. Pakistan is one of the leading countries in employing child labour (International Labour Organization). One out of 8 children employed in agricultural work in Pakistan is between 5 and 14 years old (ILO, 2020). The agriculture sector is Pakistan's biggest area of work that employs child labor. Children working in agriculture perform tasks like picking cotton, harvesting sugarcane, herding livestock, and operating machines (UNICEF Pakistan, 2021).

Many factors play a role in the persistence of child labour in agricultural areas of Pakistan. Insufficient laws regarding child labour, poor enforcement of laws regarding child labour, poverty, and difficulty in accessing education are some of the main reasons contributing to child labour (Ahmad et al., 2018). Moreover, orthodox practices and mentality also contribute to child labour. Many rural families do not deem education important and prefer their children to start earning and contributing financially from a young age (Malik et al., 2019). Additionally, the school closure and economic downfall during the pandemic played a huge role in perpetuating child labour practices (ILO, 2020).

The Pakistani government has constantly been making efforts to eradicate child labour practices through lawmaking, introducing new policies, developing social programs to promote education and putting an end to child labour. The Punjab Restriction on Employment of Children Act 2016 and the Sindh Prohibition of Employment of Children Act 2017 clearly state that hiring a child under 14 years old in dangerous professions, including the agricultural sector, is illegal (Government of Pakistan, 2016; Government of Sindh, 2017). The goal of the National Action Plan for Child Labour is to eradicate all types of child labour by the year 2025. They plan on doing so by combining lawful actions, educational programs, and introducing schemes to eliminate poverty (Ministry of Human Rights Pakistan, 2018).

According to Rana Ejaz, if a child is forced to earn rather than attend school, it is child labour; it does not matter what type of work they do, whether working in a factory or a household to support their family.

It is challenging to combat child labour because, on the one hand, a child is taken out of school and deprived of education to earn, which will limit his chances of having a decent job in the future. He is likelier to be stuck in a cycle of earning minimum wage for a lifetime. On the other hand, a child might be forced to work to support his household because their parents cannot help the household alone, which might be a temporary fix to poverty but get them stuck in the cycle of poverty in the long run (Dar et al., 2002).

Child labour is not a choice but a result of poverty, deprivation, and unfair communities. While some types of work may not be harmful to children and can even be helpful, it can be hard to differentiate between acceptable and age-appropriate activities and harmful child labour. While it is relatively easy to agree on eliminating the worst forms of child labour, such as life-threatening jobs, distinguishing between acceptable practices and harmful labour can be complicated by local customs and general attitudes.

According to the Service of Brood Act of 1991, hiring children less than 14 years of age is banned in Pakistan. As a consequence of hiring underage workers, there are severe penalties, fines, and jail time. Although there are some cultural differences between Pakistan's provinces, the root cause of child labour remains the same. Barki and Fasih (1998) implied that differences between Pakistan's four provinces also increase child labour.

Agriculture is the primary contributor to Pakistan's economy, and 75% of the population depends on it for their livelihood. However, 75% of those engaged in agriculture face the challenge of producing more food and fibre at affordable prices. In the past 35 years, agriculture growth in Pakistan has been uneven, with discrepancies in prices and commodity balances. Public policies and the market still need to provide authentic economic rewards and sustained growth to ensure that all of agriculture's benefits are enjoyed equally. Agricultural production in Pakistan is improving through the proper use of resources and technology. Fertilizers, weeding, and adjusting the water timings are some minor things that can lead to much better short-term production. However, more research to improve our agricultural gains, better water management, and improved marketing techniques can benefit us in the long run (Mahmood Hassan Khan, 2003).

Child labour is a significant issue in numerous developing countries. Discussions about human rights began to address this issue in the 1990s. It gained prominence due to the increasing concern for social rights, specifically children's rights, and the global economy's stimulus for fair labour standards. This problem has affected all countries and regions and remains a critical issue. Despite all the laws and policies to protect children's rights, the number of underage workers is still massive. India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh are leading countries in underage employment; these countries together are responsible for half of all child labour globally (Fyfe, 2004).

In the 21st century, 317 million underage children are currently working to support themselves or their families (ILO, 2006).

Underage children forced to work are liable to physical, psychological, and emotional exhaustion and exploitation. Most of them work in hazardous conditions and are exposed to harmful chemicals and substances daily. They are often overburdened and underpaid. All these factors collectively harm their physical and mental well-being. Humanists agree that most work-related health conditions are irreversible, so caution must be taken to avoid them. We must prioritize saving children employed in the Worst Forms of Child Labor (WFCL). However, all child labour practices are harmful not only to the children but also to society and the community as a whole. Determining which cases of child labour need to be dealt with first can be pretty challenging (Leiten & White, 2001).

A lack of access to schools often causes low literacy rates, parents' inability to pay for their children's education, and the persistent belief that girls do not need formal education. Additionally, the cost of schooling may be prioritized over its quality, which is a temporary fix to the literacy rate (Brown, 2002).

In developing countries, children are a cheaper alternative to adult workers, mainly when operating a simple machine instead of heavy physical labour. Poverty is also a reason for lower literacy rates. Poor parents do not deem education necessary and prefer their children to contribute financially to the household income (Grimsrud, 2003).

One of the leading programs in Pakistan to alleviate poverty and ensure the safety of underage workers who are involved in the worst forms of child labour (WFCL) is the National Centre for Rehabilitation of Child Labor (NCRCL). The program is particularly beneficial for areas where children are employed in hazardous working conditions. Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal launched this initiative in 2008.

Underage labour is a significant issue in various regions of the world. International Labour Organization's Report 2010 stated that, out of 215 million child labourers, 60% were working in fields like agriculture, fisheries, cattle rearing, and forestry.

Review of the literature

Chen et al., (2022) studied the correlation between migration and child labor in the agricultural sector. The study dissected how local and international migrations affect child labor in the agricultural sector. The conclusion from many qualitative and quantitative studies is how better policy-making and local changes can eradicate migration-related child labor and promote the well-being of migrated children.

Van den Berg et al. (2021) studied how efficient multidimensional practices were in eliminating child labour in the agricultural world. He emphasized the importance of government, businesses, communities, and organizations working together to ensure that laws regarding child labour are being enforced properly. This research discusses the best ways to eliminate child labour in the agricultural world and the challenges faced in doing so.

Maertens et al. (2021) explored how advances in technology can play an essential role in the exploitation of underage workers in agricultural areas. The research dissected variables such as the use of machinery and digital technology that can increase agricultural produce while minimizing child labour in agriculture. Utilizing information from various research and case studies, this review evaluates the difficulties of using technology to minimize child labour in agricultural areas.

Grootaert et al. (2021) studied how education can significantly combat underage labour in the agricultural world. His study shed light on how making education easy for everyone, especially at-risk children, can significantly eliminate child labour. Deducing from several educational theories, this research talks about compelling techniques for making education easy and accessible and encouraging poor children in rural areas to go to school, stay, and complete it so they will not be forced into underage labour.

Hassan et al., (2020). They have dissected how climate change impacts underage employment in agricultural areas. His study analyzed how floods, earthquakes, and environmental crises negatively affect the economy and thus cause people to force their children to work to support their households. Summarizing many practical studies and theoretical works, this study pondered the complicated relationship between climate change and underage employment. The solution to this is climate-resistant agricultural approaches. This will not only lead to better economic outputs but will also reduce child labour.

Palermo et al. (2020) studied gender discrimination among child labourers in the agricultural world. It highlighted how traditional gender roles and inequality lead underage female workers in the agriculture area to face more hardships and challenges. This study examined the intricate relationship between gender and underage employment

in the context of agriculture work. It emphasized the need for gender-protective laws and interventions to preserve all children's rights and promote their welfare. Joelle (2010) studied how the frequency of child labour in various countries increases with the increase in the population of rural areas, the participation of more women in the labour force, and the increase in fertility rates. On the other hand, it decreases with an increase in GDP per capita, the increase in the proportion of educational expenditures in the national income, the increase in life expectancy, and the increase in the proportion of the workforce in the industrial or agricultural sector. Dewlap's (2010) second-hand data from Bangladesh Dhaka slums revealed that small families and a constant income are key financial determinants of Brood's work. Low family income is related to increased benefits from child labour. Maitra and Ray (2010) conducted a study on child labour and child education in Peru, Pakistan, and Ghana. They concluded that poverty is the primary cause of child labour. Therefore, if we focus on assisting households living below the poverty line by providing better sources of income and easy access to education for their children, we can effectively reduce child labour in Pakistan's agricultural sectors. The Hague Worldwide Child Labor discussion took place in 2010, and a plan was offered to eliminate the most horrendous forms of underage employment by 2016. This plan showed a global promise to eradicate child labour. However, actions need to be accelerated, and addressing children working in unsafe conditions in agriculture should be a top priority if we want to fulfil this promise. Reducing child labour in agriculture is not only a matter of human constitutional rights. Still, it is also vital to create decent job opportunities for young people, promote rural growth, and achieve food security.

Research Objectives:
This research aims to examine the socio-economic attributes of the participants, exploring a range of factors including income, education, and employment. Furthermore, the study intends to thoroughly examine the current health risks that children in the target population face. It also aims to determine and examine the particular requirements of kids working in agriculture, clarifying the fundamental elements that lead to their participation in such jobs. Finally, the study aims to provide a series of policy recommendations that would effectively mitigate and eventually eradicate child labor practices in the agriculture industry, supporting the rights and well-being of children who are most vulnerable.

Research Methodology:
One hundred sixty participants were selected for interviews in this research, chosen primarily from rural and agricultural regions of Faisalabad to ensure a representative sample reflective of the targeted population. The selection process involved employing stratified random sampling techniques to ensure diversity across various socio-economic backgrounds. In-depth interviews were conducted with each participant, utilizing a semi-structured approach to allow for flexibility and depth in responses. The interviews were conducted in a conducive and confidential environment to encourage open and honest dialogue. Prior to the interviews, informed consent was obtained from all participants, emphasizing voluntary participation and confidentiality. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy during data analysis. Additionally, field notes were taken to capture non-verbal cues and contextual information. Data saturation was monitored throughout the interview process to ensure comprehensive coverage of relevant themes and insights.

Results and discussion (Uni-variate analysis)
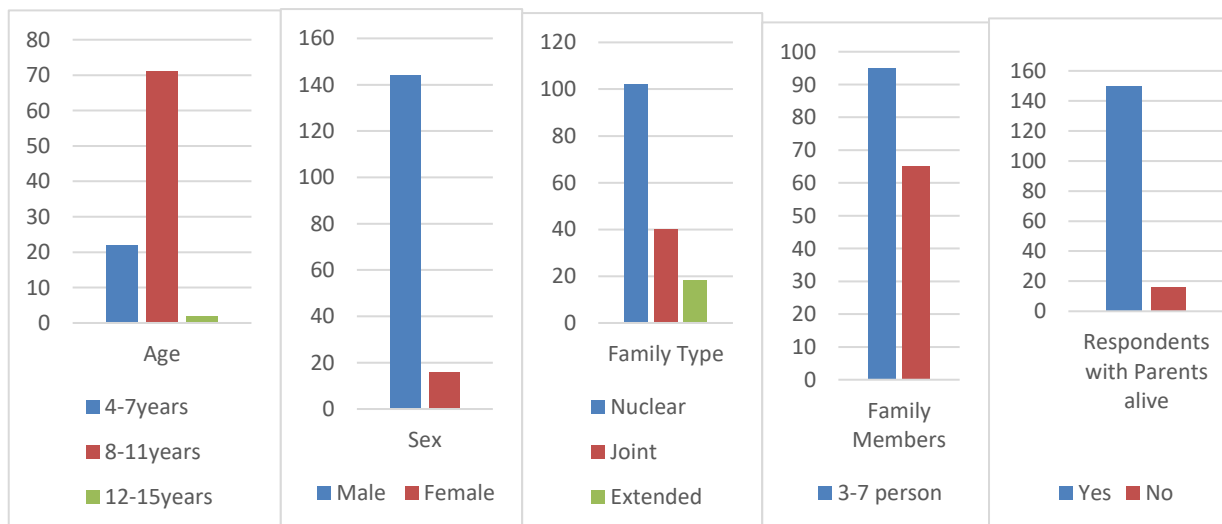
According to the study, over 50% of the participants were aged between 8 and 11, and most were male. Approximately one-third of the participants belonged to nuclear families, with most families having 8-12 members on average. Moreover, both parents of most respondents were alive and working menial jobs.

Our research showed considerable variations in the level of education among the respondents. About 40% attended school presently, and 60% never went. The majority of respondents stopped attending school for financial reasons. However, some of them did not attend school because of their parents' illiteracy.

Our research also discovered that the vast majority (95%) of child labourers belonged to parents who also engaged in labour work. Few of them (5%) had parents working as government servants. There were variations in the age at which our respondents started to work. 43.1% of the respondents started working as early as five years old, 14.4% started working at six years of age, and 42.5% began working at age 7.

Regarding the housing situation of respondents, we discovered that the majority (90%) lived in their own houses. Among these, 46.9% had semi-pucca houses, and 34.4% lived in kucha houses. The monthly incomes of the households of our respondents were mainly on the lesser side. 73.1% had monthly incomes between Rs. 2500 and 3000, and 45.6% had family incomes of Rs. 3000 to 5000. Most of their families had an income ranging between 15000 to 20000 per month.

According to Kumar's 2002 study, 94% of underage workers' families did not own any agricultural land. Only 6% of families owned some land, with 4.3% owning less than 2.5 acres and 1.7% owning 2.5 to 5 acres. Most underage workers had no choice but to work for landowners, earning minimum wages.

The study also revealed that almost all the participants' families owned little to no land. 15% of the respondents had some land in their possession, while 5% of them used their land for work.

(Bi-variate analysis) Testing of hypotheses

Hypothesis 1:   Lower the age at start work of child labour, higher will be the effect of work on their health

Age at start work (in years)	Work effect their health		Total
	No	Yes	
5	11	58	69
	15.9%	84.1%	100.0%
6	12	11	23
	52.2%	47.8%	100.0%
7	46	22	68
	67.6%	32.4%	100.0%
Total	69	91	160
	43.1%	56.9%	100.0%

Chi-square = 38.22   d.f. = 2   P-value = .000**   Gamma = -.721

** = Highly-significant

We analyzed the correlation between various factors and how they affect underage workers' physical health, and it brought vital information into our sight. At first, we observed the relationship between working hours and their effect on child labor's bodily health. The conclusion is that longer working hours have an adverse effect on child worker's health. Many participants supported this hypothesis by addressing that those working longer hours suffered more health issues than those working for reasonable hours.

Hypothesis 2:   Higher the income of the respondents, lower will be effect of work on their health

Income (Rs.)	Work effect their health		Total
	No	Yes	
2500-3000	45	72	117
	38.5%	61.5%	100.0%
3001-3500	15	13	28
	53.6%	46.4%	100.0%
3501-4000	9	6	15
	60.0%	40.0%	100.0%
Total	69	91	160
	43.1%	56.9%	100.0%

Chi-square = 4.02   d.f. = 2   P-value = .134[NS]   Gamma = -.323

NS = Non-significant

While studying the relationship between income and the health of underage workers, we encountered some surprising results. The hypothesis was that a higher income would mean fewer health issues for underage workers. However, our research uncovered that this was different. Moreover, in contrast to what we believed earlier about higher income being linked to fewer

health issues in underage workers, the inverse relationship shown by the Gamma value suggests that higher income is associated with more adverse health issues in child workers working in agricultural sectors.

Hypothesis 3: Long working hours will be affected child labour's health

Working hours	Work effect their health		Total
	No	Yes	
Up to 4	29	8	37
	78.4%	21.6%	100.0%
5-8	35	68	103
	34.0%	66.0%	100.0%
Above 8	5	15	20
	25.0%	75.0%	100.0%
Total	69	91	160
	43.1%	56.9%	100.0%

Chi-square = 24.93 d.f. = 2 P-value = .000** Gamma = .633
** = Highly-significant

When we examined the relationship between the age at which the child starts working, and the health issues the child faces in the future, we discovered that children who began working at a younger age experienced worse health issues later in life. It increases their chances of suffering from severe diseases due to exposure to unsafe substances and working in hazardous conditions for too long. The children who started working later did not suffer from adverse health issues compared to the ones who began working early.

Conclusion:
After thorough analysis, the findings indicate that extended work hours negatively affect the health of underage workers. A child's long-term health is also negatively affected by the age at which they start working. Furthermore, this review rejected the hypothesis that higher income positively impacts child labor. It was observed that higher income has an inverse relationship with the health of child workers. These issues highlight the need for measures to be taken and policies to be established to safeguard the welfare of underage workers and protect them from exploitation.

Suggestions:
Based on the findings, here are some suggestions to combat child labour:

• Implement laws and regulations limiting underage workers' work hours to protect their health and well-being.

• Educate families, communities, and employers about the negative impacts of child labour on children's health and prospects.

• We suggest implementing programs and interventions similar to those successfully used in [insert country or region], which have effectively prevented children from entering the workforce at a young age, focusing on education and skill development.

• Strengthen enforcement of existing laws and introduce penalties for employers who exploit underage workers.

• Offer support services such as counselling, healthcare, and vocational training to child labourers to mitigate the adverse effects of their work and help them transition to safer and more sustainable alternatives.

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