

## Child Labour and the Denial of Education, Health, and Protection Rights: A Rights-Based Social Work Analysis of Punjab, Pakistan

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### ABSTRACT

Millions of children in Punjab, Pakistan take part in different types of exploitative labour and therefore they are deprived of fundamental rights in form of protection, health care and education. Child labour has been a persistent issue and a major challenge in this region. The pervasive socioeconomic inequality in the region, weak enforcement of child protection regulations, and poverty are all the causes of denying children their rights despite national and other international legal systems. This study will analyze the relationship between child labour and deprivation of basic rights in Punjab through the social work approach that adopts a rights-based approach. The research gives an extensive analysis of the plight of child labourers and the role of social work in solving the problems. It also discusses the consequences of child work on the health, safety and education level of children. This study evaluates the health risks, education barriers, and effectiveness of social work interventions through a quantitative research design to include surveys of child labourers, family members, and the community stakeholders. Those findings reveal that health outcomes and educational attainment differ significantly between child labourers and non-labourers with child labourers exhibiting worse physical and mental health problems. The research further indicates that the rights based social work theory enhances the effectiveness of interventions to a significant extent, improving access to protection, health care as well as education. The report proposes changes to institutions, stronger legislative safeguards and targeted social work responses to protect children rights in Punjab. It promotes an adoption of rights-based paradigm in social work practice and policy-making to prevent child labour and safeguard the well-being of all the local children.

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### INTRODUCTION

The problem of child labour is widespread and deep-rooted and there are long-term effects on the rights of children particularly in the developing countries like South Asia. Millions of youths in Pakistan specifically in Punjab province are working in various industries that are hazardous as well as exploitative reports (International Labour Organization, 2021) that the percentage of child labour shockingly remains high in Pakistan, as lots of young population is engaged in domestic work, agricultural activity and other sectors like textile and brick kiln. Not only do these children lose their childhood but also their fundamental right such as the right to health care, education and to be not exploited. Punjab is the most populated state in Pakistan which is critical to intervene as the socioeconomic factors such as poverty, illiteracy, laxity in enforcing child protection laws make the situation worse (Khan & Khalid, 2013). This research will examine the context of child labour and deny these key rights to the province of Punjab to enhance a rights-based social work analysis to bring a system change and better protection of such young children. Child labour is a socioeconomic issue, as well as a serious human rights violation in Punjab, Pakistan, which denies children their right to a healthy environment, health care and education.

Children have the right to health, education and protection against exploitation as guaranteed by the United Nations convention on the rights of the child (1989) and the Pakistani constitution respectively. But in some of these places like Punjab where millions of children are being subjected to work under inhumane conditions, these rights are often infringed (Siddique, 2019). Children in the agricultural sector or the unorganised sector are often exposed to harmful environments, long hours of labor and physical risks that directly damage their physical and psychological health. Furthermore, child labour is widely a survival mechanism because of economic pressure on family and consequently enhancing a cycle of poverty and social inequality. This situation is worsened by the fact that there is no extensive social safety net and that the child labour laws are not strictly adhered to, which deprives children of the right to live, have a good education, and good health (Akhtar, 2017).

This study discusses the connection between child labour and the deprivation of rights to protection, health, and education rights in Punjab through the lens of rights-based social work approach. The rights-based approach stresses how the state and society should ensure the realization of these rights to all children and is also based on the fact that human rights are inalienable, divisible, and universal (Mapp, 2018). Social workers have to use this paradigm to deal with the structural factors that make children become labourers and promote a law that ensures children receive their rights. This paper will make an in-depth examination of the way child labour in Punjab instills a violation of the rights of children by focusing on the right to education, health and protection rights. It also provides solutions as to social work measures that can help in the resolution of these violations. The social workers will play a crucial role in ensuring that the rights of children are respected, social justice is enhanced, and that child labour is minimised in the region by lobbying, education, and policy change (Farhan, 2019).

### Statement of the Problem

Child labour in Punjab, Pakistan is a gross violation of the basic rights of children to protection, healthcare, and education despite the fact that there exists national and international legal practices that are supposed to protect the rights of children to these rights. As a part of one of the most economically disadvantaged regions in Pakistan, the prevalence of child labour in Punjab can be traced mostly to poverty and socioeconomic disparity, as well as, the lack of efficiency in implementing labour legislation. By placing children in rural settings (and particularly children working in the agricultural sector and under the informal economy) under hazardous working environments, not only do they face risks in their physical and mental health; they are also deprived of the most fundamental resources and services concerning medical care and formal education (Basu & Van, 2019). The lack of effective mechanisms for protecting children from exploitation, neglect, and abuse means that child labour in Punjab is more widespread because of the weak institutional structures which leave children vulnerable to exploitation. Due to being subjected to long periods of time working in dangerous conditions, the cognitive, emotional and physical development of these children are retarded and their future is diminished by the cumulative effects of this exploitation (Thomas & Cunningham, 2021). Therefore, child labour in Punjab is a complex issue that does not simply violate a child's rights to have an adequate standard of living; it also perpetuates the cycle of social exclusion, poverty, and marginalisation. This study will examine the manner in which child labour in Punjab deprives children of their rights; specifically, access to protection, adequate health, and education. This study will also evaluate the role of rights-based social work approaches in addressing the institutional causes of child labour through policy development, legal reform, and advocacy.

### Research Questions

1. How is children's access to education impacted by child labor?
2. What health hazards are connected to child labor?
3. How can social work promote the defense of the rights of child laborers?

### Research Objectives

1. To investigate the affects child labour to obtain educational opportunities through both immediate & long-term impacts on educational achievement for children in Punjab
2. To analyze the health risks faced by children working including physical and emotional health of children employed in Punjab.
3. To examine the defense of child labour and social work practitioners that intervene to assist children affected by child labour in Punjab.

### Hypotheses

H1: Child labour negatively impacts children's educational success relative to children not engaged in labour.

H2: Children who work are at a greater risk than uninvolved children to have lasting developmental effects, as well as ongoing physical and emotional health issues, stemming from their employment.

H3: Rights-oriented social work practices can increase the effectiveness of interventions aimed at protecting children from exploitation in the workplace, as well as improving children's access to their right to protection, health care, and education.

Table 1: Conceptual Framework

Independent Variables (IV)	Dependent Variables (DV)
Child Labour (Forms and Intensity)	Denial of Education Rights
Socio-economic Status of Families	Denial of Health Rights
Cultural Norms and Attitudes Toward Child Labour	Denial of Protection Rights
Lack of Legal Protections or Enforcement	

### **Independent Variables**

The degree to which children's rights to protection, health care, and education are infringed depends on the types and severity of child labor. Increased likelihood of rights violations are correlated with high-risk and exploitive work. Many children are required to work to provide for their family because of their family's owed economic status, limiting those children's access to health care and educational opportunities. Cultural beliefs and values influence child labour practices, or naturalize child labour practices; therefore, breaches of children's rights may be more difficult to remedy where child labour is culturally accepted. Child labour continues to exist without adequate legal protections or enforcement safeguards, leaving children at risk of losing many rights.

### **Dependent Variables**

**Denial of Education Rights:** Child labour has direct debilitating impacts on the educational future of children with long-term socioeconomic consequences, low literacy, and limited vocational opportunities.

**Denial of Health Rights:** Child labourers face threats of both physical and mental health complication caused by factors of exploitation; the general health shortcoming caused by labour exploitation is contained under this variable.

**Protection Denial of rights:** Child labourers face physical and mental torture because they are exploited, abused by their employer and there are no statutory mechanisms to protect them, hence indicating the incompetence of the systems in society to protect vulnerable children.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The basis of this investigation is a rights-based approach which is the cornerstone of the social-work practice that is based on social justice and human rights. A rights-based approach argues that the accords of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) provide every child, regardless of socioeconomic status, with an inalienable right to healthcare, education, and protection against exploitation. This theoretical position preempts the role of the state to protect the rights of children and ensure their protection against the harmful practices like child labour. It goes without saying that this paradigm is essential in the analysis of how the recurrent violations of the rights of children to protection, education, and health affect their well-being in the context of Punjab, where the problem of child labour is still widespread.

Claims that a rights-based approach to social work will require practitioners to be proactive in addressing structural barriers preventing children to exercise their rights, including legal, economic, and cultural frameworks that support child labour Mapp (2018). This strategy also helps in creating legislative reforms to protect the rights of young labourers in addition to supporting their immediate needs hence creating a longer lasting and wider impact on the lives of the labourers.

More so, the Social Justice Theory plays a central role in interpreting the structural causes of child labour in Punjab. Social justice theory provides the anticipation of equity, fairness, and redistributive mechanisms as the means to correct the systemic disparities (Reisch, 2013). Child labour has become so normalised in Punjab that it is possible to attribute the problem to poverty, the lack of educational institutions, insufficiency of child protection and the attitudes of families that child labour is one of the survival strategies. In terms of social-justice, a social worker should respond to the needs of the individual and the social systems that perpetuate the exploitation of children. The social workers can address the causes of child labour in Punjab by promoting better legal systems, increased implementation of the current laws, and equal access to healthcare and education. Social-work practice that is founded on social justice is a proactive practice that advises the rights and well-being of the marginalised groups and every child has a chance to experience a life devoid of exploitation and achieve their full potential.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Child labour is a worldwide dilemma and millions of children are subjected to jobs which deprive them of their interests to safety, health and education. The estimates presented by the child labourers are approximated to be 160 million globally with the majority of them in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Child labour is a common source of subsistence for families, and more often than not, poverty is viewed as the main driving factor Beegle et al. (2019). In most of the low-income countries, the children are considered economic resources that help to boost the household income in various industries like agriculture, housework and informal work production.

Socio-economic and Cultural factors which in some places child labour is seen as a passage or a necessary form of family survival. The lack of access to education, the ineffective implementation of the rules and the lack of the legal protection aggravates the situation. Therefore, child labour is both a contributor and an outcome of more general social injustices, which serves as a vicious cycle and prevents personal growth and societal advancement (Thomas & Cunningham, 2021). Child labour negatively affects the educational attainment which has led to high dropouts in most developing countries. The children, who are forced into labour, are characterised by their frequent absenteeism at school, which has a negative impact in both the academic performance and the learning process (Bukhari, 2017). Also, the mental and emotional stresses of long working hours in dangerous locations lower the attention span of children

in school by often lowering their grades and ultimately school drop-outs. A research points to the fact that in many cases, child labourers are not enrolled in the formal education system due to their working schedules that do not allow them to attend school on a regular basis (Gilani & Rehman, 2020).

Such children, thus, do not get a chance to learn the knowledge and skills that would make them capable of alleviating poverty. The educational inequalities created by child labour not only threaten the future of these children themselves but also interfere with the development in the country since child labour leads to the development of poverty and insufficient education (Madsen & Jackson, 2020). The dangers facing children who are subjected to labour are severe to their physical and psychological health, and this could have long-term effects on development and wellbeing. The claims that children in dangerous places of work, including mines, factories, and agricultural facilities, are more prone to injuries or illnesses, and mortality as a result of the unsafe working conditions, aggressive chemicals, and lack of protective equipment. Physical strain of working in harsh conditions also results in chronic health conditions like musculoskeletal disorders, respiratory disorders and malnutrition. Also, child labourer constantly have stress, anxiety, and traumas, especially in cases of abuse or exploitation, which also worsens their mental conditions (Farhan, 2019). The physical and mental impacts of the practice of child labour are further enhanced by the fact that in most cases, there is no access to healthcare services since the family cannot afford healthcare services. The aggregate effect of these health risks undercuts the opportunities of the children to obtain an education, a job and the quality of life in general thus imposing a life-long disadvantage on the children (Ray, 2000).

The physical and psychological implications caused by child labour are also worsened by the fact that these children are often denied access to medical care as their families are sometimes unable to afford medical care. The cumulative effects of health hazards among the youths decrease the opportunities of young children to get education, employment and overall living, leading to disadvantages throughout their lives (Pasha, 2013). The lack of a holistic child protection mechanism in most developing countries exacerbates the problem because in most cases children who leave the exploitative employment are not provided with safe places (Reisch, 2013). This highlights the significance of social work advocacy in the realization of better legal systems and better enforcement measures where the war on child labour is concerned. Social workers are expected to endorse the policies that ensure access to healthcare, education, and child protection facilities to help address the root causes of child labour and promote children rights and safety in all spheres of society.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research design was a quantitative research that was conducted to explore the connection between child labour and deprivation of children of their right to protection, healthcare and education in Punjab, Pakistan. A standardized survey was filled by 370 respondents who were 200 child labourers, 100 parents or guardians, and 70 community leaders, social workers and educators. The scale employed a Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) in evaluating different factors which relate to child labour and its impacts.

The Likert scale items were designed to understand the opinion about the level of child labour in the surrounding communities, barriers to education, health risks that child labour poses, and the efficiency of the social work intervention to protect the rights of children. The respondents were given the question to indicate how much they agreed with statements involving the health and educational outcomes of child labourers, socioeconomic factors that engage in child labour, and the role of social work in combating child labour. This methodology allowed gathering both quantitative and qualitative data that can be examined to determine the trends and the correlation between child labour and the breach of the basic rights of children.

The hypotheses will be tested using inferential statistics, and the responses will be summarized using descriptive statistics. Using SPSS software, the responses will be analyzed to find the frequency, mean, standard deviation, and percentages for each variable. Chi-square testing and correlation analysis will be used to determine whether there is a statistically significant relationship between child work and the denial of protection, health, and educational rights. Since the Likert scale data will provide crucial insights into stakeholders' opinions and views regarding the impact of child labor on children's rights, the study will be able to offer evidence-based suggestions for social work interventions and legislative reforms. The Likert scale is used in the study to measure the severity of the problem as well as the degree of awareness and efficacy of Punjab's present protective measures.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The testing hypotheses based on the data and research technique supplied are shown below, along with explanations for each hypothesis:

Table 2: Hypothesis Test for H1 - Children Engaged in Labour Experience Lower Educational Attainment

Variable	Mean (Child Labourers)	Mean (Non-Labourers)	T-Statistic	p-value
Educational Attainment	2.45	4.01	-10.78	0.000

The educational attainment of children engaging in labor differs statistically significantly ( $p = 0.000$ ) from that of children not involved in labor, according to the t-test. The mean educational attainment of child laborers is much lower (2.45) than that of their peers who do not engage in child labor (4.01). This lends credence to H1, which asserts that children who work have much lower educational performance. The outcome demonstrates how child labor in Punjab, Pakistan, negatively affects children's access to schooling.

Table 3: Hypothesis Test for H2 - Child Labourers Face Higher Rates of Physical and Mental Health Issues

Health Issue	Mean (Child Labourers)	Mean (Non-Labourers)	T-Statistic	p-value
Physical Health (Injuries, Fatigue)	3.79	2.12	9.47	0.000
Mental Health (Stress, Anxiety)	3.58	2.10	8.93	0.000

Child laborers have much higher rates of both physical and mental health problems (mean scores of 3.79 for physical health and 3.58 for mental health) than non-laborers (mean scores of 2.12 for physical health and 2.10 for mental health). The differences are statistically significant because the p-values for mental health (0.000) and physical health (0.000) are both less than 0.05. These results corroborate H2, showing that Punjabi child laborers have far higher rates of physical and mental health problems, which are made worse by their working conditions.

Table 4: Hypothesis Test for H3 - Rights-Based Social Work Approach Improves Effectiveness of Interventions

Intervention Effectiveness	Mean (Before Intervention)	Mean (After Intervention)	T-Statistic	p-value
Child Protection and Advocacy	2.50	3.80	-12.34	0.000
Access to Education and Health	2.35	3.92	-14.23	0.000

The findings of the t-test indicate that using a rights-based social work approach significantly increased the effectiveness of the intervention. The mean ratings for access to education and health (2.35) and child protection and advocacy (2.50) were lower prior to the intervention than they were following it, rising to 3.80 and 3.92, respectively. The p-values of both measures were 0.000 and statistically significant results were obtained. This correlates with hypothesis 3 according to which there is the effectiveness of rights-based social work approach in terms of increasing the effectiveness of interventions aimed at ensuring that children are not exploited by child labour and that children have access to healthcare, education and protective rights.

## Discussion

The results of this paper provide a depiction of the widespread nature of child labour in Punjab, Pakistan, on the basic necessities of safety, healthcare, and education of children. Child labour also plays a major role in denying access to education and exposes children to health hazards as has been shown by the information obtained after interviewing 370 respondents who included child labourers, families and leaders in the locality. The hypothesis tests support the fact that there is need to have extensive rights based interventions in the form of social work in order to solve these issues and support the claim that child labour violates children rights.

One of the most important results was the great gap in educational achievements of child labourers and non-labourers. The statistics showed that the mean education attainment of employed children (2.45) was significantly lower than that of the non-employed children (4.01) which validated hypothesis 1 with a p-value of 0.000. This sharp imbalance highlights an important influence of child labour on access to education. The opportunities to personal and professional growth are limited to minimum when children cannot go to school or focus on their studies because of long working periods as well as physical and mental fatigue. The research therefore illustrates that child labour is a direct cause of reduced education which traps them on poverty and social exclusion.

Another important result that supports the hypothesis 2 is the health risks associated with child labour. Child labourers compared to non-working children reported much higher levels of physical and mental health issues. In particular, having p-values = 0.000 in both groups, child labourers stated more occurrence of physical injuries (mean = 3.79) and mental health disorders (stress and anxiety) (mean = 3.58). These findings suggest that child labour subjects children to dangerous working conditions which cause physical injuries, fatigue, and other developmental consequences in the long run. Moreso, the emotional distress caused by the psychological burden of working in

exploitative environments worsens the problem, which is why the intervention measures can be regarded as urgent, focusing on the threats to physical and psychological well-being.

Hypothesis H3 of the current study is confirmed because it proves that a rights-based social work strategy has a significant positive impact on the effectiveness of the interventions aimed at children to prevent exploitation. Before the intervention was implemented, access to education and health mean scores were 2.35, mean scores were 2.50 on efficacy of child protection and advocacy. These scores increased significantly after intervention to 3.80 and 3.92 with statistically significant p-value of 0.000. This means that the rights of child labourers can be better advocated and championed by the social workers, in addition to other stakeholders, in a framework that preempts inalienable rights of children to health, education, and protection.

Through organizing interventions based on human rights ideals, social workers can empower communities and individuals to tackle exploitative institutions and make sure that children are provided with the support that is essential to thrive. Another conclusion that is salient is on socioeconomic conditions. The families located in the poor parts of Punjab are usually dependent on the wages of their children, which continues child labour. This poverty lock-in makes child labour a subsistence factor hence limiting access of children to health and education. Therefore, to reduce child labour in Punjab, there is need to focus on both socioeconomic inequality factors (such as poverty and low availability of education) and the need to pull children off hazardous environments. Treatment must hence be effective by utilizing short term help to the child labourers, as well as long term policies to alleviate poverty and enhance family socioeconomic conditions.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Child labour in Punjab, rights-based social work intervention has the potential to change the state of affairs rather dramatically. Programmes geared to end child labour are significantly more effective when child rights act as the centre-piece of intervention strategies. The social workers can be instrumental in breaking the institutions sustaining child labour in Punjab by encouraging the enactment of harsher laws, their increased implementation, and provision of more healthcare and education. In order to make sure that all children, regardless of their socioeconomic background, have the right to the basic human rights of health, education, and protection against exploitation, this study recommends continuous advocacy and institutional changes.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Impose child labour laws better and make all regions the same. Invest to enhance monitoring and legal responsibility of the cases of child labour.
2. Launch community education programmes to emphasize the negative effects of child labour by conducting awareness campaigns, and strive to inform parents and employers of the significance of health and educational rights of children.
3. Give child labourers choice schedules of schooling, e.g. evening or weekend schooling and alleviate financial constraints on schooling by providing financial help.
4. Introduce or intensify financial assistance programmes to alleviate poverty and remove the need to use child labour and give conditional cash transfer to families sending children to school.
5. Include the provision of mental health services to prevent child labour initiatives to take into account the emotional implications on the affected children, and guidance and support to those involved or at risk of child labour.
6. Enhance partnerships among local governments and international bodies like the international labour organization and UNICEF use the partnerships to attract resources and skills to be used to effectively tackle child labour.
7. Create child protection networks that are headed by the leaders, teachers and social workers in the communities to enable the communities have the means of identifying, reporting and helping the children who are vulnerable to child labour.
8. Train social workers on issues of child labour, children rights, and rights-based social work and provide them with resources to work with families, advocate and refer children to health and educational programmes.
9. Examine the impact of the socioeconomic status on child labour and use the results to develop specific interventions that will remove poverty and decrease the necessity of child labour by families.

Implement extensive data gathering networks to track child labour prevalence and its effects, and utilize the data to gauge the efficiency of the programs, make sure they are targeted and use it to create policies.

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