

Case Report

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Case Report

Exploring the Socio-Economic Drivers of Child Labor: A Case Study of the Hotel Industry in Quetta, Balochistan

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Abstract: Child labor is a complex issue influenced by various socio-economic and political factors. This study aims to explore the socio-economic causes of child labor in Quetta, Balochistan, with a specific focus on the hotel and restaurant sector. Using a quantitative approach, the study surveyed 200 children employed in these industries through structured questionnaires. In addition, key informant interviews were conducted to gain deeper insights into the root causes of child labor. The findings reveal a strong correlation between child labor and the socio-economic conditions of the family. However, poverty alone does not account for the prevalence of child labor. The study distinguishes between two sets of factors: push factors (such as poverty, unemployment of adult family members, and the need to meet basic family needs) and pull factors (including parental pressure, family size, limited access to quality education, and cultural norms). The study concludes with practical recommendations for stakeholders to address the issue of child labor.

Keywords: Child labor; Hotel industry; Socio-economic factors; Poverty; Balochistan; Education; Family dynamics

1. Introduction

A child is defined as any human being under the age of 18 years, unless national laws specify an earlier age of majority (CRC-1990). Similarly, the 1973 Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan defines a child as anyone under the age of 18 years. However, the Employment of Children Act 1991 sets the definition of a child as anyone under 14 years of age, with an adolescent being defined as someone under 18. Following the 18th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan, the minimum age for labor was raised to 16 years, though no changes were made to labor laws regarding child workers. Article 25(A) of the Constitution mandates compulsory education for all children aged 5 to 16 years, reinforcing that children under 16 should not be permitted to work. The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines child labor as any economic activity that interferes with a child's childhood, schooling, self-esteem, and damages their physical, emotional, and psychological development (paycheck.pk, accessed April 29, 2018).

2. Literature Review:

Child labor is a global issue that affects not only developing countries but has also become a challenge in many developed nations. The prevalence of child labor has been steadily increasing over time, despite efforts to address it. Countries like India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh have some of the highest numbers of children who are out of school and are engaged in child labor, representing nearly half of all child laborers globally (Fyfe, 2004).

Child labor remains a significant obstacle to social development worldwide, as it is not only a social evil but also a complex issue that continues to affect both developed and developing nations. While many countries have implemented plans to combat child labor, the issue persists. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), child labor refers to children under the age of 14 or

15 engaging in work that prevents them from accessing education or enjoying their childhood. ILO reports estimate that over 200 million children are involved in various forms of child labor, with more than 8 million engaged in hazardous and dangerous types of work. Many children work to support their families, with some involved in running shops, garages, and hotels, even as young as 5 to 14 years old (Ejaz, 2008).

While poverty is often cited as a major cause of child labor, it is not the sole factor. Cultural values, societal norms, and traditions in many societies also contribute to the prevalence of child labor. In some communities, it is a common practice for children to assist their parents in their work as a form of family support (Ariyanti, 2018). Other significant factors include lack of resources, insufficient governmental focus on addressing child labor, and a lack of awareness about the harmful effects of such work on children's health and development (Avais et al., 2016).

A study conducted in Solapur, Maharashtra, in 2007 aimed to identify the causes of child labor in the city. The findings revealed that the majority of children worked due to insufficient family income and resources, which forced them to seek employment to help alleviate their family's financial difficulties (Wadgave et al., 2013).

3. Pakistan's Scenario on Child Labor:

In Pakistan, children make up about 10 percent of the total workforce, with many of them working between the ages of 10 and 14 years. The country's per capita income is approximately \$1,900, and the average white-collar worker earns around \$5 per day. The average Pakistani family, which often includes 9 to 10 members, struggles to support itself on this daily wage. In the 1990s, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) estimated that 11 million children were engaged in various forms of labor, with nearly half of them being under the age of 10. Additionally, it was projected that child workers made up about one-fourth of the country's total workforce.

A large number of these children work in shops, workshops, and other informal sectors. Among the working population, 22.5% earn less than PKR 500 per month (around USD 6) (Zaidi et al., 2013).

In societies like Pakistan, a significant number of children contribute to household income by participating in economic activities. Child labor has been a crucial element in nearly every sector of the country's economy. Many children work in informal sectors, either helping relatives with household chores or serving as domestic workers in homes. Additionally, they often work part-time or overtime in businesses, shops, on the streets, and in hotels. Most working children are employed alongside their parents in the informal economy, particularly in agriculture and small-scale industries (Mazhar, 2008).

4. Child Labor in Balochistan:

Child labor is a pervasive issue across the Balochistan region, with children engaged in a wide range of exploitative work, including in coal mines, construction sites, auto workshops, hotels, and as garbage collectors. This widespread child labor has significant negative impacts on the physical, mental, and moral well-being of children, leading to severe issues such as trafficking and other forms of abuse.

According to a 2013 report by the International Labour Organization (ILO), over 500 children were found working in coal mines in the Loralai district of Balochistan. Additionally, the Society for Human Resource Development (SEHR) reported that approximately 10,000 child laborers are working in Quetta.

Child labor in the region also severely affects children's access to education. Of the 3.6 million children in Balochistan, around 2.3 million are deprived of schooling and are instead forced into labor, often working in garages alongside their parents or other family members (Altaf, 2017).

5. Worst Forms of Child Labor:

There are several forms of child labor that are considered the most harmful, including slavery, child trafficking, debt bondage, serfdom, and forced labor.

- **Slavery** is the most extreme form of child labor, where children are forced to surrender their rights and freedoms to their "masters," often under threat or coercion.
- **Child trafficking** is another grave form of exploitation, where children are kidnapped and transported to other cities or countries, or, in some cases, sent by their parents due to extreme poverty.
- **Debt bondage** occurs when parents incur debts that they cannot repay. In this situation, they are often forced to send their children to work for the creditor, with the children working until the debt is paid off.
- **Serfdom** is a form of child labor where a person is forced to work without pay or for very little compensation, often under oppressive conditions, due to the control of another person or group.
- **Forced labor** involves children being compelled to work against their will, without their consent, in harsh and exploitative conditions (Pouty et al., 2004).

6. Causes of Child Labor:

Child labor is a social evil driven by multiple interconnected factors. Key contributors to its persistence include poverty, illiterate parents, large family sizes, lack of income resources, limited job opportunities for educated individuals, an underdeveloped education system, overpopulation, and traditional societal practices (Rao et al., 2004).

In many cases, children are found in vulnerable labor situations due to the neglect or indifference of their parents, who often do not prioritize their children's education or well-being (Dessy et al., 2005). The most pressing causes of child labor are poverty, lack of education, poor economic conditions, and ignorance among parents regarding the risks of child labor (Wassan et al., 2004).

Ground realities reveal that the lack of basic needs, healthcare facilities, and access to education all increase the likelihood of children being forced into labor. Families struggling to make ends meet often send their children to work to contribute to household income (Akhtar et al., 2010).

A survey conducted in Lahore, Sialkot, and Gujranwala (major cities in Punjab, Pakistan) found that poverty, outdated family traditions, and the struggle for survival were key drivers of child labor. The average age of child laborers was found to be 11 years, with children working to meet their family's daily needs (Khan, 1982).

The root cause of child labor is often **poverty**, which forces families to send their children to work, as these families are unable to meet even the basic necessities of life. **Low aspirations** and lack of investment in children's futures are also major causes globally. Parents may prioritize short-term survival over long-term education, pushing children into the workforce. Additionally, **the demand for unskilled labor** is a contributing factor, as children are seen as cheap, unskilled workers, making them easy to exploit.

Another significant cause is **illiteracy** and the high cost of education. In many areas, the illiteracy rate is high, and parents may not send their children to school due to the financial burden of education, leading to an increase in child labor.

Early marriages and overpopulation also contribute to child labor. In regions where early marriages are common, parents often have large numbers of children and, due to limited resources, send them to work in order to financially support the family (Victor, 2017).

The causes of child labor can be categorized into three main types: **pull factors**, **push factors**, and **interactive factors**:

- **Pull factors:** These are external factors that attract children into the workforce, such as the low wages that employers are willing to pay children. For example, during the 1990s in Bangladesh, garment factories attracted poverty-stricken children by offering low wages.
- **Push factors:** These are internal pressures that force children into labor, such as extreme poverty, the loss of a family breadwinner, or parental separation, which compel children to work in order to support the family.
- **Interactive factors:** These are psychological and social factors that push children into labor. For instance, children may be manipulated or exploited by adults who take advantage of their desire to earn money. Other interactive factors include lack of interest in education, failure in exams, peer pressure, family punishment, or psychological stress at home.

The two primary causes of child labor are the **lack of education** and **lack of awareness**. Education is one of the most effective ways to combat child labor and poverty. Therefore, the provision of free, quality primary education must be a top priority for governments, with easy access to schools and affordable education. The second major factor is the **lack of awareness** about the harmful effects of child labor. In many regions, there is insufficient awareness about the dangers of child labor and the importance of educating children (Saddat, 2009).

7. Methodology

This study is descriptive in nature, focusing on the socio-economic causes of child labor, particularly in the hotel industry in Quetta. While several studies have explored similar themes, this research specifically examines the factors influencing child labor in hotels, considering not only the impact of poverty but also other factors such as family-run businesses.

A total of 200 working children were selected through an accidental sampling technique. Data were collected using structured questionnaires, key informant interviews, and direct observations. To ensure the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, a pre-testing exercise was conducted.

Once collected, the data were cleaned, processed, and analyzed using **SPSS** to perform descriptive statistical analysis.

8. Results and Discussion

Hotel Businesses in Quetta and the Contribution of Children

The study focused on children involved in labor at hotels in Quetta, with respondents including both **paid** and **unpaid** child workers. Paid children receive direct compensation for their work—either daily, weekly, or monthly—while unpaid children typically work in family-run hotels (e.g., under the supervision of their fathers, older brothers, or uncles in joint family setups). Despite not receiving wages, these children still contribute economically by saving the money that would otherwise be paid to external workers.

In Quetta, hotels vary in size—large, medium, and small—and offer different types of food and services. Children in these hotels perform a wide range of tasks, including:

- Serving food to customers,
- Cleaning dishes and hotel premises,
- Cutting vegetables and meat,
- Bringing water and other supplies,
- Preparing tea or food in some cases,
- Loading and unloading goods (both food and non-food items).

These tasks expose children to difficult physical and emotional challenges, often resulting in both short- and long-term **psychosocial problems**.

Personal Profile of the Respondents

All of the children interviewed in this study were boys, as cultural norms in the region typically exclude girls from working in hotels and restaurants. The **mean age** of the respondents was 13.4 years. Most children spoke **Pashto** as their mother tongue, reflecting the predominance of Pashtoon-run businesses in the hotel sector of Quetta.

A key finding was that only **3% of the respondents** had completed **middle school**, while **34%** were **literate at the primary school level**. The remaining children had either never attended school or dropped out early. About **13%** had received religious education from a **Madrassa**.

Regarding family background, most of the children lived in a **joint family system**. **36%** of the children lived away from their families in Quetta, having migrated from other districts in Balochistan in search of work. Notably, **38%** of the respondents had other **underage family members** involved in economic activities. This suggests that child labor is becoming more common in families with

multiple working children, particularly in low-income households. However, **middle-class families** were also found to have children working in family-owned hotels.

Socio-economic Causes of Child Labor in Hotels/Restaurants

Child labor is a complex issue influenced by various socio-economic, political, and geographical factors. This study specifically focused on identifying the socio-economic causes of child labor in Quetta's hotel and restaurant industry. While poverty is a significant driver of child labor, the study reveals that other social factors are also at play.

According to the data in **Figure 1**, the majority of working children (94%) reported that their involvement in child labor was due to their family's **insufficient income**. An almost identical percentage (91%) indicated that they had taken up work to fill the gap in family income caused by the **unemployment of older family members**.

Further analysis showed that **two-thirds** of the children agreed that they worked because there were no **elder family members** available to provide for the family. Additionally, **70%** of the respondents reported working to fulfill basic family needs, and **53%** cited the **rising unemployment** of family members as a contributing factor.

These findings strongly suggest that **poor income conditions, unemployment of adult family members**, and the need to meet **basic family needs** are the primary factors driving child labor in hotels and restaurants. These results align with similar research on child labor conducted in other regions of Balochistan and Pakistan (Wassan et al., 2014; Wadgave & Godale, 2013; Zaidi et al., 2013; Khan, 1982; Akhtar et al., 2010; Avais et al., 2016).

Socio-economic Factor	Percentage of Respondents Agreeing	Interpretation
Lack of Family Income	94%	Lack of family income is the strongest driver of child labor in hotels.
To Overcome Basic Family Needs	70%	Many children work to help meet their family's basic financial needs.
Increased Unemployment in the Family	53%	Family unemployment contributes significantly to child labor in hotel businesses.
Filling the Gap Due to Unemployment of Family Members	91%	Child labor often fills the income gap caused by adult family members' unemployment.
No Adult Male Family Member to Support the Family	30%	The absence of an adult male breadwinner in the family leads to child labor.

9. Non-Economic Factors Contributing to Child Labor in Hotels/Restaurants

In addition to the **economic factors** previously discussed (Figure 1), the study also identifies several **non-economic factors** that significantly contribute to the prevalence of **child labor** in hotels and restaurants in Quetta. These factors are deeply intertwined with the **socioeconomic conditions** of the family, such as **family type, education, income level, geographical factors**, and the **occupation** of the family's elder members.

The key non-economic factors influencing child labor in the hotel sector include:

- Parental Pressure**
 - A substantial number of children (57%) reported that they work in hotels due to **parental pressure**. This is particularly prevalent in families where parents, especially in rural areas of Quetta or nearby districts like **Pishin** and **Killa Abdullah**, depend on the hotel business as their primary source of livelihood. These families often engage their children in the same industry, either working with the family or with known associates in the hotel business.
 - Cultural expectations** play a significant role here, as parents view child labor as a form of family contribution rather than exploitation. This pressure is not only financially motivated but also stems from cultural norms that expect children, particularly older siblings, to assist with family-run businesses, even at the cost of their education.
- Family Size**

- **Larger family size** is another important factor contributing to child labor. As shown in Figure 2, 67% of respondents believe that the **number of children** in a family directly correlates with a higher tendency to send children to work in hotels. In larger families, the financial burden is often spread across multiple children, which increases the likelihood that older children, especially, will be sent to work. This trend is also linked to the **cultural practice** of involving children in economic activities to help support the household.
3. **Cultural Practices and Family Traditions**
- **Cultural values** and **family traditions** have a strong influence on child labor practices. Nearly 51% of respondents pointed out that **traditional cultural practices** compel children to participate in labor, especially within the hospitality sector. In some families, helping parents with economic activities, such as working in hotels, is considered part of a child’s **upbringing** and is expected as a cultural norm.
 - In many societies, children are expected to contribute to the family income as part of a **family’s collective effort**. In regions like Quetta, where extended families often live together in **joint family systems**, these practices are normalized and can sometimes outweigh the importance of formal education.
4. **Access to and Quality of Education**
- **Limited access** to quality education, particularly in rural areas, contributes to the high rate of child labor. Many children do not attend school, either due to **financial constraints** or the belief that **work** is more important than **schooling**. Families may not see education as a priority, especially when children can earn money that directly contributes to meeting the family’s immediate needs.
 - Even when education is accessible, the **quality** may be insufficient to motivate families to keep children in school. **Drop-out rates** are high, especially when the benefits of working outweigh the perceived value of education. As a result, children are often sent to work in hotels, where they help meet the family’s daily needs instead of pursuing educational opportunities.
5. **Geographical Factors and Occupation of Elder Family Members**
- The geographical location of a family and the type of work that **adult family members** are involved in also influence the likelihood of child labor. In Quetta, many families are from rural areas where economic opportunities are scarce. The **hotel industry** in Quetta is often seen as a viable option for earning a living, and this extends to involving children in these businesses.
 - **The occupation of elder family members** is also a significant factor. Families where **adult family members** are either unemployed or engaged in **low-wage jobs** may resort to sending their children to work in hotels. This is particularly common in areas like **Pishin** and **Killa Abdullah**, where the **hotel business** is a primary livelihood and children are expected to help support their families by contributing to this industry.

Non-Economic Factors:

Factor	Percentage of Respondents Affected
Parental Pressure	57%
Larger Family Size	67%
Cultural Practices	51%
Inadequate Access to Education	High correlation with child labor, particularly among those who dropped out early

Socio-Cultural and Economic Factors Contributing to Child Labor in Hotels: Analysis of Findings

In the context of child labor in the hotel industry in Quetta, the study highlights a range of **socio-economic** and **cultural factors** that drive children into the workforce. As illustrated by **Figure 2**, several factors related to **family dynamics**, **cultural practices**, and **economic pressures** contribute to the phenomenon of child labor in the hospitality sector.

1. Family Size and Economic Pressure

As shown in **Figure 2**, a large majority (67%) of respondents believe that **larger family size** is a key factor leading children to work in hotels. In families with many children, the tendency to send older children to work in **restaurants and hotels** becomes more prevalent. The logic behind this is simple: larger families often face financial constraints and rely on the **contribution of all family members** to meet household needs.

In such families, elder children are frequently sent to work in the **hotel industry**, a sector where **child labor** is relatively easy to exploit due to the **low wages** offered, and the **lack of regulatory oversight**. Thus, children from larger families are often seen as economic assets who can help ease the financial burden by contributing to the family income.

2. Parental Pressure to Contribute

Another significant factor identified is **parental pressure**, with 57% of the respondents indicating that they work in hotels due to pressure from their parents or elder family members. This is especially common among families from rural areas of **Quetta** or neighboring districts such as **Pishin** and **Killa Abdullah**, where the **hotel business** is a primary livelihood. These families often have deep ties to the hotel industry, and children are expected to contribute to the family's income by either working directly in their own family-run hotels or with known hotel owners.

The **economic necessity** of such practices is compounded by the **cultural expectation** that children, especially in joint family systems, will help their parents in running family businesses, even at the cost of their education. The **intergenerational cycle** of child labor continues in such families, where children work to support the financial needs of the household, perpetuating the pattern into future generations.

3. Cultural Practices and Tradition

As pointed out in **Figure 2**, 51% of respondents indicated that **traditional/cultural practices** are a key reason why children are involved in hotel labor. This is particularly prevalent in regions where **cultural norms** dictate that children, especially boys, assist with household economic activities from a young age. Such practices are deeply ingrained and often take precedence over formal education or other developmental opportunities for children.

The **cultural acceptance** of child labor in some communities further fuels this issue, as it is seen as a rite of passage or a necessary part of growing up. This phenomenon is not just about immediate survival but also about continuing a long-standing tradition of children contributing to the family's economic activities, whether it is working in hotels or other businesses.

4. Economic Factors and Poverty

The study also confirms that **economic hardship** is a primary driver of child labor. Children in Quetta's hotel industry is mostly from **low-income families** where parents face immense financial pressures. A significant proportion of the respondents (92.5%) agreed that their families' **low income** was the primary reason they were forced to work in hotels. The study reveals that many families in Quetta struggle to afford basic necessities, including accommodation. The high cost of **housing** and **living expenses** forces families to rely on **children's labor** to meet the basic needs of the household.

Inflation and the **lack of income opportunities** are cited by **experts** as additional contributing factors to the high prevalence of child labor in the region. With few adult employment opportunities and rising living costs, children are seen as an important economic resource for their families.

5. Lack of Education and Awareness

The study found that many working children had either dropped out of school or never attended school at all. This lack of education is often a consequence of both **economic necessity** and **cultural expectations**. In families where education is not prioritized, children are more likely to work to help with household expenses, rather than attend school. The **limited access to quality education** in rural areas of Quetta, as well as **cultural beliefs** that value work over formal education, further exacerbate the issue.

Moreover, children are often unaware of the importance of education or the potential risks associated with early labor. Many children expressed a preference for working over attending school, as working provides immediate financial benefits, while education seems less urgent.

6. Legal and Policy Issues

The absence of **effective laws** to prevent **child labor** in hotels is a significant concern. The study revealed that the **lack of enforcement** of child labor laws is a major factor contributing to the problem. There is also a general **lack of awareness** about the harmful effects of child labor, both on the children's health and future prospects. Many families are simply unaware of the legal protections available to children, and the **lack of government resources** to provide alternative support further compounds the issue.

Additionally, **overpopulation** is identified as a major cause of child labor. As the population grows, families with limited resources find it increasingly difficult to meet basic needs, resulting in children being sent to work. The absence of an effective **family planning system**, combined with cultural practices that allow **polygamy** and **remarriage**, leads to larger families with more children, making child labor a necessity rather than a choice.

10. Conclusion

The **causes of child labor** in the hotel industry in Quetta, as identified in the study, are deeply rooted in **poverty**, **inflation**, and the **large size of families**. These socio-economic factors compel children to enter the workforce at a very young age, often at the expense of their physical and mental well-being. Many of these children are unaware of the long-term harm that early employment can inflict on their development.

However, addressing child labor is not just the responsibility of the affected families; it is also the duty of the **government** and **state** to protect the welfare of its citizens, particularly vulnerable children. To mitigate this issue, **effective legislation** must be enacted and enforced. The government should prioritize **family welfare services**, ensuring that families, particularly those facing economic hardship, have access to **social support systems** and **educational opportunities** for their children.

Education and the **right to play** are fundamental rights of every child. Therefore, the government must take immediate steps to guarantee that these rights are upheld. This can be achieved by improving **access to quality education**, making it **affordable and accessible**, and **raising awareness** within communities about the importance of education over child labor. Moreover, a **strict and comprehensive child labor law** needs to be enacted and implemented effectively to curb this pervasive social issue.

In conclusion, the prevention of child labor requires a multi-pronged approach, combining **strong legal frameworks**, **community awareness**, and **economic support** for families. Only through these efforts can we create a society where children are allowed to grow, learn, and play without being forced into labor at such an early stage in their lives.

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