
Child Labor is Common in Agricultural Trade, Assist in Households' Burden KP Pakistan

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Abstract

Child labor remains a prevalent issue in the agricultural trade of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan, where economic hardships, cultural norms, and limited access to education force children to contribute to household livelihoods. Many families, particularly in rural areas, rely on child labor to support farming activities, as poverty and financial constraints make it difficult to hire adult workers. The resolve of child labor in KP's agricultural sector highlights the structural inequalities and inadequate enforcement of labor laws. Furthermore, the socio-economic implications of child labor extend beyond individual households, as it perpetuates cycles of poverty. This study examines the key drivers of child labor in agricultural households, including economic pressures, lack of alternative income sources, and the unavailability of accessible education. It also explores the broader consequences of child labor on health, education, and long-term economic mobility. To address this issue, the study advocates for targeted policy interventions such as poverty alleviation programs, improved access to quality education, financial support for rural families, and the strict enforcement of child labor laws. By addressing the root causes of child labor and implementing effective interventions, KP can work towards a future where children are safeguarded from labor exploitation and provided with opportunities for education and skill development.

Keywords: Child labor, agricultural trade, farming households, education access, labor laws, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

Introduction

Children are compelled to work when their families experience financial strain due to poverty, illness, or job loss. Yet notable gap in research on the key factors driving child labor in Pakistan (Sikandar, Muhammad et al. 2022). It is projected that by 2025, 121 million children will be involved in child labor. Among them, 48% will be aged 5–11, 28% will be 12–14, and 25% will be 15–17 years old (Sikandar, Khan et al. 2022). Child labor is often described as work that negatively impacts children during their early years, hindering their potential, dignity, and causing harm to their physical and mental health (Hallaq and Khalifah 2022). While the Boys are more frequently involved in outside domestic work compared to girls and COVID-19 pandemic is likely to cause in increase in child labor (Abdullah, Huynh et al. 2022). However, as the result, national governments and international organizations have been working to reduce child labor, yielding some progress: in 2016, 152 million children were engaged in child labor, down from 246 million

in 2000 (Hoppula 2022). On the other than that, the most recent estimates by the International Labor Organization (ILO) reveal that 152 million children, aged 5 to 17, are subjected to child labor worldwide (Hennessy 2023). Not all forms of work are classified as child labor, but only those that can harm children's health and deprive them of their education (Thi, Zimmerman et al. 2023). There is no universally agreed definition of child labor were market-based work, which involves paid work in the formal or informal sectors, or within a family enterprise, where goods and services are produced primarily for non-monetary purposes (Ahad, Parry et al. 2024). Additionally, child laborers often come from needy families and may experience starvation, making them more vulnerable to a range of diseases (AZUAGA and Education 2024). According to the International Labor Organization, in 2008, 8.3% (3.3 million) of the 40 million children in Pakistan were engaged in full-time and/or low-protection labor across all territories (Shah, Ahmed et al. 2023). Furthermore, Low-income families are unable to afford school fees and are forced to send their children to work in order to contribute to the family's income (Habib, Rankin et al. 2023). While the primary factors contributing to child labor include socio-cultural aspects such as large family size, an agricultural based economy, family conflicts, divorces, and the joint family system (Salik 2023). Furthermore, prevalence of child labor arises from a combination of factors, including parental or guardian illiteracy, health issues, weak enforcement of child labor laws, social inequality, and poverty (Wilder 2023). According to the United Nations, "children are classified as child laborers when they are either too young to work are engaged in hazardous activities that may risk their physical, mental, social, or educational development (Cortes and Forsythe 2023). Moreover, Poverty, income level, migration, education level, and family size are the primary factors determining child labor and the source of agricultural assist in household burden (Dayioğlu, Kırdar et al. 2024). Child labor remains a global issue that demands a multifaceted approach for its resolution. International conventions and treaties serve as the cornerstone of this effort (Munir and Umer 2023). Child labor is prevalent in the agricultural trade in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, where children often assist in alleviating household burdens (Maqbool, Newton et al. 2024). Last but not the least, address this issue, it is essential to implement government policies focused on reducing child labor through education initiatives, poverty alleviation programs, and strict enforcement of labor laws (Gul, Ahmad et al. 2023). Globally, child labor is predominantly an agricultural issue Approximately 60% of all child laborers aged 5–17 is engaged in agriculture livestock (ILO 2022). The majority of child labor, approximately 70%, is concentrated in the agricultural sector and Around 112 million boys and girls are engaged (FAO 2022) in child labor across various agricultural activities farming, Notably, the number of child laborers in agriculture has increased by four million between 2016 and 2020 (FAO 2022). Child labor is widespread in developing countries and continues to rise in certain sub-Saharan African nations. This issue is primarily concentrated in the agricultural sector (A Mwendwa, M Aurah et al. 2024, Habib, El Khayat et al. 2024). There are 30 million fewer children involved in agricultural child labor today than in 2008 and, the main cause of poverty, children from entering child labor remains a complex challenge, governments peruse this cycle (Liaqat, Riaz et al. 2024). This represents over 98 million children, with the majority (67.5%) working as unpaid family members (international labor organization) (ILO 2022). While the Collaborative efforts from communities, organizations, and international bodies are essential to address the root causes and provide sustainable solutions (Organizaiton 2016). Understanding these dynamics is crucial for developing targeted initiatives aimed at eliminating child labor and ensuring the well-being of children (Akram, Hassan et al. 2024). Studies indicate that as higher education and financial stability reduce of the child labor engaging in different work (Basu and Dimova 2024). However, limited research has been conducted to identify the specific factors contributing to child labor in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan For instance, findings from some studies reveal Musa, Magaji et al. (2023). Children from disadvantaged families have fewer opportunities to secure a

better future, especially when access to quality education is unavailable (Abbas and Iqbal 2024). Parental education and household wealth are crucial factors influencing child labor, while financially struggling households are more likely to depend on child labor for economic support (Thi, Zimmerman et al. 2023). This paper emphasizes that education is pivotal in eradicating child labor, advocating for equal access to educational opportunities for both girls and boys (Betcherman, Fares et al. 2004). Education and knowledge are essential for a country's development and recognizing their transformative potential, this study aims to analyze the relationship between child labor, education, and poverty, shedding light on how these factors interact and impact societal progress (Awaleh 2007) Alongside policy recommendations, it highlights the need for critical measures to create a more robust economic environment, ensuring improved living conditions and economic stability for the broader population (Nawab, Aktaş et al. 2021).

Literature Review

The majority of studies highlight a negative relationship between child labor and educational outcomes (Abdullah, Huynh et al. 2022). While the growing evidence highlights climate change as a significant threat multiplier for child labor, especially in the agricultural sector, which accounts for 70% of all child labor as globally and education, household, burden risks, economic pressures, and existing social inequities (A Mwendwa, M Aurah et al. 2024). Furthermore, the households allocate 60-70% of their income to food, with their consumption heavily reliant on both adult and child labor incomes. As a result, these economically disadvantaged families are often unable to afford to send their children to school of barrow in household (Khan, Jan et al. 2020). The study recommended that the government support home-based businesses and provide parental enrollment incentives to reduce the need for child labor. It also examined the working conditions of children, existing programs and policies, and the challenges faced by these initiatives (Bekik 2024). The findings revealed that 60% of respondents identified poverty as the primary cause of child labor. Additionally, a significant proportion of parents were unemployed, with 70% engaged in low-skill trades, 78.7% earning income from small-scale businesses, and 41.9% being uneducated. Consequently, children from low socio-economic backgrounds were compelled by their parents to contribute financially (Khattak 2016, UNICEF and HAR 2019, Rebelo and Guimarães 2023). Child labor in Pakistan distances across multiple sectors impact household burden, including agriculture, carpet weaving, automobile workshops, mining, stone and marble factories, deep-sea fishing, glass manufacturing, hotels, street vending, and domestic work (Hanane, Xianghe et al. 2024). Finally, we explore whether parents consider child labor an investment in human capital to enhance their children's future agricultural productivity and the anticipated future returns from child labor (Dwibedi, Khan et al. 2024), as parents often perceive farm work as a means of developing countries to involved agricultural while the Economists primarily analyze to reduce with child labor (Zewdie, Berlie et al. 2024). The study explores the relationship between skilled child, poverty, and child labor in the Peshawar district. Furthermore, it highlights that child labor occupies in education and the educational achievement of the household burden significantly reduce the prevalence of child labor (Ejaz, Iqbal et al. 2024).

An estimated 200 million farmers engage in urban agriculture that child labor in agriculture can also be present in urban areas (Edet, Etim et al. 2013). Child Labor in agriculture many families rely on child labor to supplement household income Rural areas in KP have inadequate schools and high dropout rates (Eze, Amedu et al. 2024). While the working children are often viewed as contributors to family survival Despite legal restrictions, (Congdon Fors 2024) while the child labor persists due to lack of enforcement and agricultural Dependence Agriculture being labor-intensive increases demand for family-based work (Takyi 2024). In a recent review, Ravetti (2020) found that one-third of studies on the impact of cash transfers on child labor indicate a reduction in child work, another third show a decline only for specific groups of children, while the

remaining third report an increase in child labor participation due to cash transfers (Churchill, Iqbal et al. 2021). Agricultural labor constitutes the largest proportion of child labor globally. However, accurately measuring child labor statistics remains a challenge, and enforcing regulations to alleviate household burdens is often difficult (Galdo, Dammert et al. 2021). In many rural communities, particularly in regions like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan, child labor in agriculture is not merely a practice but a necessity for household survival (Shah, Gong et al. 2021). Agricultural labor is physically demanding, requiring intensive child labor during peak seasons such as planting and harvesting (Takeshima and Vos 2022). Furthermore, the smallholder farming households lack access to modern technology and machinery, making manual labor essential (Sabates-Wheeler and Sumberg 2022). It presents economic and business arguments for why private companies should actively work to combat child labor and explores ways to enhance or adjust current strategies to achieve more rural and urban areas remit (Adonteng-Kissi 2023). To achieve this, the article moves beyond dominant narratives surrounding child labor and explores how re-framing children's participation in African agriculture from "labor" to "work" could provide deeper insights into its various forms, prevalence, underlying causes, and the dynamics that contribute to their engagement in potentially harmful activities (Sabates-Wheeler and Sumberg 2022). Innovative strategies are essential to meet the ambitious target of eliminating child labor by 2025. Key Issues to Address: Poverty remains the primary driver of child labor, as many families rely on their children's income for survival (Bensah 2025). According to the ILO there is a significant negative correlation between child labor and school enrollment. The study highlights that lower literacy rates are linked to a higher prevalence of child labor (Ul-Haq, Nazeer et al. 2024). Child labor, including its "worst forms," remains widespread in Latin America. According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the number of children engaged in labor increased by 8.4 million between 2016 and 2020, marking the first increase since 2000. In this context, the role of International Labor Organization (ILO) conventions related to child labor, particularly Convention 182 concerning its worst forms, becomes crucial (Nurmahfudi, Setyani et al. 2025). Although Convention 182 was the first ILO convention to achieve universal ratification, its actual impact on the situation of vulnerable children is not straightforward (Yousuf and Razi 2025). While the convention has garnered widespread support, its implementation and enforcement at the national level face significant challenges, and the ongoing rise in child labor highlights the complexity of addressing the issue despite international commitments (Zsögön 2024). The purpose of this study is to examine the psychological health of child working in hazardous labor conditions in Lahore, Pakistan. Despite being a vital resource for the nation's future, children in Pakistan face significant challenges, including poverty, unemployment, and limited access to education and healthcare (Khanum, Ul-Haq et al. 2024). Specifically, high-quality infrastructure and teaching materials were linked to a reduction in cocoa agricultural activities, but did not impact domestic and economic tasks (Ansong, Asamoah et al. 2024). In light of the global emphasis on enhancing education quality, we propose that investments in quality education could achieve two objectives: reducing child labor and enhancing children's learning outcomes (Wortsman, Bhattacharya et al. 2024). Over the past decades, an expanding body of research has examined the link between child labor and education, or more broadly, human capital development while, the study draws on key insights from the existing literature (Chudgar, Grover et al. 2022). However, these analyses have been partially constrained by a lack of data on critical outcomes, such as foundational skills, and further complicated by challenges in accurately measuring and integrating child labor into quantitative analyses were negative impact (Kumar, Subrahmanian et al. 2024). Research on the impacts of child labor indicates multiple associations with adverse health outcomes. For instance, Parker¹ highlighted that child labor is linked to hazardous exposures, such as silica in industrial settings, and an increased risk of HIV infection in cases of prostitution (Ibrahim, Abdalla et al. 2019). However, the working child labor, often

unskilled and employed at an early age, are particularly vulnerable to exploitation. Child labor working hours in poor conditions, lack adequate protection, In a country like Pakistan, regulation alone is not a sufficient solution to address the complex issue of child labor (Hussain and Saud 2017). Nearly all governments worldwide have approved international human rights conventions advocating for the eradication of child labor and the guarantee of universal primary education (Betcherman, Fares et al. 2004). The findings of this study are crucial for shaping policies aimed at addressing the complex issues of child and youth education and labor in Pakistan (Zaman, Moroojo et al. 2024). Last but not the least, the Identifying the primary gaps in existing child labor and educational laws is key to understanding the challenges and deficiencies in current legislation, which is essential for creating more effective solutions (Hanane, Xianghe et al. 2024). Previous research primarily explored the influence of household income on child labor. The employment of underage individuals, or child labor, remains a widespread issue in developing countries (Raza, Shah et al. 2024). Additionally, given the unique characteristics of the region, addressing the normalization of child labor requires both a cultural shift and the implementation of effective and deterrent penalties (Zsögön 2024). A rights-based approach serves as an important tool for monitoring child labor, but enforcing legal frameworks necessitates an interdisciplinary strategy combined with robust social and economic policies (Han 2024). In Pakistan, child labor is not only legally prohibited but also discouraged through initiatives such as free compulsory education, social welfare programs, and efforts to promote self-respect among children. (Ali, Bhatti et al. 2021). The research findings and literature review support a positive correlation between poverty and child labor, while indicating a negative relationship between child labor and children's access to education (Sabir, Haleem et al. 2024). Child maltreatment is a significant global health concern that affects millions of children worldwide. Among them, child laborers are particularly vulnerable due to their economic hardships and the exploitative nature of many workplaces (Ahad, Parry et al. 2021). The study further reveals that the root causes of child labor poverty and limited access to education have largely remained unchanged over time. These findings highlight the urgent need for effective policies and targeted interventions to combat child labor in the district of Haripur, ensuring better opportunities for children and reducing their economic vulnerability (Hamza, Mehdi et al. 2023). This study aims to examine the individual, household socio-economic, and regional contextual factors that influence child labor participation in Indonesia. By identifying the key drivers of child labor, the research provides help policymakers develop and implement effective measures to eliminate child labor (Magdalena, Sukamdi et al. 2021). Child labor in Pakistan refers to the employment of children in work that causes social, moral, mental, and physical harm. Despite its widespread prevalence, various organizations are actively working to eliminate this issue through policy reforms, were perse (KHAN, NIWAZ et al.). The study's findings recommend the enforcement of child labor regulations in the agricultural sector and the expansion of public schools in rural areas to improve access to education. In traditional agriculture, where child labor is prevalent, such measures are crucial to reducing the child labor (Mohammed 2024).

Objective

The study aims to investigate the prevalence, determinants, and implications of child labor in the agricultural trade of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan, with a focus on the interplay between child labor, education, and poverty. Examine the scale and nature of child labor in agricultural households in KP, identifying the key tasks and sectors where children are involved. Explore the socio-economic factors such as poverty, parental education, household wealth, cultural norms, and inadequate institutional support that drive child labor in the region.

Conclusion

Child labor in the agricultural trade of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan, remains a pressing socio-economic issue that reflects deep-rooted poverty, cultural norms, and inadequate policy enforcement. The reliance on children to support household farming activities stems from financial hardships, limited access to education, and the absence of viable employment opportunities for adults. While these children contribute significantly to agricultural productivity, their engagement in labor-intensive tasks comes at a high cost to their physical health, educational attainment, and overall well-being. The perpetuation of child labor not only reinforces intergenerational poverty but also hinders the socio-economic development of the region. Despite international and national efforts to curb child labor, the persistence of weak labor laws, insufficient monitoring mechanisms, and socio-cultural acceptance of child labor continue to fuel this crisis. Addressing this issue requires a multi-faceted approach, incorporating poverty reduction strategies, investment in quality education, financial support for rural families, and rigorous enforcement of child labor laws. Strengthening institutional capacity to monitor labor practices, raising public awareness, and fostering community engagement are crucial steps toward eliminating child labor in KP's agricultural sector. The elimination of child labor in agriculture is not just a moral imperative but also a fundamental requirement for achieving long-term sustainable development and economic prosperity in KP and beyond.

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