

► Research Brief:

Child labour in domestic work in Pakistan

► ILO brief



June 2022

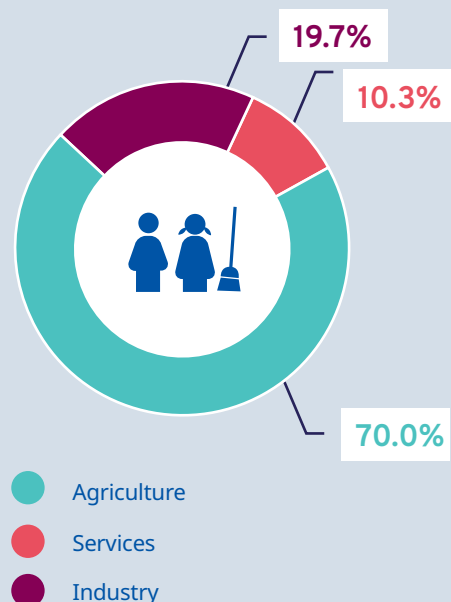
Paving the way to combat child labour in domestic work

Child labour in domestic work remains a widespread, but hidden, phenomenon worldwide. It is estimated that 4.4 million girls and 2.8 million boys are involved in domestic work globally. Recent figures on child labour in domestic work in Pakistan are not available at the national or sub-national levels. However, considerable anecdotal evidence suggests that child labour in domestic work is prevalent across Pakistan's provinces and involves more girls than boys.

This scoping study was commissioned by the International Labour Organization (ILO) under the Asia Regional Child Labour (ARC) Project, with the generous support of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) of the United Kingdom. The project aims to reduce children's vulnerability to child labour and protect them from exploitation.

The qualitative study was conducted by Dr Meesha Iqbal, which assessed the current situation of child labour in domestic work, elaborated the major push and pull factors, working conditions, effects on children's health, safety, and education, and the classified the priority areas including legislative and non-legislative measures for combatting child labour in domestic work.

Percentage distribution of children, aged 5 to 17 years old, engaged in child labour in the world, by sector of economic activity, 2020



Source: Adapted from ILO and UNICEF, *Child Labour: Global Estimates 2020. Trends and the Road Forward. Executive Summary*, 2021.

Methodology

Using the Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, the study was carried out in three phases:

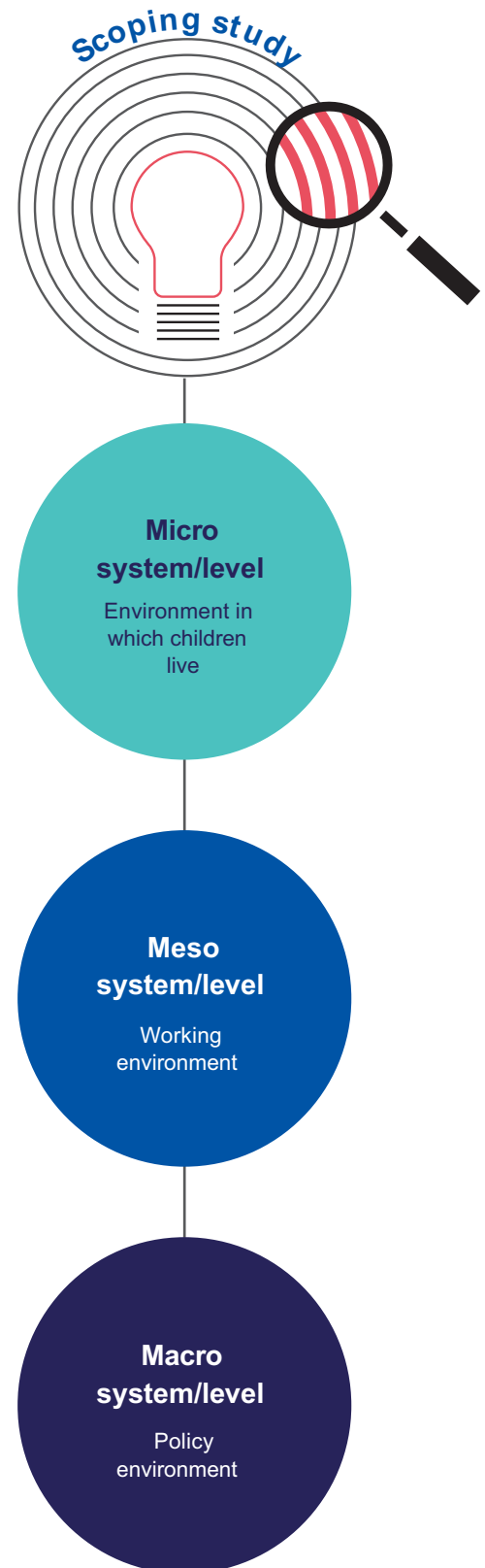
The Bronfenbrenner's ecological model considers the life and health of an individual that is affected by the environment in which, s/he thrives, including the social support system (micro-system); the working environment (meso-system) and the policies of the government and the economic context at the broader level (macro-system).

The lives of the children engaged in child labour in domestic work were assessed at the micro-level, where the 'push' factors were explored, including social support, home environment and, the attitude of children and parents towards child labour. The meso system explained the 'pull' factors for child labour in domestic work including the working conditions, exposure to hazards, violence and abuse, remuneration and payment methods, school attendance, the support of the family members and neighbourhood. The macro-level critically assessed the policies, laws and programmes, addressing the national and sub-national response to child labour in domestic work.

During Phase I, the desk review explored the existing evidence, using peer reviewed articles (Pubmed) and grey literature (manual search and solicitation of documents through the ILO). Thirty-seven documents were included in the desk review.

Phase II involved primary data collection, employing in-depth interviews with children (n=18), guardians/ parents (n=11), employers (n=6), and relevant stakeholders (n=10) including officials from the Ministry of Human Rights, Poverty Alleviation & Social Safety Division, National Commission on Rights of Child, SPARC, Sahil, Idara-e-Taleem-o-Agahi, Aawaz, Group Development Pakistan, ILO and All Pakistan Women Association.

For Phase III the technique of content analysis was applied for analyzing the qualitative data. Existing laws and regulations regarding child labour were critically assessed.



Key Findings

The study offers pertinent insights into the current landscape of child labour in domestic work in Pakistan.

Micro-level:

The study determined that one in every four households in Pakistan employs a child in domestic work, predominantly girls, aged 10 to 14 years. The families with children employed as



“1 in 4 households in Pakistan employs a child in domestic work”

domestic workers, generally did not have an earning father. Amongst the major push factors into child labour involved poverty, paying off the household debt, and utility bills. Society also accepts the children being pushed into child labour in domestic work. The children considered themselves responsible to work and share the economic burden of their parents, while the parents were found a little indifferent while sending their child to work. The parents and children were generally dissatisfied with the meagre wages (ranging between PKR 2,000-15,000 per month for full time/live in workers

and between PKR 1,000-3,500 per month for part time workers). Most parents and children had a positive attitude towards education, however the access to education was found limited due to lack of economic resources. Only 6 to 33 per cent attended school.

Meso-level:

The working environment of child labour in domestic work depends on employers – it ranges from peaceful and friendly to cruel and cumbersome. Children engaged in child labour in domestic work perform a range of basic household chores including washing dishes, cleaning floors, sweeping, washing clothes, ironing, dusting and house cleaning and are frequently exposed to hazards including electrical shocks, dust, noise, heat, allergens etc. Children engaged on a live-in basis are likely to face more hazards, be called on at any time, work continually with no fixed hours, rarely have holidays and rarely visit

home, sometimes just once a year or once in every two years.

The part time and full time (live in) workers were subject to varied forms of abuse including verbal, physical, mental abuse. Some of the respondents also reported the cases of sexual abuse. While some were well treated, many were beaten, abused and threatened by their employers. The most important 'pull' factor for child labour in domestic work is the cheap labour provided by children. Employers also consider children 'flexible' and 'easy to handle'. No formal agreements or contracts appear to define the nature and duration of their work, or payment mechanisms.

Macro-level:

Gaps and fragmentation exist in the policy environment for the elimination of child labour in domestic work in Pakistan, with variations across provinces. Pakistan has yet to ratify the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189). Punjab has achieved a milestone with the introduction of the Punjab Domestic Workers Act of 2019. However, evidence of the law's positive impact has yet to become apparent. Pakistan's frameworks on labour and education are not entirely aligned. Pakistan's second ever Child Labour Survey was launched in 2019 and remains ongoing in 2022. This highlights several challenges, including a lack of political will and the limited importance accorded to ending the phenomenon.

The general public, and especially disadvantaged families, lack awareness about the harmful effects of child labour in domestic work and available social protection measures, which limits their access to avail these schemes. Weak enforcement mechanisms and accountability are another challenge, linked to a lack of technical capacity in the public sector, a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities, and the need for greater political will.



I work for 10 hours a day [...] play for 30 minutes, and after [that] I am back at work.”

– In-depth interview with a boy in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa



No matter how sick I am, they come and take us. They say even if you die, first wash our dishes then die. [...] This is what she [employer] says [...] no weekend, no Eid.”

– In-depth interview with a girl in Punjab

The Way Forward



Pakistan requires a **clearly articulated vision** outlined in a **strategic plan or roadmap** on eliminating child labour in domestic work. This should be formulated through careful engagement with key stakeholders, with the public sector taking the lead, and the private non-profit sector (including civil society) and UN agencies providing technical support.



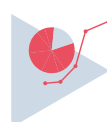
Laws on labour and education should be **aligned**, and light work should be regularized by clearly defining what it includes and who can legally perform. "Light Work" should be operationalized to ensure accountability.



The **capacity** of organizations working to end child labour both in the public sector and among the private non-profit sector, including civil society should be strengthened.



There is a need to raise **awareness** among communities of the fact that child labour in domestic work is illegal. The power of social media can be leveraged to support awareness raising, including to sensitize communities about available social protection measures.



There is an urgent need to have a **reliable data** on the magnitude of child labour – stratified by location, gender and socio-demographic features needs to be generated, including data on child labour in domestic work. An effective monitoring and evaluation system will only be possible once such data is available.



Implementation research is needed to test what, why and how of previously implemented policies, programmes and interventions, in order to learn from past challenges and successes, and pave the way to a brighter future implemented policies, programmes and interventions, in order to learn from past challenges and successes, and pave the way to a brighter future.



A **neighborhood watch system** could be introduced, wherein cases of child workers being employed within homes (and the cases of abuse) are reported not to the police, but to an officer appointed for social welfare at the appropriate tier of local government



Rehabilitation services should be offered to the afflicted children and their families in the best interest of their health and well-being.

Conclusion

Child labour in domestic work is widespread across Pakistan. It has had extremely destructive effects on the affected children and continues to affect many even today. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the crisis in Afghanistan are likely to increase the incidence of child labour in Pakistan.

Intergenerational cycles of poverty make it especially difficult to end the phenomenon. Affected families require assistance to lift themselves out of poverty and educate their children. Its eradication can only be achieved through consistent support both at the policy and societal level which must be nationally supported.

Acknowledgements

This study was conducted and authored by Dr Meesha Iqbal, an independent researcher. Acknowledgments are also due to all the ILO specialists and relevant stakeholders throughout the research process for their support.

This research brief has been compiled by Mr. Areeb Tanvir, an intern at ILO Country Office Pakistan with the technical support of Ms. Munawar Sultana, National Project Coordinator for the ARC Project.

The infographics and quotations have been extracted from Child labour in domestic labour in Pakistan: A Scoping Study.