

## The Forgotten Children: An Exploratory Research

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### **Abstract**

*The paper gives an insight on “The Forgotten Children: An Exploratory Research”. The research design was qualitative. The objectives of this research were to explore the working condition of the forgotten children as domestic laborers and the factors contributing to domestic child labor. For this purpose, 50 respondents including male & female children between the age of 8-14 were interviewed by using semi-structured interview guideline for data collection. The study shows that the work of these forgotten children is invisible and also exploitative in nature. The study also found out that the main reasons behind Domestic Child Labor are lack of economic resources and illiteracy. The treatment of the employers is inhumane towards these vulnerable children and working conditions are also not safe & healthy for them. Mostly these Domestic Laborers face physical and verbal abuse by the hands of their employer and their family. These invisible Children also need to be dealt and some ways should be found out to secure their bright future.*

**Keywords:** Domestic child labor, Exploitation, Poverty, lack of economic resources, Physical & Verbal abuse and illiteracy

### **Introduction**

Children are the flowers of heaven. They are the most beautiful and purest creation of God. The children are the most innocent creature of the God and the beauty of this universe. They are the blessed one who enjoys the blessing of universe other basic needs by their parents/guardians.

But there are also other children, those who cannot go to schools due to financial problems; they can only wish to seek knowledge by seeing others go to schools. It is due to many obstacles and difficulties that they face in their lives. Having been forced to kill their ambitions, dreams and other wishes, they are pushed to earn a living for themselves and for their families. It is also a fact that there are many children who play a key role in the survival of their family without which, their families would not be able to make ends meet. These are also part of our society who has forgotten the pleasures of their childhood.

**The term Child Labor is used for employment of children below a certain age, which is considered illegal by law and custom. The specific age varies from country to country and government to government. Child labor is a global phenomenon which is considered exploitative and inhuman.** Almost all child labor occurs in developing and under developed countries, with about 60% of those children engaged in agriculture.

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Child labor is a demand driven phenomenon also because it is cheap and easily available in developing countries like Pakistan. There is a market for child labor and this is matched by an abundant supply of children. Poverty stricken children are an easy prey for those who seek to make a profit by exploiting their vulnerability. Child labor prevails in many forms in Pakistan. With the formal sector shrinking and informal sector growing, children are seen taking up employment in new occupations. There are many occupations where children's visibility is high but there are some jobs where children are invisible such as child domestic labor, bonded child labor, agriculture etc (The State of Pakistan's Children 2006).

Anderson (1971), Goldin (1979), Olsson (1986), Chandrasekhar (1997), Basu (1999), Grootaert and Kanbur (1995), among others, argue that poverty of families is a precondition for child labor. Poverty and economic disparity work as push factors for child labor, which may also lead to the worst forms of child labor. However, child labor will not disappear only by eradicating poverty, although its intensity may be reduced considerably.

Dean (2004) is of the view that child domestic workers (work in other people's home) are the world's most forgotten children. That is why this dilemma needs to be discussed first. Although domestic service is not considered as hazardous but in reality it is. Children in domestic service may well be the most vulnerable and exploited children of all, so they are the ones who are most difficult to protect. They are often extremely poorly paid or not paid at all; their terms and conditions are entirely based upon the employers' will. These children are deprived of schooling, play and social activities and of emotional support from family and friends. They are prone to physical and sexual abuse. So what else can be worse than these children facing miserable conditions while working among the strangers at the age of 5.

Due to the nature of domestic work these children are forgotten as they are invisible and difficult to identify in the premises of four walls of home. Sometimes they stay at the homes and some times they come in the morning and go back to their homes in evening. All the day they work and no time left with them for even leisure in their lives. This is what something really need for these Forgotten Children to help prevent them from working as domestic laborers and facing abuse and neglect by the hands of their employers. Every child has the right to a life free from cruelty and suffering.

One of the worst kinds of child labor is domestic labor, mainly because it is hidden away and not regulated by the government. In addition, because child labor is mainly a rural problem, domestic labor is often unrecognized because it takes place mostly in cities such as Lahore, Islamabad and Karachi. One-quarter of all homes in Pakistan use children in their homes for many types of domestic chores and 62 percent of them are girls. Many of these children are physically or sexually abused and they are forced to work long hours. Children working in the domestic sector rarely go to school and they do not have the chance to interact with other children. Lastly, the work is often unpaid. This is a very tragic situation because the government does not include domestic work as a hazardous occupation (Miriam Katz, 2008). A rapid assessment on child domestic labor by SPARC in Islamabad (capital) and four provincial capitals reveals that every fourth household in Pakistan employs children for domestic purposes majority of these were girls (shujaat, 2007).

A study conducted on domestic child labor by (Akhtar & Razzaq, 2005) showed dimensions of domestic child labor that is neglected segment within the child labor phenomena. This study has highlighted the similarities and differences in dimensions such as labor market characteristics and its arrangements, working conditions, violence, and exploitation. This study is about that the labor arrangements of child domestic worker in Pakistan are segmented along with the term as non-resident and resident. Thus working conditions, violence, exploitation and dynamics of demand and supply vary with this widely observed

segmentation. They look for the nature of the work that children are required to perform, the treatment they get or the means by which they entered into the situation in which they find themselves.

Del Rosario and Bonga (2000) question the assumption that children's work in the home should be allowed because these are likely to be unexploitative. They mainly pointing to the situation of child labor in industrial homework for export production where:

*“Child workers received very low amount for the beautiful handiwork from which the foreign importers in developed countries earned much profit. They also worked long hours and were risk in terms of their health. Individually and collectively, these child home workers were being exploited right in their own homes, not necessarily by their parents, but under parental supervision. The home was, therefore, hardly a place free of exploitation, particularly in the context of contracting out for export production*

The study on domestic Child Labor in Morocco by Tone Sommerfelt (2001) examined the extent, social organization, and economic contexts of child domestic labor. The study emphasized on the relationships between employers, parents, and children. More specifically, the focus is directed toward girls, the so-called “petites bonnes” (small maids), which create the majority of child domestics in Morocco. The “petites bonnes” are young girls (here defined as under the age of 15 years) who perform various household tasks, and who live with their employers.

Children work in a wide variety of different areas. These include: Providing care within a family, for example to a sick adult relative. Domestic work - This may be paid or unpaid and provided whether to a relative or non-relative. The work done by these children is sometimes referred to as a hidden form of child labor. This is because it is not easily visible and is rarely covered by campaigns on child labor. Most of the children involved in domestic work are girls. Some children are seen selling items on the streets, transportation of goods, work in warehouses and factories; work in the fishing industry, Mining, work in the military. This may involve very young children (Rodgers & Standing, 1981, as cites by Shandilya & Khan, 2006).

## Objectives

- To explore the condition of children working as domestic laborers.
- To analyze the factors contributing to domestic child labor.

## Research Design

Research design is qualitative and was done through thematic technique by conducting interviews.

## Sample

Non probability sampling technique (Purposive sampling) was used to select the sample for the present study. Selection criteria were that these children were working in the houses as Domestic laborers. Total sample size was 50 (35 girls and 15 boys). The children who were working as non-resident (staying with their own family) domestic laborer were selected. Mostly girls were included in the sample and less boys because most of the girl child was found involved in this activity. Age limit of the respondents were ranges between 8-14 years.

Education level of the respondents varies from none educated to class 5. Because some of them have attended school at some level and then drop out from school and some of the never been to school as their parents did not send them. All of the respondents belong to lower class families.

### Procedure

Data was collected from working children (male and females) who works as non-resident domestic laborers. Data was collected by contacting each participant individually. After taking their and their parents consents, participants were assured that the information provided by them would be kept confidential and would be used for the research purpose only. There was no time limit. Participants were given maximum time to give answers without any pressure. After getting the complete information from all the participants the thematic analysis technique was use to found out the results.

### Results

**Table 1**

Percentage distribution of the respondents on attending School

S. No	Categories	%
1	attended	40.0
2	not attended	60.0

Results from above table show that 40% respondent did not attend any school and 60% of them has attended up to 5<sup>th</sup> class and then dropped out. This shows that number of school going children is less.

**Table 2**

Percentage distribution of the responses on causes of not attending School

S. No	Categories	%
1	Parents not willing	70.0
2	economic resources	30.0

The results from the above table show that 70% of the parents did not allow their children to go to school because they think that it is the waste of time to send their child in school. 30% Respondent said that due to lack of economic resources their parents are unable top send them school.

**Table 3**

Percentage distribution of responses of reasons of working as domestic labor (n=50)

S. No	Categories	%
1	Parents ask me to do so	60.0
2	For financial support	40.0

Result from above table shows that 60% respondent were of the opinion that they are working as domestic laborers because of the decision of their parents and 40% respondents said that for financial support of the family they are working. As there are lack of resources in their homes so to fulfill the needs of their house they are working.

**Table 4**

Percentage distribution of the responses on relaxation time during working hours (n=50)

S. No	Categories	%
1	Full time job (8-10 hours)	72.0
2	Continuous activities	15.0
3	Relaxation time less than an hour	13.0

Results from the above table shows that 72% of the respondent said that it is full time job of (8-10 hours). They did not get free time for relaxation and 15% of the respondent said that the activities they performed are of long duration and continuous and 13% respondent said that they hardly get time (less than an hour) for rest on lunch time.

**Table 5**

Percentage distribution of the responses on taking days off from work place (n=50)

S. No	Categories	%
1	No off days	56.0
2	Sometimes	25.0
3	In case of emergency or occasionally	19.0

Result from the above table shows that 56% respondent said that they did not get any off day from work. They work in all the week days 25% respondent said they get off days sometimes

like once in ten days and 19% respondent said that in case of emergency or when they needed they get off days like in case of illness, on wedding, or in case of some urgent work.

**Table 6**

Percentage distribution of the responses on the received pay and the utilization of pay

S. No	Categories	%
1	Less pay	80.0
2	Parent's control	90.0

Results from the above table shows that 80% respondent said that they receive less pays for the work they do. 90% of the respondent said that they have no control on their pays. Their parents take their pays.

**Table 7**

Percentage distribution of the responses on physical abuse (n=50)

S. No	Categories	%
1	Slap/hit	42.0
2	No physical abuse	58.0

Result from the above table shows physical abuse from their employ. Like they hit them and slap them when they do any work wrong or they do work late and 58% respondent said that they did not face physical abuse. They are not beaten by their employ

**Table 8**

Percentage distribution of the responses on verbal abuse (n=50)

S. No	Categories	%
1	Use of abusive words	70.0
2	Use of rough language	30.0

Result from the above table shows that 70% of the respondents are treated with the abusive words and 30% of the respondent said that their employ use rough language with the. This teases them and makes them feel inferior.

**Table 9**

Percentage distribution of the responses on provision of facilities (n=50)

S. No	Categories	%
1	No facilities	35.0
2	Facilities like medication/clothing	65.0

Results from the above table shows that 36% of the respondent said that they receive no facilities like apart from the pay they did not receive any extra facilities or financial support and 65% of the respondent said that they get clothing and medication when they needed.

**Table 10**

Percentage distribution of the responses on impact of long working hours on their health

S. No	Categories	%
1	Over exertive Work makes them ill & Stressed	80.0
2	Long Hours causes low stock of energy	70.0

Results from the table shows that 80% of the respondents were of view that over burdened work makes them ill and they feel stressed. Seventy percent of the respondents said that due to long working hours their energy stocks get low and they feel weak.

## Discussion

Exploitation includes a social relationship in which certain persons are being mistreated or unfairly used for the benefit of others. In this the upper class or the authoritative person use the lower one for his/her benefits. It also includes that someone make use of other without his/her will or forcefully for work and offer less amount of pay. Worldwide children are working as child labor. If we view the policies and laws that are made for the protection of children they are not implemented the way it should be. Children are the important part of our society and it is their right to live freely as the citizen of Pakistan.

Problem of child labor is a global phenomenon. Mostly it is found in Third World Countries. The problem is not only confined to Pakistan, it is spread in India and Bangladesh as well. Children under fourteen are working very where in different occupations and exploitation of children (Child Labor) is the worst form of exploitation. In this work especially Child Domestic Labor is not visible and society does not consider it Child Labor. Parents think that it is the duty of the Child to help them and support them financially.

The root causes of child domestic labor are multiple and multi-faceted. Poverty and its feminization, social exclusion, lack of education, gender and ethnic discrimination, domestic

violence, displacement, rural-urban migration and loss of parents due to conflicts and diseases, are just some of the multiple “push factors” for child domestic workers worldwide.

Child domestic laborers are also at risk of abuse, violence and routine unkindness. They also suffered abuse at the hands of employer’s children and their own parents. The focus of the present study is on the issue of exploitation of children as domestic labor and its impact on their physical health.

The results of the present study showed that mostly children are not school going. And some of the children has attended school till just 4 or 5 class and then left the school. The results also showed that the cause of not school that why these children did not attend school is their parents as they did not allow them to go to school. Their parents think that it would cost them. It is not useful. As the education is expensive and the parents who cannot afford to educate their children, they encourage their children to go for a job. Some of the respondent said that their parents are not economically strong to send them school. In both the responses the due to lack of economic resources the children did not attend school The present study showed that the parents and lack of economic resources are the major cause and hinders in the way of children to attend school. The parents think that it will cost them and not beneficiary. And the parents think if children will go for work it will financial help for the parents. In a paper on Economics of Child Labor by Basu & Van (1998) it is argued that the primary cause of Child Labor is parental poverty. And the parents send their children into work field due to lack of economic resources. It also supports the present study findings that the poor parents cannot afford the education expenses of their children so they did not send them to school.

Due to illiteracy and unawareness of the parents the children are deprived of receiving proper food, education that is necessary for the upbringing of the child. Another problem of the parents is the bigger family size, and poor parents become unable to maintain their homes so the parents sent their children to work and made their children domestic laborers. 40% of the respondent’s response showed that they do the work for the financial support of the family. As they see the problems of their family and get motivated by themselves and join the job to supplement the family income. They are easily employed as they are used as cheap labor as compare to adults.

The present study finding showed that the working hours of the children are not flexible and the activities performed in these hours are continuous. They work almost 7-8 Or 8-10 hours continuously in a day. 72% of the respondent’s responses indicated that the domestic work is a full time job to do. They work all the time and did not get time for relaxation. If they can not complete their work on time then they have to spend more time on their work place until they complete their work. 15% responses are that the activities (clothing, cleaning the house and dish washing) duration is long so during their working time they do not take time for rest. The only time they have is of 10-15 minutes that is not at proper free time for rest. 13% of the responses showed that they get time for the rest. And their rest time is less than an hour. During this hour they do not do any task and sit relax.

The findings of the present study regarding their off days from work showed that most of the children (56%) did not get any off day from their work place. All days of the week they go to the job. No off day is for them in every condition they have to go to work. 25% showed that sometimes once in ten days or twice in week they get off days. Or when the work load is less these children came home before time. No regular off day is decided but they do get leaves from their work place. The houses that have more workers in their home give off days to



children from work. Very few (19%) of the results showed that they get off days when they need it. Like in case of severe illness or any emergency when they cannot go to work place they made their days off. And if they have any functions at their homes or on any other occasion they made the number of days off.

Oebanda (2006) argued that child domestic workers are prone to verbal, physical and sexual abuse violence, and the impact of this abuse can leave permanent scars. In the Philippines, the Visayan Forum has documented cases of physical abuse that sometimes result in serious physical injury or even death. The present study also showed that 42% respondents are of the view that they are being physically abused by the hands of their employ. They sometimes hit them or slap them on not completing their task on time or if the children broke something or go late to the work place. So in the respondents view they face physical abuse. 58% respondents are of the view that they did not face any physical abuse by the hands of their employ. They never been hit or physically tortured. In the respondent's view hardly touch of the hand is not physical abuse. As

Result showed that most of the respondents (70%) face verbal abuse by the hands of their employer and their kids. The workplace environment is not healthy as the employer use harsh language with the children and spoke them in rough manner. They scold them whole day during work. Thirty percent of the respondents are of the view that the use of rough language is very commonly faced by them. They are considered as inferior and of low status so they are not treated in well manner.

Some of the respondents (35%) said that they receive no facilities apart from their pay. No extra financial support is given to them and no other facilities like clothing, medication they get from the employ. Most of the respondents (65%) are of the view that they only get medication in case of need at workplace. And sometimes they get clothing from them. But no extra provision of the facilities they received.

William Wordsworth wrote: "Child is the father of the man." This is a simple philosophy, but beyond the comprehension of our policy makers. If only they could follow it, it could actually change the sophisticated fabric of the society and the future of this country. Pakistan has the potential to grow into a stable, strong and resourceful country, free of poverty and deprivation. The step urgently required to put Pakistan on the right track to put all the children in schools where they receive quality education. It is not an impossible task, China, Korea, Malaysia and many other countries have done it and so can Pakistan.

## **Conclusion**

Child labor is not a disease that cannot be cured. Although, practically speaking it may not be completely eliminated at once, but there are many reason to believe that the number of children working as Domestic Laborers (invisible kind of labor done by children) can be reduced even in the third world countries. The first element that is required for the elimination of the Child Domestic Labor is the strong government policies and its implementation, second is total unacceptability of working children by the society as a whole.

From the present findings of the research it is concluded that Child Domestic Labor is very much prevalent in the society. Though access to these children is not easy but it is not impossible to find these children. As they too are the important part of the society so we cannot neglect them. The Child Domestic Labor is an invisible phenomenon so the people

think it is not a work. These children work 8-10 hours and do different activities clothing, cleaning, dish washing taking care of the kids at home and many other tasks. Throughout their working time they only work and get very minimum pay in return of their work. Often they face physical and verbal abuse by the hands of the employ. Children working as domestic workers also need attention. Working at a young age is likely to have an adverse effect on health both immediately and in future life as well (Adult age). Their growth is also effected due to their involvement in child domestic labor. As they are sometimes beaten, abused and treated as inhuman by the hands of their employers. The study showed that children are exploiting in this work and this work is negatively impacting their lives.

The hazards faced by these domestic laborers need to be seen in association with the denial of fundamental rights of the children such as access to education and health care, the right to rest, leisure, play and recreation and the right to be cared for and to grow with their full potential. These factors can have an irreversible physical, psychological and moral impact on the development, health and well-being of the child. The society and the parents should also think that children are not the property that should be utilized and exploited. They should also provide the education and the basic facilities that are necessary for healthy life of these forgotten children as they also have the right to live their lives with freedom. On the basis of the studies it is also concluded that these domestic child workers should also be involved in all efforts on their behalf. Their ideas should be taken into account in practical involvement and matter should also be clearly taken to account in regards to these invisible, forgotten children.

- Betterment in the lives of child domestic workers is dependent on changes in society's attitudes.
- In child laborers the children working as domestics are numerous, and also the most hidden, invisible, and inaccessible. So there is a need to look over these children and to find the better solutions for them as soon as possible

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