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Recommendations: putting an end to child labour in Pakistan!

Meesha Iqbal, Zafar Fatmi, Kausar Saeed Khan, Asaad Ahmed Nafees, Neelma Amjad

Abstract

Child labour is rampant in Pakistan since ages. Laws, policies, programmes and strategies to eliminate child labour have been in place with little gain. Implementation of laws and sustainability of programmes offer barriers to eliminate the menace. We recommend a new approach of regulating child labour as a strategy to eliminate it in the longer run. Model districts with drop-in-centres offering free education to the working children should be constructed. The key stakeholders should unite on a common platform to formulate guidelines defining the nature and duration of work for children in various sectors such that they have sufficient time to visit the drop-in-centres. Once a generation of children is educated, the cycle will start to break itself and gradually we will overcome child labour.

Keywords: Policy, Pakistan, Child labour.

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Landscape

Child labour was estimated to be 3.3 million in Pakistan in 1996 and is projected to have increased to 14 million in 2014.^{1,2} Eliminating child labour has been on the global as well as the national agenda with laws and policies being formulated and initiatives taken. However, the issue remains as a huge number of children are seen working on streets, shops, fields, hotels, and homes. The 1973 constitution of Pakistan set 14 as the minimum age for working (article 11) and stated that the state will provide free and compulsory education to all children under 16 years (Article 25-A).³ Pakistan ratified the convention on the rights of the children in 1990 which prohibits the working of all children and adolescents under 18 years.⁴ Pakistan is also signatory to the ILO minimum age convention 138 and worst forms of child labour convention 182 (See Table for laws, acts and bills passed in the provinces of Pakistan related to child labour).⁵ The legislative environment has remained supportive for the

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elimination of child labour, yet we do not witness any fundamental changes on ground.

The child labour project, 2017

A study was conceptualized by Aga Khan University (funded by the WHO-EMRO), based on the Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, to assess the physical, mental and social health of working children in Pakistan. The Bronfenbrenner's model (Figure) considers health of an individual to be affected by the environment in which he/she thrives, including the social support system; the working environment and the policies of the government at the broader level. Through this study, we intended to assess the key factors at each level in order to have a comprehensive picture of the health of the working children of Karachi and sub-urban areas of lower Sindh. Specifically, this study assessed the nutritional status of working children, the proportion of occupational injuries, their lifestyle characteristics (hygienic practices, smoking, drug abuse), proportion of violence (emotional, physical and sexual abuse) and the social impact of migration among migrant child labourers affected by the floods of 2010-2011. Our study results show a pitiable state of the working children, with 16% and 30% showing signs of chronic and acute malnutrition respectively. A total of 19% children exhibited occupational injury in the past six months and 9% had clinical depression. The details of the results are mentioned elsewhere. We learnt by interviewing the children that they were not willing to leave their work all-together as they themselves and their families relied on the income. However, the children showed enthusiasm about going to school if it could be managed with work. Based on our findings, we have come up with recommendations to tackle the menace of child labour.

Policy Implications

Regulation of child labour in model districts: We suggest initiation of regulation of child labour in model districts. We recommend formulating guidelines for each occupation suited for children of specific age groups, allowing them to attend school and maintain appropriate health along with work. The Government and the technical experts in the field of child labour should come

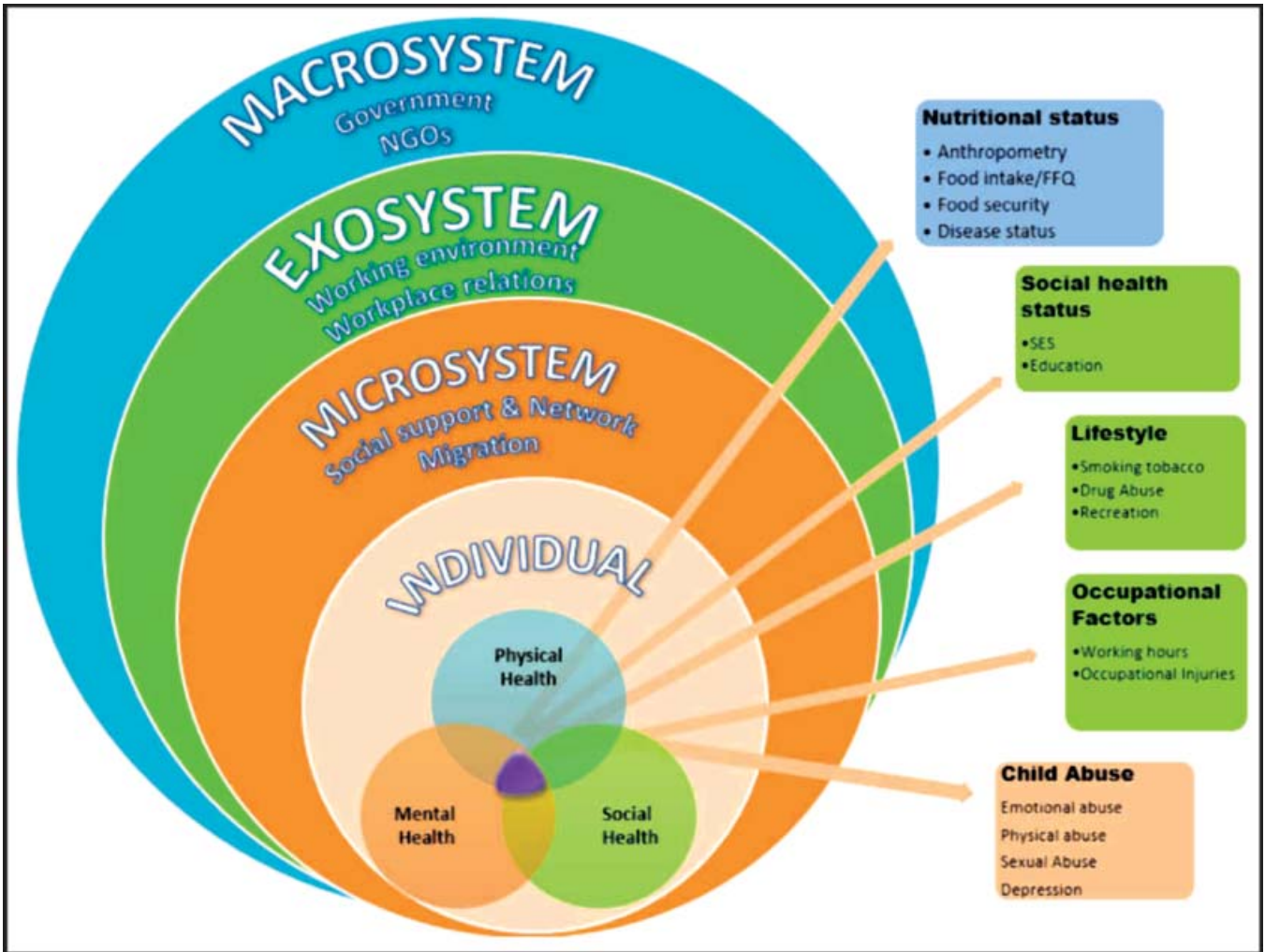


Figure-1: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model.

together on a common platform and start building model districts, setting guidelines for child labour in every occupation.

Formulating guidelines: For every sector in a district, guidelines regarding the regulation of child labour should be established. The hours of work and nature of work would be defined for children such that they have sufficient room to go to the "drop-in-centres". We recommend that the duration of work should not be more than four hours a day for a child with two days off per week. The labour employers should be communicated the guidelines of work and punishment should also be framed for those who do not follow. Some occupations also require protective equipment for health protection which should be included in the guidelines. For instance, protective glasses should be

given to the children working in the bangle industry for protection against the burning flame, face masks should be provided to workers of the textile industry. The subject experts such as ILO, UNICEF, SPARC etc. should be taken on board to draft these regulations for each sector.

Drop in centres: A sufficient number of "drop in centres" should be established in every district, having a morning and an evening shift. Going to the drop-in centres should be made mandatory for the working children at-least once a day by communication to the employers of the children in every occupation. Free Government schools, exclusively for working children should be built in these drop-in-centres and education made compulsory for them. We foresee that transport to the drop-in centres could be a hurdle in their success. It is recommended to

Table-1: Bills, acts and laws pertaining to child labour in Pakistan.

Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT)	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	Baluchistan	Punjab	Sindh
Factories Act, 1934	KPK Child Protection and Welfare Act, 2010	Factories Act, 1934	Bonded Labor System (Abolition) Act, 1992 (adopted in 2012)	Sindh Children Act, 1955
The West Pakistan Shops and Establishments Ordinance, 1969	KPK Prohibition of Employment of Children Act, 2015	Shops and Establishments Ordinance, 1969	Punjab Destitute and Neglected Children Act, 2004 (PDNC)	Sindh Child Protection Authority Act, 2011
Employment of Children Act, 1991	KPK Bonded Labor System Abolition Act, 2015	Employment of Children Act, 1991	Punjab Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2014	Sindh Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2013
Bonded Labor System (Abolition) Act, 1992	KPK Free Compulsory Primary and Secondary Education Act, 2017	Bonded Labor System (Abolition) Act, 1992	Punjab Prohibition of Child Labor at Brick Kilns Act, 2016 (sectoral law)	Sindh Bonded Labor System (Abolition) Act, 2015
Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2012		Baluchistan Compulsory Education Act, 2014 Baluchistan Child Protection Act, 2016	Punjab Restriction on Employment of Children Act, 2016 (general law)	Prohibition of Employment of Children Act, 2017

map the areas of child labour and establish the drop-in centres where it is concentrated.

Mapping of worst forms of labour: These "regulations" of labour should only be for the commonly observed forms of labour such as agriculture, manufacturing industry, domestic work etc. The worst forms of labour including trafficking, bonded labour, prostitution cannot be regulated and need to be eliminated altogether. We do not see these forms of labour out in the open thus they need to be mapped out first by the Government, district by district. Once identified, the owners need to be punished and the children returned to their homes.

Once a generation of child labourers would be educated, the cycle of labour would automatically start to break. This is the only way we see to put an end to it otherwise a lot of efforts have previously been directed to wipe it off the floor but in vain.

Conclusion

Child labour has been surviving and flourishing since ages and the scenario cannot change over-night. A lot of private organizations and the Government have been working towards elimination of child labour, but the picture has remained essentially the same. We recommend trying a new approach of "regulating" child labour rather than "eliminating" it, as a means of putting

an end to it.

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Conflict of Interest: None

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