**Lost Innocence**

**Child labour perpetua-tes a cycle of exploita-tion and abuse that leads to devasta-ting conseque-nces, including occurre-nces of domestic violence.**

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Poverty in Pakistan has become a major concern, with re­cent data showing an unprecedented increase in the number of people living below the poverty line. Accord­ing to the World Bank estimates, poverty rates in Pakistan have increased to 39.4% in the last fiscal year, pushing an ex­tra 12.5 million individuals into poverty. This is primar­ily due to the inconsistent implementation of political reforms, which has led to a flawed democratic sys­tem that hits the poor the hardest. As a result, pov­erty has gone up and the gap between rich and poor has widened. When families cannot afford necessities like food, water, education, and healthcare, they often have no choice but to send their children to work and rely on them for financial support. This shows the intricate interde­pendence of poverty and child labour in Pakistan.

One of the major threats to the rights of children across the globe is Child Labor, especially in developing countries like Pak­istan, where around 12 million children are forced to work at an early age. Many poverty-stricken families depend on their chil­dren to make ends meet, often making them work as domestic helpers. Currently, an estimated 264,000 children are working in this sector. Furthermore, some ideological, and cultural be­liefs restrict girls’ access to education and consequently, they end up doing household chores and are forced into early mar­riages. Thus, this inaccessibility contributes to their inability to break the chain of poverty.

[Attock police arrest 11 outlaws](https://www.nation.com.pk/27-Mar-2024/attock-police-arrest-11-outlaws)

In Pakistan, Child Labor is prevalent in several industries, such as agriculture, mining, manufacturing, domestic work, and the informal sector. In 2020, Pakistan banned child labour and declared it unlawful for children to be employed in factories and other industries. Despite this, according to the Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Children (SPARC), over 12 million children aged 5 to 14 are still working as labourers. In addition, according to the National Institute of Population Stud­ies, many child labourers are subjected to hazardous and un­pleasant working conditions.

Child labour perpetuates a cycle of exploitation and abuse that leads to devastating consequences, including occurrences of do­mestic violence. For instance, Rizwana, a 14-year-old maid, em­ployed at the residence of a civil judge in Islamabad, endured severe mistreatment from the judge’s wife, resulting in grave in­juries. Shockingly, amidst physical abuse and false accusations, she was not provided with her due rightful wages. Her injuries in­cluding fractured teeth and ribs, along with strangulation marks, highlight the distressing reality faced by many forced labourers. However, this event is not an isolated occurrence, similar acts of brutality have occurred several times in the past. Thus, it stresses on the urgent need to address the interconnected issues of child labour, human rights violations, and domestic violence, intensi­fied by widespread poverty and inequality in Pakistan.

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Such injustices remind us of the need for a caring society that puts the well-being and rights of its most vulnerable first. There­fore, child labour not only harms the children involved but also shakes the foundation of society by posing a threat to the future of millions. Forced child labor deprives children of the chance to study, learn, and acquire the necessary skills. They are exposed to arduous hours of work, abuse, and exploitation. Moreover, it impedes children from contributing positively to society as a skilled and educated individual in the long run. Thus, the conse­quences of child labour are multifaceted in nature that affect hu­man lives negatively and threaten the future of humanity.

The effective role of Government in this subject matter is the need of the hour. It should improve access to quality education, especially for the marginalized communities. In the short run, there should be financial support programs for vulnerable fami­lies in the shape of cash transfer schemes, and vocational train­ing for the parents. In the long run, to reduce the poverty gov­ernment should announce livelihood programs for the targeted population living below the poverty line. Moreover, strengthen­ing child protection systems and services to identify and support children engaged in forced labour activities. So, the principle that children are meant to learn, not to earn, echoes the wisdom of Karl Menninger who stated that “What is done to the children, they will do to society”. With continuous efforts, we can ensure a better tomorrow for all. Child labour is deeply ingrained in the mindsets of impoverished families and there is a need for social and behavioural change to abolish it. It is an obligation to speak out against such injustices and strive for a world where every child’s innocence is protected, and their rights are ensured.

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