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# Socio-Economic Impact of Bonded Child Labour in Pakistan

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this paper was to investigate the impacts of bonded child labour in the brick kiln industries. It aimed to analyse that how these children are exploited for less wages and increased work hours so that to highlight the complete violation of human rights in Pakistan.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The paper analyses the literature on the socio-economic conditions of the children particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan and engages its theoretical development.

**Findings** – The paper analyses that the socio-economic conditions of the poor masses especially the children in KP, Pakistan are deteriorating day by day. Moreover, the poor policies of the government both federal and provincial to cater the needs of the underprivileged class are further worsening the situation.

**Research limitations/implications** – The research uses an analytical approach based on some empirical data to probe into the heart of this issue.

**Originality/value** – This paper traces out the policies being formulated by the government of Pakistan from time to time. However, there is a strong dichotomy between what the government is trying to convey and the ground realities in different parts of the country. This paper, therefore, investigates four distinguishing points: social conditions of bonded labour, exploitative strategies used for bonded labour, the extent of bonded child labour, pessimistic effects of hazardous child labour on the personality of the affected children.

**Paper type** – Mixed Method Approach (Quantitative and Quantitative data collection) has been adopted in this Paper.

**Keywords** - *Labour Reforms, Bonded Child Labour, Advance Money, Brick Kilns and Loan Burden.*

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## 1. Introduction

Children are prospective assets for every nation irrespective of their social and economic conditions. Their significance neither can be denied nor ignored since they are the future of a particular country. If a nation ignores the status of its children, it cannot compete the rest of the world in terms of socio-economic uplift of its citizens. Keeping in view the importance of this asset in the future prosperity of a country, they should be given proper conditions and environment whereby their personalities can be groomed for their future responsibilities. However, many children from poor and deprived background suffer the harshness of working conditions in many developing countries including Pakistan. Child labour is an evil and a serious problem in today's world. It has assumed a manipulative and/or exploitative aspect all over the world and Pakistan has no exception in this regard. Children are not only socially oppressed but also suffer moral corruption especially in Pakistan where there is no check and balance by the government. According to the World Bank survey, Pakistan lines the sixth most populous country in the world with 173.8 million people; Literacy rate in 2008 stood at 53% whereas infant mortality rate was noted to be maximum among South Asian countries. The right to education, health and opportunities for standard physical development are basic to every member of a state; however, these rights have been denied in Pakistan. As a result, millions of children are living under poverty line and this situation exists even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Pakistan, claims Afzal (2006).

A study by Chaudhry and Garner (2007) reveals that exploitative child labour in pathetic working conditions is one of the burning and serious problems of Pakistan nowadays. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is a hub of bricks kilns, where hundreds of child labourers are employed with their parents. In Pakistan, an average of eight family members are consuming the earning of a single person. Moreover, since the inflation rate in the country is high, it becomes very difficult for such families to sustain their livelihood. Child labour is increasing throughout the country in general and, due to certain social factors, it is on the rise in particular in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas) and PATA (Provincially Administered Tribal Areas) i.e., Malakand Division.

Among the early efforts, the United States of America has made legislation for the elimination of child labour in the world. In this connection, one of the important acts is 'The Child labour Deterrent Act in 1992'. This bill is widely known as Harkin Bill (ILO, 2004).

### *Child Labour*

ILO (2004) defines child labour as “the labour where such work deprives children of their schooling, entertainment, childhood, their potential dignity and that is hazardous to their mental and physical development.”

### *Bonded Labour*

According to the Report of National Coalition Against Bonded Labour, “Bonded labour refers to the work which is performed by any member of the debt bondage family for their Master/Owner on nominal wages on weekly payment until the loan is repaid. In the contract period of “Peeshgi” (advance payment), the debt-bonded family neither can seek employment on any income generation source and nor can move freely work outside.” (Rogaly, 2008).

### *Forced Labour*

Forced Labour refers to “All works or services which are taken from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily” (ILO, 2006). Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), in a press release on June 25, 2012, Lahore, highlights that bonded labour remains one of the most reprehensible and widespread forms of exploitation in Pakistan even 20 years after promulgation of the law to abolish it. Therefore, the state and civil society must redouble their efforts to eliminate the evil.

### *The tradition of Bricks Production*

According to Iqbal (2006), “Bricks production had a long history in the subcontinent and across the world. In the case of Indus valley civilization (2500-1500 BC), people of this era had a culture of bricks production and they were using bricks in their building construction e.g. the ancient people of Egypt and Mesopotamia had used bricks in the construction of large monument and even in their residential buildings” (p. 3).

In the bricks kilns business, “peeshgi” (Peeshgi is an advance received by the labourers prior to taking up bricks process activities for their Master/ Owner) mechanism is frequently used and the labourers and owners of brick kilns have adopted it as a tradition. Debt bondage is in the form of “peeshgi” and it is a century-old practice in Pakistan. It defines a verbal contract which is in accordance with the seasonal calendar of brick kilns. Laborers received “peeshgi” through “Jamadar”--Jamadar is an important middle labourer

(influential person) who is responsible for organizing the working force for the owner. In Punjab, he is known by the “Labour Mate”, who is responsible for entering into an agreement of “peeshgi” between the Owner and labourers. Such practice has several obligations on the working class and on the owners as well. Although the more disadvantaged and vulnerable status is of the workers class, the owners are still exploiting the energies of his labourers. Every member of the bondage family is trying to reduce the burden of debt, but, unfortunately, due to certain social and cultural circumstances, the labourers are highly suffering from the work load and work period of this contract. The burden of debt is so chronic that people could not get rid of the debt for a generation even by engaging their female and children as well (Afzal, 2006).

## **2. The Extent of Bonded Labour in the Brick Kilns in Pakistan**

According to a report by Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (PILER), there is about 90% of brick kilns in the rural areas of Pakistan where the owner of bricks kilns engaged several families for bricks making. The Owners of kilns take full advantage of the cheap labour force. The PILER has identified that up to 5000 bricks kilns are in the Province of the Punjab and more than 6000 in other Provinces of the country (Ali and Hamid, 1999).

Bonded child labour has already been banned and outlawed in Pakistan after a convention of the UN on human rights. However, still, it is in practice in different provinces of Pakistan. Global Slavery Index 2014 shows that approximately 2,058,200 people are engaged in bonded child labour or in other words engaged in slavery in Pakistan. Pakistan is ranked third among 167 countries where slavery or bonded labour is at its peak. After China and India which are world top populated countries, Pakistan is placed on the third position having the largest number of individuals who are living in worst conditions of debt bondage which can be defined as slavery of modern times. It is also noticed that the combined bonded labourer found in Thailand, Pakistan and India, are almost equal to half of estimated 36 million people that trapped in bonded labour or slavery around the globe (Ali, 1999).

An individual becomes a bonded labourer when he/she takes a loan, or he/she is tricked or compelled to do so. Afterward, the person asked to repay the debt and for that he/she is forced to work for long hours, even seven days a week. Hence, he gets stuck in the web and never makes to get out of it. This debt never gets paid and it passes from one generation to the other. They are so much pressurized that they cannot even think to escape form this slavery (Iqbal, 2006). Like other South Asian countries, Pakistan is also marked for debt bondage which remained an ugly part of other medium scale industries

for example carpet weaving industry, agriculture, brick kilns, fisheries, shoemaking, workshops, stone crushing, scavenging. Statistics show that eight million children are working in different sectors of Pakistan. However, this data is based on earlier sources and the new data can be different from it since no steps have been taken to eliminate this curse from the country.

The practice of bonded labour or debt bondage in brick kilns is a common phenomenon all over Pakistan. Majority of this practice is carried out in the province of Punjab (Ercelawn and Karamat, 2002). In a report issued in 2013, Pakistan has been declared among those countries which are included in the 'Slavery's List of Shame'. Among the total 185.13 million people in 2014, the Global Slavery Index reported that more than 1% of people are enslaved in Pakistan. Recently a campaign has been launched by Punjab government on August 26, 2015 for the enrolment of those children in school who work in brick kiln. The basic objective of the campaign was to enrol all the students' up to 14 years of age in schools near to brick kilns till the end of October 2015 (Ercelawn and Karamat, 2002).

### 3. Literature Review

#### *Socio-Economics Perspective of Child Labour*

In developing countries, there are several factors which can be considered as root causes for increasing trend of child labour. Many researchers opine that poverty is responsible for child bonded labour. These researchers have conducted various studies in the socio-economic dimensions of child labour and have analysed both primary and secondary data. All findings of these studies indicate that poverty, large family units and single parenthood are the main factors which are playing a detrimental role in child labour which automatically lead to exploitations. Moreover, there are other social and cultural forces which influence the rise of child labour in developing countries including Pakistan (Irfan and Hamid, 1981; Khan, 1982; Basu and Kaushik, 1999 and Ali & Hamid, 1999). Bhalotra (2007) has examined the association between poverty and child labour. She had used a large household survey from rural Pakistan and estimated labour supply models for boys and girls in wage work. She had found that "poverty is associated with the supply of child labour into the active workforce".

Behera (2007) associated the problem of child labour with poverty, insufficient educational system, and unemployment. She argued that child labour is the highly noticeable problem in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century in South Asia. Many of the children are working in various fields and pooling their families' economy. They are working in highly miserable conditions and exploited by their owners.

She has, also, pointed out that child labour is both the cause and consequence of poverty. However, she acknowledges the role of society and cultural discourse in the increase in child labour and it is in the shape of traditional practices and gender disparity.

### *Research Discourse on Child Labour in Pakistan*

In the previous two decades, both academic and action-oriented organization had carried out several researches in which the focus is to explore the phenomena of child labour prevalence in Pakistan. Many researchers have tried to provide their input in sorting out this issue; however, there are still many areas of investigation which demands analysis to find out why an answer to the question of why an increasing number of children are at the workforce. Shaheen (1982) carried out research, “Exploitative Child Labour in Auto Mobile Workshops in district Peshawar”, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, highlighting the links between poverty and large family unit; single parent family and illiteracy. It was also found that the parents’ wishes were also one of the factors responsible for child labour in the informal industry.

### *The Government of Pakistan and Federal Legislation on Child Labour*

The state of Child Rights in Pakistan is a matter of high concern. To protect the rights of children, the government of Pakistan has pledged that it will be working with International Organizations to eradicate this issue. In this connection, the Government of Pakistan has legislated on the Worst Form of Child Labour. Article 11 (3) of the constitution of Pakistan prohibits work by a child below the age of 14 years in the formal and informal industry and hazardous working environment (ILO, 2006).

### *Economic Perspective of Child Labour*

Basu and Van (1998) have presented the first formal economic theory and have explained the economic perspective of child labour. Theoretically, they described two important observations; “one that most families would prefer not to send their children to work; and second that most families that do send their children to work because of dire necessity. Both researchers have indicated both facets which are exploitation by the employers and the parent’s decisions for sending their children for work (Hugh, 2009). Emerson and Souza (2003) have explained the child labour and economic relation in their dynamic model of child labour in which they indicated that drop out in education sector of Pakistan. This practice can be repeated through

generations, and consequently, families can get fixed in a “child labour trap”. It is obvious that parents who were once child labourers will have to send their own children to work, and thus such families can get trapped in a cycle of poverty and child labour.

### *Debt Bondage*

The notion in which people are obliged to work for someone from whom he or she has received an advance is termed as “debt bondage”. In this regard, an advance is used as a tool of intimidation to compel people to work for an owner; whereas borrowing money from an employer is not strange. In bonded labour system the debt is imposed through exploitation and refusals of rights. Generally, in all debt bondage practices, the debt is advance money which is taken by (labourers) or given by (owners) other than the regular wages. This system is very exploitative for the workers and the owners take advantage of the advance money he/she has given. (ILO, 2012).

### *Debt Bondage and Self Determination*

Bondage is a type of modern slavery in the case of cash advance and inability to repay the advance money to the masters; it automatically clenched the hands of family members and they are bonded with their owners. They are not allowed to go anywhere without the consent of their owners. The owners have regularly forced them to work on minimum wages or no wages. Thus, bondage families are always at the mercy of their masters and at risks of high exploitation in terms of low wages or no wages, physical harassment. Children and wives are used as domestic servants (ILO, 2012).

### *Debt Bondage and Forced Labour*

Debt bondage is generally deemed as a type of forced labour but is usually not entirely involuntary. In numerous cases, families who are bonded to deliver services for their employer under some form of commitment /contract or agreement to which they have consented. For some, consent is a matter of tradition and history in societies in which they live. It is obligatory for the workers that they may be doing labour in any circumstances or situations for which the owners of industry to fix (ILO, 2012). As soon as the honour and dignity of the individual, either child or adult, is so evidently infringed, it is patent that the individual choice cannot be used to tie up them to serve which is exploitative and which violates their rights. Thus, it is not steady with the guidelines of laws and conventions of human rights that an individual can

pledge, commitment or contract in which they are not empowering for their freedom. In short, in South Asia, the bonded labour mechanism is the oldest type of forced labour and accounts for the maximum number of forced labourers in the modern world (ILO, 2012).

#### *Impacts of Bonded Child Labour*

Upon engaging children into bonded labour force can results very bad impacts on their social, psychological and physical development. Children in the bondage contract fall into the stream of abuses and violation of their rights. Though, the impacts of bondage on bonded child labourers is not a unique one, as children in all working settings are the prey of vulnerability and exploitation in the same manners (ILO, 2012).

#### **4. Material and Methods**

This study is related to the problems of bonded child labour in brick kilns/industry at Peshawar, Pakistan. It is a quantitative research which has been carried out through random sample as a data tool. According to an ILO report (2012), there were 05 hundred brick kilns industries, among them only 380 were functional and 60 brick kilns were selected as a sample size from a total 380 brick kilns. From 60 brick kilns 2 children, 2 parents and 1 owner from each kiln were selected on simple random sampling, thus total sample size was 300 i.e. 120 children, 120 parents and 60 owners through Sekaran (2003) table of sample size. The interview schedule was used as a tool for data collection from different respondents. After the collection, the data then analysed through Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) and a statistical Chi-square test was used to test the hypothesis i.e. Higher the debt bondage, greater would be exploitation of parents' and children's services by brick kilns owners.

#### *Ethical Consideration*

Ethics in research activity is considered as the guidelines of the research. Research ethics play a very important role in conducting any research activity. In this study the researchers strictly followed the ethical considerations. It was a very sensitive topic because in this the minor or children were interviewed along with their parents and the owner of the brick kilns. The researchers took consent from the owner of the industries, bonded child labour, and their parents. The researchers said to them that the information will be used only for academic activity. The researchers will not share any information with other

people. The researchers assured that all the information will be kept confidential and their names will be not mentioned in the study.

### *Hypothesis*

For this hypothesis, the association between independent and dependent variables has been tested through Chi-square, where p values are 0.169, 0.003, and 0.000, which shows a strong association between the variables. Hence, the hypothesis is proved valid. In the analysis, the hypothesis is then tested through Chi-square test to find out the relationship between dependent variable (bonded child labour) and independent variables (financial problem, loan burden, and total advance money). Higher the debt bondage, greater would be the exploitation of parents' and children's services by brick kilns owners.

## **5. Analysis and Discussion**

The study analyses the primary data collected in comparison with the existing literature through some tables along with a detailed discussion as follows:

**Table No 01. Chi-Square Tests Showing an association between Financial problem and Bonded Child Labour**

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.118 <sup>a</sup>	1	0.146		
Continuity Correction <sup>b</sup>	0.941	1	0.332		
Likelihood Ratio	3.586	1	0.058		
Fisher's Exact Test				0.333	0.169
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.082	1	0.149		
N of Valid Cases	60				

a. 1 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.50.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

In the table number 01, the result shows that there was significant ( $p=0.169$ ) association between the financial problems facing by children and the bonded labour. In this variable, most of the respondents were of the view that bonded child labour did not face any type of financial problems while the owner of the brick kilns industries provided enough money to these children. The findings of Behera (2007) did not support the result of the table in comparison to the problem of child labour with poverty, employment, and financial problems. She argued that child labour is the highly noticeable problem in the 21st Century in South Asia. Many of the children are working in various fields and pooling their families' economy. They are working in high miserable conditions and exploited by their work owner. She also pointed out that child labour is both the cause and consequence of poverty. However, she acknowledges the role of society and cultural discourse in the increase in child labour and it is in the shape of traditional practices and gender disparity.

<b>Table No 02. Chi-Square Tests Showing an association between Total Advance Money and Bonded Child Labour</b>			
	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	52.549 <sup>a</sup>	5	.000
Likelihood Ratio	42.784	5	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	14.845	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	60		
a. 8 cells (66.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .30.			

A highly significant ( $p=0.000$ ) association was found between the children takes the advance money and the bonded child labour. Most of the respondents replied that bonded child labour takes advance money from the owner of the industries. After giving the advance money by the owners to the bonded child labour then the owners exploited the children in working hours. They took more work from the children and provided less money. If any of the bonded children demanded his rights, then the owners said not to come for work by next day and also demanded the remaining amount paid him in advance. According to Rogaly (2008), this study was supported by the Report of National Coalition Against Bonded Labour, "The State of Bonded Labour in Pakistan, "Bonded labour refers to the work, which is performed by any member of the debt bondage family for their Master / Owner on nominal wages on weekly payment; until the loan is repaid; In the contract period of "Peeshgi" (advance payment) the debt-bonded family cannot seek employment

or any income generation source and move freely outside”. After analysing the whole primary data, the results show that the hypothesis proved valid.

**Table No 03. Chi-Square Tests Showing an association between Loan Burdon and Bonded Child Labour**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	13.958 <sup>a</sup>	1	.000		
Continuity Correction <sup>b</sup>	9.818	1	.002		
Likelihood Ratio	9.769	1	.002		
Fisher's Exact Test				.003	.003
Linear-by-Linear Association	13.725	1	.000		
N of Valid Cases	60				
a. 1 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .90.					
b. Computed only for a 2x2 table					

The last table of the hypothesis shows a significant ( $p=0.003$ ) association between loan burden and bonded child labour. In this table, most of the respondents said that owner of the industries did not provide enough money on proper time to bonded child labour. Due to this most of the children borrowed money from other people to fulfil the basic needs of their family. When the owner provides them with their salary then they return the loan money and through this borrowed cycle they become poorer day by day. The study supported by the findings of Afzal (2006). According to Afzal in the bricks kilns business, “peeshgi” mechanism is of frequent use and the laborers and owners of brick kilns have adopted it as a tradition. Debt bondage is in the form of “peeshgi” and it is a century-old practice in Pakistan; it defined a verbal contract which is usual on the seasonal calendar of brick kilns. Labourers received “peeshgi” through “Jamadar” in Punjab that person also called labour Mate, who is responsible for entering into an agreement (verbal) of “peeshgi” between owner and labourers. Such practice has several obligations on the working class and on the owners as well. Though the more disadvantaged and vulnerable status is of the workers class and the owners are exploiting the energies of their labourers. Every member of the bondage family is trying to reduce the burden of debt but unfortunately, due to certain social and cultural circumstances, the labourers are highly suffering. The burden of

debt is so chronic that people could not get rid of from the debt for a generation even by engaging their female and children as well.

## 6. Conclusion and Suggestions

It is concluded from the whole study that bonded labourers face a lot of problems; they do not fulfil the basic needs of their family easily. For the fulfilment of their needs, they are working as a bonded labour and most of them are the children. Poverty and unemployment are the main causes of the bonded child labour because these children and their family faces financial problems to overcome these problems they take advance money from their owners. When the owners provide them advance money/peeshgi then the owners use the according to their own will as they take more work from these bonded children and give them a very low salary. First, these bonded labours returned the peeshgi and this becomes a cycle of giving and taking money in advance from owners. This type of loan money becomes a burden on these bonded labours and through this way they become poorer day by day. It is recommended that children are the future of the society and policymakers must have to take some positive steps for their rights. Political leaders must focus on the violation of the rights of these children by the owners of the brick kilns/industries. To provide free and compulsory primary education, income generation schemes, implementation of bonded labour abolition Act 1992 including other labour laws and Conventions on the Rights of Children (CRC) Ratifications.

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