

Socioeconomic factors influencing Child Labour and Educational Opportunities in Afghan Refugees Communities in Peshawar and Jalalabad



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Abstract: *This study investigates the impact of child labour on the educational outcomes and school attendance of Afghan refugee children in Peshawar and Jalalabad. Data reveals that 36.66% of these children work 9-11 hours daily, which severely affects their ability to attend school regularly and perform well academically. Those working over 12 hours face even greater challenges, including worsened health and minimal educational time. Financial constraints, inadequate resources, and cultural barriers are major factors driving children to leave school, with 28.87% citing household financial weakness as a primary reason. The Covid-19 pandemic further exacerbated school dropout rates, contributing to 9.6% of the cases. The educational level among the 68 enrolled students is notably low, with high dropout rates as they advance through grades. Only 11.6% complete middle-level education and many students attend religious Madrassas instead of formal schools. Irregular attendance and poor academic performance are common, with only 11.77% attending school regularly. The findings underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions to address these challenges and improve educational access and quality for child labourers.*

Keywords: Child, Labour, Education, Afghan, Refugee

Introduction

Child labour remain a persistence problem in the world, with around 160 million children aged 5 to 17 years, that comprise of 97 million boys and 63 million girls engaged in child labour in 2020, among them, 79 million children involved in hazardous work (ILO, 2020). Child labour is defined as a work that deprives children of their childhood, that is physically, morally and socially harmful, and that conflicting with their education by depriving them of the opportunity to attend school or obliging them to leave school prematurely or demanding them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work (ILO, 1999). Pakistan labour force survey estimated 13.7 percent of children aged 10-17 years are involved in labour among which 5.4 percent are working in hazardous sector (ILO, 2023). As per the International Labour Organization (ILO), 3.6 million children are employed across various sectors in Pakistan, encompassing tens of thousands of Afghan refugees nationwide, with

some coerced into work by parents, particularly in families led by females, resulting in adverse future prospects characterized by insufficient education and diminished mental and physical development (Lowicki, 2002). It is argued that the basic cause of child labour is the socio-economic condition of the family and factors such as poverty, parents' level of education, the expensiveness of education, and living conditions significantly exacerbate child labour, ultimately harming the mental and social development of affected children (Khan, 2001). The Pakistani government asserts its efforts in safeguarding and assisting Afghan refugees amid limited resources, yet faces occasional criticism from international organizations for allegedly failing to establish an enabling environment for the social, mental, and educational development of refugee children, constituting 50% of the total Afghan refugee population, many of whom are subjected to harsh employment such as carpet weaving, begging, domestic servitude, drug trafficking, and involvement in child prostitution (Berti,

2003). Children of Afghan refugees, as revealed through interviews, engage in scavenging and carpet weaving to meet their families' daily needs, with the majority of households experiencing a higher ratio of females, thereby placing additional financial burdens on male members (Lowicki, 2002). Local and international NGOs established technical educational centers and schools for refugees in camps and some off-camp, children are also allowed to go to Pakistani private school but often due to high educational costs limited families can send their children to private education institutions. However, the situation of girls is different due to cultural restrictions as they need to perform daily house chores and also are expected to get married at their early age of puberty (Lowicki, 2002). A study on the health and educational impacts of child labor in Nigeria revealed that children from impoverished families often forego school attendance in order to generate income through child labor, while, culturally, many families view having numerous children as a divine blessing, contributing to alleviating their financial burdens. (Agbo, 2017).

There are many factors that are directly and indirectly affecting education of child laborers among afghan refugees living in Peshawar.

Quality of Education

The education of children depends upon the proximity of school, quality of education; future earning, financial uncertainties and protection and safeguarding of children from all problems (Lutf & Yasini, 2018). Determinants that are discontinuing children from educational achievement is school cost, low job opportunities, gap in practical and theoretical education, a smaller number of schools and cultural barriers especially for females, parents awareness about prospects of education (Brown D 2002). According to ILO, developing nations can make laws for child rights according to their own requirements along with the representatives of labour community. However, in many countries it is usual that the age of compulsory education is higher than the age for apprenticeship/employment for child, due to which these states cannot achieve the

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (Humbert, 2009). Some countries allow child labour to benefit from the unfair trade through attraction of cheap, docile labour to the international investors in their countries that cannot raise their voices against violation of their rights (ILO, 2004).

Parental Level of Education

The utilization of child labor by families as a strategy to alleviate poverty can perpetuate across generations, leading to a cycle of deprivation of education (Emerson & Souza, 2002). In Nangarhar, Afghanistan, educated families prioritize their children's education, unlike illiterate families who, influenced by conservative views, believe schooling promotes rebellion against family norms and view recreational activities as a waste of time, leading them to create a harsh home environment and push their children into child labour for immediate family benefits (Lutf & Yasini, 2018). While according to these illiterate parents child labour is a form of training that keeps them learning and aligns with their culture (ILO, 2004).

Child Labour and its Impact on Education

Worldwide, 218 million children are busy in work and among them 152 million are victims of child labour (World Vision, 2022). These children are engaged in different form of activities that deprive them of their fundamental rights e.g.; education, school attendance, leisure activities, freedom and that also affects their cognitive and physical health. (ILO, 2018). As child labour shares the financial burden of the family, therefore, in Pakistan only 9% of the children combine work with their education, each extra year spending in school gives a child 11 percent higher income chances while early joining the workforce by a child reduces his lifetime earnings by 13 to 20 percent (Vandenberg, 2007). Study conducted by the World Bank suggests that child labour negatively affect the academics of children when combined with school and these children at some stages leave school to fulfill their economic requirements (Donnell, Doorslaer, & Rosati, 2002). All those children who are

working with or without school and think that they are sharing economic burden of their families in reality they are perpetuating poverty to their next generation (ILO, 2015). Childhood labour has a detrimental impact on children's social, mental, and educational backgrounds and education, rather than labour, holds the potential to change their fate (Sam, 2016). The child labour also has physical consequences like eye and respiratory diseases, memory defects, learning difficulties and speech problems while it also has physiological effects such as anxiety, feeling insecurity, jealousy and revenge and hostility, which lead to violence in the society in Afghanistan (AIHRC, 2006). There are contradictory views about educational institutions and child labour in society. Some argue that if a child's school performance is poor and the child believes they can learn better through work rather than attending school, they should be allowed to leave school for work, especially if the work is less harmful and potentially beneficial for their development. However, their financial contributions often go unnoticed within families. Moreover, these children face abuse at their workplace, experiencing verbal and sexual assaults by employers or co-workers, incidents that often go unnoticed by parents (ILO, 2004). Article 28 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child deals with the right to free primary education along with vocational and secondary education, and that the State must take steps for regular attendance and reduction of drop-out rate while State parties should also encourage international assistance regarding education to eliminate

ignorance throughout the world (OHCHR, 1989).

Research Methodology

The research employed a post-positivist interpretivist approach to analyze the data, focusing on understanding the lived experiences and social realities of Afghan refugee child laborers in Peshawar and Jalalabad. The snowball sampling method was used to identify participants, and data were gathered from 210 respondents, including 183 boys and 27 girls, through interviews, case studies, and observations. An interview schedule was developed to guide the data collection process, ensuring consistency across interviews. Primary sources included direct interactions with the child laborers, while secondary sources comprised relevant literature and reports on child labor and refugee issues. For data analysis, thematic analysis was used to identify key patterns and themes emerging from the qualitative data.

Research Questions:

How do the working hours of child labourers impact their educational attainment and school attendance?

What are the main factors that force children to leave school and enter the workforce?

What is the educational level of Afghan refugee child labourers living in Peshawar?

How does child labour impact school attendance?

Table: 1 Daily Working Hours of Child Labour

Working Hours	Number of Boys		Number of Girls		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
3-5 hours	34	18.58	3	11.11	37	17.62
6-8 hours	55	30.05	5	18.52	60	28.57
9-11 hours	63	34.43	14	51.85	77	36.66
12 and above	31	16.94	5	18.52	36	17.15
Total	183	100	27	100	210	100

The table 1 shows the category of working hours in the first column while in second column the number of boys and in third one the number of girl's respondents are shown and in the last one total number and percentage of the working children are shown. Working hours are categorized into four categories between 3-12 hours while in the last row numbers of total respondents are shown. The first category of working hours is 3-5 hours, comprising 17.62 percent of respondents who work as scavengers, with some also attending school or religious education centers. Meanwhile, 17.15 percent of respondents who work over 12 hours are employed in Hotels, Restaurants, and Brick kilns, where long working hours are routine for child labourers. Additionally, 28.57 percent work for 6-8 hours, with some also participating in religious education. The majority of child respondents belong to 36.66% the 9-11 hour working category, engaged as street sellers and in other areas. Among the sampled respondents, the majority work between 9-11 hours a day, which exceeds their physical capacity and violates both international and national laws for children. The impacts of these long working hours are evident in the health condition of these children; increased working hours mean less or no leisure and entertainment activities, leaving

them no time for education. In comparison to their extended working hours, they receive lower daily wages that are insufficient to meet their financial needs, forcing them to work without any break for life time. A study revealed hazardous conditions of child labour in brick kilns in Pakistan, which has become a hidden sector where child labour officers cannot investigate rights violations (Ali, Abbas, & Ali, 2017). From the above data it can be concluded that Afghan's refugee's children's rights are violated through extended working hours, debt bondage, lack of education, and physical injuries.

The data shows that child labourers working 9-11 hours daily are most prevalent (36.66%), which severely impacts their educational attainment and school attendance due to insufficient time and fatigue. Those working over 12 hours (17.15%) face the greatest challenges, with minimal time for education and worsening health. Conversely, those working 3-5 hours (17.62%) are more likely to attend school and balance their education. Longer working hours contribute to poor health and inadequate wages, further hindering their ability to focus on and attend school regularly. Overall, extended working hours negatively affect both educational outcomes and school attendance.

Table 2 Causes of School Leaving among Child Labourer

Main Determinants	Specific Factors	Number of Boys	Number of Girls	Total number	Percentage (%)
Economic Barriers to Education	Household Financial Condition	14	4	41	28.87
	No Source of Income	10	-----		
	High School Fee	13	-----		
Educational Infrastructure Challenges	Lack of professional teachers	6	1	23	16.18
	Distance from school	11	3		
	Lack of female teachers	-----	2		
Negative School Environment Factor	Corporal Punishment	6	-----	11	7.75
	Rude teacher behavior	4	-----		
	Fine in schools	1	-----		
Socio-culture and familial influence on children	Parental Decision	10	-----	16	11.27
	Cultural Barriers	-----	3		
	Un-educated Family	3	----		
Working condition	Work burden	19	-----		

of child labourer	Learn Trade	16	2	51	35.93
	Covid-19	13	1		
	Total	126	16	142	100

Field Survey: 2020

The above table 2 discusses the causes of school leaving among child labourers of Afghan refugees household. The first column of the table shows main determinant that influenced on children education in general while in the second one a specific factors that push these children in to labour according to them while third and fourth column show number of respondents and in the last two columns results in number and percentage are shown. During interviews with respondents, various causes of school leaving emerged, including a lack of qualified teachers in schools, distance from educational institutes, corporal punishment in schools, and the impact of Covid-19 on their school leaving. Some children opt to learn trades in hopes of changing their future by gaining skills in the local mechanical workshops, while the influence of parental decisions and cultural barriers also play a role in their school learning. However, the predominant cause influencing the majority of respondents to leave school and enter the workforce is the financial struggles of their households.

The study reveals that a child's economic circumstances are a significant factor pushing them to contribute to and support their families through labour, resulting in a lack of time for schooling and learning. Factors such as inadequate resources, a scarcity of educational materials, unqualified teachers, and corporal punishment discourage students from remaining in school and drive them towards work. Cultural norms affect girls' education, with 2.11 percent of female respondents leaving school due to

such barriers, and 1.40 percent due to the absence of female teachers in their schools. One reason for girls not attending school is that many families avoid co-education, even at the primary level. Additionally, the lack of separate female schools and the government's disinterest in building new schools contribute to this issue. The collected data demonstrates that a workload of 13.39 percent and pursuing a trade for learning (12.68 percent) contributes to school dropout rates. Families often prefer trade skills like mechanics and welding over education, leading to dropouts. The data above highlights that 9.16 percent of children report their parents deciding to work instead of attending school, citing the necessity of providing for a family of 5-8 members as a challenging task for a single earner. Moreover, 9.6 percent of children leave school due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which led to the closure of educational institutions, prompting them to join the labour force to support their family's survival.

The primary factor forcing children to leave school and enter the workforce is household financial weakness, affecting 28.87% of the respondents. Other significant causes include inadequate educational resources, unqualified teachers, and cultural barriers, particularly impacting girls (e.g., 2.11% due to cultural norms). Additionally, the Covid-19 pandemic contributed to 9.6% of school dropouts, as school closures pushed children into labor. Trade skills training and the necessity to support large families also drive children to leave school, with 13.39% citing these reasons.

Table 3 Educational Level of Afghan Refugees Child labourers leaving in Peshawar

Educational Level	Number of Boys	Number of Girls	Total Number	Percentage (%)
Non-Formal Education	13	4	17	25
Class 1-2	11	3	14	20.58
Class 3-4	14	4	18	26.47

Class 5-6	11	x	11	16.17
Class 7th and above	8	x	8	11.76
Total	57	11	68	100

Field Survey: 2020

The data of table 3 illustrates the educational levels of children. According to UNICEF, Pakistan has the second-highest number of children who do not attend school, with an estimated 22.8 million children aged between 5 and 16 years while in Afghanistan, 3.7 million children are out of school, including 60 percent of girls (UNICEF, 2017). In Pakistan, the Primary level of education consists of grades 1 to 5, whereas in Afghanistan, Primary level is considered from grades 1 to 6, spanning six years for students aged between 6 and 12 years. Lower secondary education comprises three years, grades 7 to 9, for pupils aged 12 to 14 years, followed by higher secondary education (grades 10 to 12) for students aged 14 to 17 years. Due to differences in the education systems of both countries, Pakistan and Afghanistan, this research emphasizes classes rather than levels of education to elaborate on the collected data. The non-formal education, also known as the religious or Madrassa system, is consistent across both sides and encompasses the same levels. Respondents of the current study were enrolled in two types of education systems: Madrassa and School. The choice of education system among respondents was based on their religious affiliations and their parents' future aspirations for them. Another factor influencing this enrollment is the financial status of parents, as Madrassa education is often less expensive compared to formal School education, which entails costs for stationery and uniforms, among other things.

The total number of enrolled students is sixty-eight, among whom seventeen students are in Madrassa, while the remaining attends schools. These children are distributed across different class levels, ranging from class one to seven, with the majority enrolled in grades 3 and 4. However, as they progress to higher classes, their numbers decrease, almost halving with

each successive level. Regarding the performance of these students in school, they struggle to concentrate on education due to lack of time for homework and inadequate resources to purchase necessary materials. Families also find it challenging to prioritize education, as their primary focus is on financial support. This underscores the observation that parents sometimes intentionally overlook education-related matters. In line with the theoretical framework of this study, it becomes evident that these children are also driven to fulfill their own necessities through labour, diverting their time and skills towards earning a living rather than focusing on education. From the above data, it is evident that 68 out of 210 children are attending school, but this ratio is notably low compared to the total respondents. This study reveals that 32% of these children attending school do not meet the educational quality standards; they struggle to write their names or read sentences. They face difficulties in attending regular classes and completing assigned homework. These children typically work for 8-12 hours per day, leaving them fatigued and with little time for schoolwork. Within a year or two, they often fail exams and end up remaining in the same class for multiple years, which ultimately leads to them leaving school and aligning themselves with peers who also do not attend school.

Field information, as presented in table regarding the educational levels of students, indicates that 75% of students receive formal education, while 26.46% drop out at the primary level. Additionally, 25% of the overall students attend religious Madrassa education, typically lasting 1-3 hours per day and not interfering with their work. The field data suggests that many children attending school cannot afford expenses such as uniforms, stationery, and sometimes daily transportation costs. Only 11.6 percent of the children complete middle-level education, and even after that, they continue to

work as labourers with limited opportunities to pursue further schooling. The educational level of Afghan refugee child labourers in Peshawar is notably low. Among the 68 enrolled students, the majority is in grades 3 and 4, but as they advance, their numbers decline significantly, highlighting high dropout rates as they progress to higher classes. Only 11.6% complete middle-level education. Many children attend religious

Madrassas for 1-3 hours daily, which does not interfere with their work, but formal school attendance is limited, with 75% of students receiving formal education and 26.46% dropping out at the primary level. These children often struggle with educational quality due to fatigue from working 8-12 hours per day and financial constraints affecting their ability to afford school-related expenses.

Table 4 Impact of Child Labour on School Attendance

School Attendance (number of Days/Week)	Number of Boys	Number of Girls	Total Respondents	Percentage (%)
Regularly	5	3	8	11.77
3-5 days	20	3	23	33.82
Less than 3 days a week	32	5	37	54.41
Total	57	11	68	100

Field Survey: 2020

Table 4 presents data on the frequency of school attendance among child labourers each week, categorized into three groups. The first category includes regular students who consistently attend school, the second comprises children attending school for 3-5 days a week, and the third involves those attending for less than 3 days a week. Among the 210 respondents identified as child labourers, only 57 attend school. Of these, a mere 11.77 percent attend regularly, while 54.41 percent attend for less than 3 days a week. Through interviews, it is evident that enrolled child labourers exhibit poor school attendance. A significant percentage attends school irregularly for less than three days a week, leading to difficulty in completing assignments and understanding lessons. Consequently, their irregular attendance and incomplete homework result in poor exam performance. Dissatisfaction arises among students towards teacher behavior and teaching methods, reciprocated by teachers' dissatisfaction with their performance. Consequently, teachers resort to corporal punishment, contributing to increased absenteeism and eventual dropouts, leading these children to engage in full-time work.

Respondents prioritize their families' survival over schooling, prompting them to leave school for full-time work, which increases their families' income and overall happiness.

Child labour significantly impacts school attendance, with only 57 out of 210 child labourers attending school. Of these, just 11.77% attend regularly, while 54.41% attend less than 3 days a week. This irregular attendance leads to incomplete assignments, poor exam performance, and increased dissatisfaction among both students and teachers. Consequently, poor academic performance and teacher dissatisfaction contribute to higher dropout rates. Child labourers often prioritize work over school, further reducing their attendance and overall educational achievement.

Conclusion

Afghan refugees Child labourers living in Peshawar, working predominantly 9-11 hours daily, experience severe impacts on their educational attainment and school attendance due to fatigue and lack of time. Household financial weaknesses, inadequate educational resources, and cultural barriers contribute significantly to their decision to leave school and

work. Among the 68 enrolled students, many are in lower grades with a high dropout rate as they advance, and only 11.6% complete middle-level education. Irregular school attendance exacerbates their academic struggles, with 54.41% attending less than 3 days a week, leading to poor performance and increased dropout rates.

Recommendations

1. Implement Financial Support Programs: Provide targeted financial aid to Afghan Refugees to reduce the economic pressure on families and make education more affordable for coming generation.
2. Improve Educational Resources: Enhance the quality of education by investing in resources, training teachers, and ensuring access to necessary materials and institutions across the country to all the refugees.
3. Strengthen Enforcement of Labour Laws: Enforce stricter regulations and penalties against child labour to prevent exploitation for all and specifically refugee's child labour and ensure that children can attend school consistently.
4. Promote Community Awareness: Raise awareness about the importance of education and the negative impacts of child labour through community programs and educational campaigns.

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