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Revisiting the Relationship of Poverty, Illiteracy, and Population Growth with Child Labour in Pakistan

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Abstract

The current study delved into the complex issue of child labour. The study aimed to extensively examine the interrelation between child labour, poverty, illiteracy, and population growth. As a matter of fact, child labour is still an existing issue in Pakistan, depriving children from their basic necessities, such as education and a safe childhood. The study used a random sampling technique to collect data from a broad sample of 384 respondents mainly from general public of Lahore. Data was collected using standardized questionnaire which was then rigorously analyzed using SPSS. The results revealed that there is a significant link between child labour and the factors of poverty, illiteracy, and the growth of population. The results contribute significantly to the existing body of research and provide valuable insights for policymakers.

Keywords: child labour, illiteracy, poverty, population growth

Introduction

Child labour is a widespread issue worldwide, primarily prevalent in nations characterized by limited resources and lower socioeconomic status. Child labour prevents the progress of both children and their communities and economies (Kaur & Byard, [2021](#)). Due to pressing economic difficulties, individuals find themselves with no choice but to send their kids to work at different places including farms, factories, brick kilns, and processing units (Ahmad et al., [2020](#)).

Developed countries, which were once heavily involved in child labour, recognized it as a problem in the 1990s. Over time, it came to be known as a significant breach of human rights. Numerous humanitarian organizations and NGOs spoke out against child employment (Fyfe, [2004](#)). Despite the existence of laws discouraging child labour, it continues to exist in various fields including the agricultural and industrial sector. It is estimated that 75% (1.1 billion) of individuals living in poverty receive not more than 1

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dollar per day as a salary. They dwell in underserved zones, where their primary source of survival is rooted in agriculture, whether through direct involvement in farming or indirect dependence on it (Etim & Udofia, [2013](#); Okunmadewa, [2001](#)).

Poverty and child labour are two global problems that are closely connected with each other. In particular, when rural areas of developing countries are considered, the impact of poverty is even more profound. Although, they receive meager wages, children from poor families contribute to the overall earnings of their households. Numerous studies have highlighted the immediate and substantial economic value of impoverished children (Hussain et al., [2018](#)).

Poverty acts as a driving force for economically disadvantaged guardians to enroll their kids in low-wage employment, just for the sake of earning income, so that they may continue the basic functioning of the whole family. The economic limitations faced by low-income families make it difficult for them to afford the education of their children. This creates a situation where children remain unprotected from the effects of poverty, as they are not sent to schools and resources are not being invested in their prospects (Dessy et al., [2001](#)).

When families are impoverished, parents often prioritize earning money over the well-being of their children. According to their perspective, children are the sources of income, exploited as money-making machines. Some families rely on their children to earn money through street begging, and as these children grow older, they may continue to beg or be sent to work for employers (Hussain et al., [2018](#)). Consequently, children living in poverty are denied essential rights, such as access to healthcare, proper nutrition, education, and ensuring safeguarding individuals from injury, abuse, and prejudice. This serves to spotlight the way poverty may compromise the human rights of children (UNICEF, [2006](#)). According to Sen ([2007](#)), various factors contribute to household poverty. These factors include a low family income, the absence of family allowance programs, adult unemployment, and a large family size.

Many children are working in agricultural and industrial sectors, where there is a high risk of getting injuries and chances of loss of life. It is quite evident that how this society is using and exploiting the innocent children (Tasleem, Muhammad et al., [2023](#)). Child labour is regarded as the

negligence of children's basic rights and a denial to provide them opportunity to enjoy a normal livelihood. Child labour still exists in Pakistan which results in the exploitation of children's energy and potential to work, depriving them of educational opportunities (Dessy et al., [2001](#)).

Child labour maybe influenced by several factors, such as population growth (large family size) and overpopulation. This issue is prevalent in many developing countries, such as Pakistan, where various aspects of life are affected by population dynamics. Due to illiteracy and ignorance, people often perceive children as valuable assets and divine blessings. They believe that having more children will lead to a larger family size, resulting in increased family income (Hussain et al., [2018](#)).

Child labor is often a desperate response to the economic desperation that accompanies rapid population growth and widespread poverty. According to a report published by the Economic Survey of Pakistan in 2010, the country had a total of 82.05 million youngsters. These youngsters ranged from infants to teenagers, aged 0-19 years, and this number was projected to increase to 86.88 million by 2020. Pakistan holds the highest population growth rate in the world, at 2.77% per year. Disturbingly, people living below the poverty line in Pakistan are approximately 32.6% (Khan, [2007](#)).

Problem Statement

Child labour persists worldwide. It affects both well-developed and underdeveloped nations, however, its prevalence varies from country to country. In developing countries, such as Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan, activities associated with child labour take place on daily basis where parents compel their children to work. Despite various advancements in protection against child labour, a large proportion of children are working which is hindering their social growth and affecting their mental health as well. The data collected by Pakistan Labor Survey in 2017-2018 highlighted that 13.7% of children aged 10-17 were indulged in child labour. Usually, activities in which children are involved are unhealthy and dangerous, especially in Pakistan (Ibrahim et al., [2019](#)).

A study conducted by Latif et al. ([2020](#)) mentioned that poverty contributes to child labour where parents send their children to work at an early age. Most of the parents who force their children to work are uneducated and less aware of children's right to get an education. Therefore,

the current study attempted to explore the relationship of poverty, illiteracy, and population growth with child labour in Lahore, Pakistan.

Research Questions

The current study aimed to address the following research questions:

RQ₁: Does poverty affect child labour in Lahore Pakistan?

RQ₂: Does illiteracy affect child labour in Lahore Pakistan?

RQ₃: Does population growth affect child labour in Lahore Pakistan?

Research Objectives

The objectives attempted to cover the following questions:

RO₁: Investigate the affect of poverty on child labour.

RO₂: Investigate the affect of illiteracy on child labour.

RO₃: Investigate the affect of population growth on child labour.

Significance

The results have significant potential to shape the direction of future studies on child labor, paving the way for new insights and discoveries. Various groups would get benefit from the current study including teachers, students, parents, officials, learners, the community at large, curriculum developers, and most importantly non-governmental organizations. This is because it would provide them with knowledge and a better understanding of child labour as to why children are forced to work at an early age. The results of this study can also inform policymakers and administrators, providing them with a deeper understanding of the underlying factors driving child labor, and enabling them to develop targeted and effective solutions. The study's results have a lot of potential to increase public consciousness regarding the issue of child labour and could foster community involvement in addressing the eliminating this issue. Furthermore, NGOs can leverage these outcomes to arrange workshops and conferences in our community by highlighting the significance of eradicating child labour by highlighting the major determinants of child labour and the relationship between them.

Literature Review

The term ‘child labour’ can be defined as indulgence of children who are under eighteen (18) years of age in some work which tends to deprive them of their basic right to life and education. Resultantly, children get involved in earning their livelihood instead of going to school. From an economic perspective, children become a source of income for their respective families by violating the laws of government. In developing countries, child labour is not limited to one sector. However, it may be found in various industries within Pakistan’s economy which operates on capitalist principles. In developing countries, children are employed across various industries, mills, and agriculture on minor wages (Hatim et al., [2022](#)).

Many studies have been conducted on child labour in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Research has consistently demonstrated that poverty stands as the primary driver behind child labour. As of now, estimations indicate that there are about 98 million child labourers across the globe, with a significant concentration in the Asia-Pacific region’s agricultural industry. These youngsters are compelled by their parents to work due to their families’ inability to afford fundamental essentials, such as food, education, healthcare, and shelter (Tasleem, [2020](#)).

A study authored by Rahatullah ([2001](#)) comprehensively examined the financial and social origins of child labour in the Mingora region of District Swat. The investigation involved 100 respondents from different categories including hotels, workshops, brick kilns, and self-employment. The research highlighted the financial situation and large family size as the key factors contributing to child labour. The parents’ level of income and education also played an important part in compelling children to earn by working (Hatim et al., [2023](#)).

The research conducted by Ray ([2002](#)), Kis-Katos and Gunther ([2005](#)), International Labour Organization ([2003](#)), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, [2015](#)), Diallo et al. ([2013](#)), Cigno et al. ([2002](#)), Ortiz-Ospina and Roser ([2016](#)), and Nasrullah et al. ([2013](#)) found that the major reason behind child labour is poverty. In the light of previous researches, children falling between the age range of 5-17 and 5-14 are compelled to engage in hazardous work in the agriculture sector due to extreme poverty, especially in underdeveloped countries. Moreover, it was also observed that globalization is the main cause of child labour in the agricultural domain,

particularly in less economically developed nations (Tasleem, Hatim et al., [2023](#)).

H1: There is a significant relationship between poverty and child labour.

According to United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF, [2006](#)), illiteracy and child labour are closely interconnected, with each reinforcing and supporting the other. Extensive research has shown that a significant proportion of child labourers are illiterate and lack basic knowledge. Interestingly, some research has also shown that many child laborers come from families where education is valued and prioritized, highlighting the complexity of this issue. The prevailing trend indicates that majority of the child labourers come from illiterate or poorly educated backgrounds (Hussain et al., [2018](#)). Conversely, no studies have found any examples of child labourers originating from educated families. The ignorance and materialistic aspirations of parents who neglect their children's education represent a distressing and reprehensible reality. Thus, lack of education, parental ignorance, and parental viewpoints on educating their offsprings are critical factors that contribute to child labour (Shukla, [2006](#)).

Studies conducted by Basu and Ray ([2011](#)) concluded that with limited exposure to education and lack of basic knowledge, parents fail to recognize the vital role of education in ensuring the welfare of their children (Ahmad et al, [2020](#))

In developing countries, literacy rate is quite low. Pakistan is grappling with a large population of illiterate individuals. Also it is estimated that over 32 million adults and almost 7 million children are not even enrolled in any school between the ages of 5 and 15 (Tasleem et al., [2022](#)). According to Ali ([1999](#)), the primary school enrollment for both males and females is quite low. The percentage of students enrolled in primary schools is only 30% for females and 57% for males. On the other hand, the secondary enrollment rate is only 47% for males and 23% for females. Furthermore, the illiteracy rate among 15-year-olds stands at 86% for females and 59% for males (Latif et al., [2020](#)).

Anand ([2006](#)) has stated that most families in traditional societies view their children as a source of income, and have faith that their children are meant to help them in earning. Majority of parents prefer their children to handle their family businesses instead of sending them to school. It is quite

unfortunate that these children are made to work for long hours and may even experience physical abuse upon making any mistake.

H2: There is a significant relationship between illiteracy and child labour.

Rogers and Swinnerton (2008) examined the socio-economic factors which add up to the increase and existence of child labour, lack of family planning, and population exposure. They mentioned that when parents are illiterate they lack in family planning and population growth takes place which influences child labour because they believe that having more children results in more income.

Research conducted by Edmonds and Pavcnik (2007) determinants of child labour and its consequences. They explored the influence of poverty, population growth, and education on child labour practices. Population growth and large family sizes can influence child labour practices in various ways. Firstly, in regions experiencing rapid population growth, there might be increased pressure on resources and job opportunities for adults. This can lead to higher instances of poverty, as a larger population competes for limited resources, leading families to resort to child labour as a means of subsistence. In this context, children may find themselves obligated to work to contribute to their family's finances, even at the expense of their education and well-being.

The case study conducted by Ali (2011), in district Swabi delves into the elements that drive child labour. The study showed that child labour is predominantly motivated by the expansion of the population rapid exposure to the population is influencing child labour and creating immense pressure on the available resources. This increase in the population led to the subdivision of everything including land and other resources. As a consequence, there is an increase in poverty and deprivation also families are compelled to rely on their offspring for additional income. One study indicated that 73% of the children belonged to nuclear families (Latif et al., 2020). Rogers and Swinnerton (2008) researched socio-economic factors which add up to the increase and existence of child labour, lack of family planning, and population exposure, they mentioned that when parents are illiterate they lack in family planning and population growth takes place which influences child labour because they believe that having more children results in more income.

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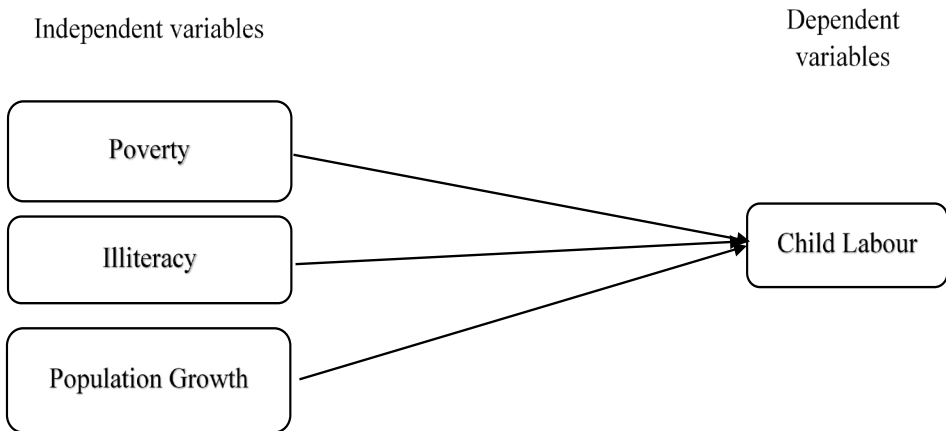
H3: There is a significant relationship between population growth and child labour.

Research Framework

The research framework is the fundamental underpinning of any research plan and serves as the nucleus of the entire study, as argued by Ngulube (2018). This framework consists of a connected set of concepts that steer the study's direction, commonly known as the theoretical framework, a concept also acknowledged by Almalki et al. (2016). Within this research framework, it becomes evident that poverty, illiteracy, and population growth are the independent variables, while child labor is identified as the dependent variable in this research study.

Figure 1

Research Framework



Research Methodology

This research utilized a quantitative approach, collecting data through in-person surveys administered to a sample of the general public in Lahore, providing a representative view of the city's residents. The study concentrated on gathering poverty, illiteracy, population growth, and child labour data from the general public of Lahore as they are units of analysis for this study. The data collection involved a survey method utilizing a structured close-ended questionnaire. This study focused on Lahore, a city with a large and diverse population of approximately 14 million residents (as of 2023), as the sample population. The general public of Lahore constituted the primary unit of analysis. Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), which enabled data summarization, table generation, and the calculation of frequency distributions. A 5-point Likert scale was employed to capture respondents' attitudes and opinions. This scale allowed for a nuanced understanding of the research findings, providing insights into the prevalence and intensity of the phenomena under investigation.

Data Sampling

Based on the sample size table as per the research performed by Krejcie and Morgan in 1970, the optimal sample should not be less than 377 respondents. The sample size of the current study accordance to Krejcie and Morgan was 384. The Data was collected through the questionnaire from

the general population of Lahore. As per the research design, it was deemed appropriate to survey 384 individuals. Out of the 384 questionnaires distributed, all were returned immediately to the researcher, achieving a 100% response rate. However, 376 of these questionnaires were deemed usable, resulting in a valid response rate of 98%. Despite careful handling, 8 participants did not fill complete survey those questionnaires were not used in this study.

Data Analysis

The statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) software was used for the analysis of data. The data that operated in SPSS for analysis was of 376 participants. Cronbach's alpha was employed to assess both the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. The Cronbach alpha is 0.91 which means the questionnaire is reliable and valid. The descriptive statistics and multi-regression linear model method were used for the analysis of the data collected from the participants. Among the participants, 51% were males, and 48% were females. The maximum number of participants that took part in the survey belonged to the 26-33 age group which is 46%. The variations in the age group could not influence the results of the findings. The majority of participants hold an intermediate degree while second, the participants hold a bachelor's degree and very minor participants hold a matric degree which shows that the majority of participants are literate and understand the context of the questionnaire. The income of the maximum number of participants is from 25,000 to 30,000 which is 30% approximate. Overall, it shows that participants from all ages, incomes, qualifications, and gender groups take part in this survey.

Results & Discussion

The discussion indicated that poverty, illiteracy, and population growth are the cause of child labour in Lahore and the government policies on child labour are not working on the pure interest which is why, this issue is still present in our society. Hypothesis one in the study that Poverty has a significant influence on Child Labour ($B = .068, t = 1.413, \text{Sig} = 0.009$) shows that the participant thinks that the H1 is correct because of the significance values of the variables. Just like that, the H2 says that the relationship between illiteracy and child labour has a direct relationship and as far of results the results show that ($B = .361, t = 7.612, \text{Sig} = 0.000$) there is a need to work on the rate of illiteracy because the impact causes an increase in

child labour and become the reason of the disparity between the low income and high-income families. Similarly, the H3 ($B= .199$, $t=4.087$, $Sig=0.000$) is also showing that the relationship between child labour and population growth is strong and positive. Thus, these variables show that these variables impact child labour. So, what should be the measures the literature shows that the problems and the causes have an impact that are major reasons that child labour exists.

The linear regression is also operated on SPSS, to conduct the ANOVA and coefficients of the data collected from the participants. A multiple correlation coefficient R -value of 0.562 indicates the strength and direction of the association between poverty, illiteracy, population growth, and child labour. The variance's proportion is shown by the R Square value. In this Model, R^2 is 0.516. The ANOVA results revealed the importance of the predictors, showing the extremely low value of p which is the p -value of 0.000, which indicates a very strong significance. This shows that the combined effect of all factors including poverty, illiteracy, and population has a major aftermath on child labour. The connection between poverty, illiteracy population growth, and child labour includes representing their magnitude and directionality. The anticipated change can be denoted in the child labour corresponding to a one-unit shift in each predictor variable while keeping all other variables held fixed. The associated significance levels (e.g. 0.0009, 0.000,0.000) confirm that coefficients are significant statistically, as they are all below the standard significance level of 0.05.

Hypothesis Results

H₁: The research effort established a hypothesis about it that Poverty has a significant influence on Child Labour ($B= .068$, $t=1.413$, $Sig=0.009$).

H₂: Resulting ($B= .361$, $t= 7.612$, $Sig- 0.000$) demonstrate that important relationship exists among the illiteracy and Child Labour.

H₃: The study has proposed a hypothesis that has a noteworthy influence population Growth on Child Labour ($B= .199$, $t=4.087$, $Sig=0.000$).

Conclusion

This research has shown the significant impact of poverty, lack of education, and population growth on how often child labour is. The quantitative methodology to collect data through a questionnaire survey has

been used, which helped to point out the footprint of these independent variables on the driving child labour practices in Pakistan. One of the key findings of this research is that factors such as poverty, illiteracy, and population growth significantly impact and contribute to child labour in Pakistan. Rehman et al. (2021), also conducted research titled “An analysis of out-of-school children factors: A case study of Pakistan” mentioned that poverty is the reason and as the main factor contributing to the problem of child labour while poverty and increasing inflation are the major reason behind the increase of child labour. This means that these factors impose a direct impression on the problem of child labour and must be taken into account when designing child labour and social protection policies and programs (Fatima, 2017). The research revealed that families facing financial hardships often opt to send their kids to labor as a way to sustain their livelihoods, perpetuating a cycle of poverty. Illiterate fathers and mothers of children may not fully grasp the importance of getting an education, which leads to almost no investment in children’s future. Policymakers need to work on the factors to decrease the overall practice of child labour in Pakistan (Batool & Bilal, 2022).

Moreover, the rapid population growth in Pakistan puts additional strain on limited resources, making it challenging to address the root causes of child labour effectively (Shabbir et al., 2020). It is essential to identify that child labour is not a sustainable solution to these underlying problems, and addressing poverty, illiteracy, and population growth is crucial to breaking the vicious cycle. As a society, we must acknowledge that not only does child labour rob children of their childhood but also hinders children’s potential for a better future (Rehman et al., 2021).

Conflict of Interest

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Data Availability Statement

The data associated with this study will be provided by the corresponding author upon request.

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