



A Qualitative Analysis of Stakeholders' Views about Female Child Domestic Laborer's Education

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ABSTRACT

Education is the fundamental right of every child but domestic child laborers are deprived of this right due to multiple socio-economic and cultural factors. In South Asia, particularly in Pakistan, female children are associated with domestic labor. In this study, female child domestic laborers, their parents and employers are the main stakeholders. Based on this study, the current article aims to analyze the views of female child domestic laborers, their parents and employers about female children's education. Qualitative methodology was used, employing purposive sampling from different areas of Lahore. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and were analyzed through thematic analysis. Employers and female child domestic laborers have positive views about female education. However, their fathers' views were revolving around gender discrimination and societal stereotypes related to female role. Thus, study recommends to change the patriarchal mindset of society through adult education.



Introduction

According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, every individual under eighteen years is considered a child and every child has the right to an education. (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1990) Children involved in labour in domestic work are often deprived of their right to education and chances for vocational training (ILO & UNICEF, 2021).

Child domestic labor is one of the forms of child labor and the term "child labor" is often defined by International Labour Organization (2022) as work that denies children of their childhood, their potential and self-esteem, and that is adverse to physical and psychological development (ILO, 2022).

Child domestic work means the work performed by children in the house of a third party or employer, against the ILO's Convention No. 138 on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment and Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour (ILO, 2021).

Child labour in domestic work remains widely prevalent, but concealed worldwide. The up-to-date guesstimates of child labour in domestic work suggest that 7.1 million children worldwide were involved in paid or unpaid domestic work, among them nearly 4.4 million girls and 2.8 million boys are involved in domestic work globally (ILO & UNICEF, 2021). According to ILO and UNICEF, globally, more than one third of all children in child labor are out of school. Children working as laborers usually comes within the age range for compulsory education are omitted from school and even having barriers to school attendance. Nearly, twenty eight percent of five to eleven years old and thirty five percent of twelve to fourteen years old in child labor are out of school (ILO & UNICEF, 2021).

Child labor in domestic work is a protuberant type of child labor in Pakistan (Iqbal, 2022). According to ILO one in every four families in Pakistan employs a child in domestic work, mainly girls, aged 10 to 14

years. (ILO, 2022) To achieving the goal of SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth, the international community has recognized the importance of ending child labor. International community has target to end child labor in all its forms by 2025. Ending child labor will also contribute to progress on many other SDGs, especially on SDG4 which aims to ensure quality education for all (ILO & UNICEF, 2021). However, without gender equality in education, no one can achieve the targets of SDG5 which talks about gender equality and women empowerment (UN WOMEN, 2015). Child domestic labor has many harmful impacts on the emotional, mental and educational opportunities of child, specifically in terms of education (Smith, 2020). Therefore, the present research is conducted with the following objectives:

Research Objectives

1. To explore the views of female child domestic laborers' employers about the female education.
2. To understand the views of female child domestic laborers' about their education.
3. To explore the views of female child domestic laborers' parents about female education.

Literature Review

Child labor, a persistent worldwide problem, refers to the employment of children in work that denies them of their childhood, inhibits their abilities to attend regular schools, and is frequently mentally, physically, socially, or mentally harmful (Bachman, 2020).

Primrose & Ningshen (2019) study demonstrated that the child domestic work is the main hurdle in the way of female child domestic workers' education. For those who attempt to combine work and schooling, their attendance and performance become very poor and eventually they drop out of school to concentrate on work. Negligence behavior of parents and employers and financial constraints of parents are major factors for the deprivation of female child domestic workers' education (Primrose & Ningshen, 2019).

The qualitative study conducted by Hassaan (2024) in Pakistan revealed that employers and parents of CDWs involve children in domestic work for their own needs. They do not think about their children's future but their own interests. On one side, employers usually preferred girl children as domestic worker over adult workers due to multiple factors like low wages, easy to handle, submissiveness and obedient behavior as compared to adult and male workers. On the other side, parents of domestic child workers see their financial benefits as well as they consider the domestic work a suitable work for their girl children.

Pokharel (2018) showed in his study conducted in Nepal that child domestic work are renowned and a critical problem all over the world, especially in South Asia. Generally, girls are involved in domestic child labor because they are perceived as best to carry out domestic chores. Moreover, child domestic work is mostly consider as a safe and harmless employment option for female child workers (Hassaan, 2024).

Due to number of gender stereotypical notions, people think that woman does not need education because she has to perform various gender roles like full time mother, a housewife and an expert cook. Socially constructed gender roles and identity leads towards gender inequality in all aspects of life which has an adverse effect upon the health and education of women (Dom et al. 2018).

India has among the highest number of working children and young people globally. While, precise figures on child domestic work remain unknown, literature indicates middle and upper-class households in urban India are increasingly seeking females, especially young girls, for domestic work. (Svensson, 2018) Neera Burra has done seminal work in the context of child labor in India. Burra (2001) explained that in India, girls' involvement in child labour is the consequence of long-standing stereotypes and customs that seek to discriminate against the girl child. Burra (1995) noted in her book that there is a definite difference between the male and the female working child both in the stereotyping of work according to gender, and in the attitudes and aspirations of parents. Due to social and cultural reasons, the girl child is mostly undervalued by parents.

The major finding of the Pokharel, (2018) study revealed that majority of the child domestic workers come from poor and rural background and they spend more hours in domestic works than in their education. Similarly, the results of the study in Lusaka City of Zambia showed that child domestic labor has adverse influence on the school registration of children due to parents' vested interests, especially in terms of family financial support. A big number of girls' children are involved in domestic work and because of this involvement they are deprived of school than boys. It is a vivid sign of gender discriminations (Chanda, 2014).

In Pakistan, domestic child labor is also deeply intertwined with cultural and societal norms. Children are often expected to assist with household tasks as part of their upbringing, a practice passed down through generations. This cultural acceptance of child labor within homes perpetuates its prevalence (Ali et al., 2020). Additionally, the gender dimension of child labor is significant, with girls more likely to be engaged in domestic work compared to boys, reflecting traditional gender roles and expectations. The main reasons for child domestic labour in Pakistan include socioeconomic inequalities, cultural norms, and a lack of

knowledge about children's rights. Due to financial difficulties, parents frequently send their kids to work as domestic helpers without realizing the long-term effects on their children's education and health (Rashid, 2018).

Khan et al. (2021) highlighted in their research conducted in Khabar Pakhtunkhawa that unemployment, large family size and gender discrimination are the factors which compel parents to allow their children in school age as a domestic worker. In Pashtun culture, girls are preferred to work within the four walls of houses. This mindset allow girl children to work as a domestic laborer.

According to ILO's report, forty million children, between the ages five to fourteen years are involved in child labor that is thirty percent of the total population. According to ILO, two lac sixty four thousands domestic laborers are working in Pakistan. Another study by UNICEF demonstrates that about ten million children are tangled in child domestic work. Unemployment, limited access to education, and traditional practices all contribute to the occurrence of child domestic labor (International Labor Organization, 2020).

According to Kakar (2021) Education of parents have positive impact upon the school enrollment of children. Pakistan is a patriarchal society where education of father has direct impact on the children's school enrollment. In ethnic Pashtuns, children whose father are educated, their children are more likely to attend school than children whose fathers are illiterate.

Theoretical Framework

Behaviors of female child domestic laborers, their parents and employers about their education emerged or derived from the culture and social interaction with other persons who surrounds them and having more knowledge and experience. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of cognitive development was applied as theoretical framework in this research. Allman (2020) stated that Lev Vygotsky, the founder of sociocultural theory, proposed that human development and learning are highly influenced by social and cultural factors. In other words, human cognition is fundamentally shaped by the social interactions and cultural practices that individuals participate in. Individuals develop their behavior from their culture, language and through interpersonal experiences. Through interactions with more knowledgeable others, individuals internalize and develop thoughts which ultimately regulate their behavior.

Methodology

Qualitative research approach was adopted to conduct this study. In the present research, ethnographic research design was used by employing in-depth interviews of all participants. 07 female child domestic laborers, 07 employers and 7 parents, mother and father both were interviewed from Lahore by using purposive sampling. This sample size was determined on the basis of saturation, when the researcher didn't find any new information in the data. The concept of saturation exists in the qualitative study (Mason, 2010). The responses of all stakeholders were gathered with the help of an interview guide and overt non-participant observation. Female child domestic laborers from 11 to 14 years old, having one year work experience with female employer and rural background were participants in this research. Interviews and overt non-participant observations took place at the employer's house, where employers and female child domestic laborers were interviewed and sittings lasting between 45 minutes to 50 minutes. Interviews were conducted in Urdu and Punjabi and have been recorded with the consent of participants. The data were transcribed through verbatim and intelligent verbatim. Field notes were maintained and finally, different themes emerged from qualitative data by using thematic analysis. The whole process was carried out observing ethical standards of qualitative research including parental/guardian/employer consent to access children, ethical and respectful language with participants, confidentiality, privacy and safety of interviewee.

Results and Discussion

Following themes emerged from the interviews of participants.

Theme 1: Female Education and Better Economic Growth

Educating girls is pivotal to the development of society (Somani, 2017). As it is stated by others in those words that female education is explicitly linked to development outcomes (Tajammal et al. 2023). In the current research, one of the female child domestic laborer said that girls' education is very important for their development (Participant C5: interview 28 July, 2024). Similarly, many employers of female child domestic laborers in this study were of the view that female education resultantly impact economic and social development of society (Participant E1: interview 15 June, 2024; Participant E2: interview 20 June, 2024; Participant E3: interview 27 June, 2024; Participant E4: interview 06 July, 2024). As one employer stated that 'education opens the door of various economic opportunities for females' (Participant E3: interview 27 June, 2024). As shown in literature that education is a fundamental human right as well as a catalyst for economic growth and human development and the Former UN Secretary- General Kofi Annan declared during the Global Action Week of the Global Campaign for Education in April 2003 that "to educate girls is to reduce poverty" (World Bank, 2005 cited in Derdar, 2014).

Theme 2: Female Education and Better Family and Social Life

Female education has an impact upon economic development of country but it also influenced the family life in terms of development. As asserted in the literature that an educated female will bring/raise an educated and well-groomed family causing benefit to the society and on bigger level to the country (Tariq, 2018). Various participants of this research expressed that educated women could lead the house in a better way (Participant E1: interview 15 June, 2024; Participant E2: interview 20 June, 2024; Participant E3: interview 27 June, 2024; Participant E5: interview 28 July, 2024) Same views were expressed by two female child domestic laborers, they think that girls' education is very important because girls can change the whole life style of family (Participant C2: interview 20 June, 2024; Participant C3: interview 27 June, 2024).

Theme 3: Female Education and Better Human Rights

It is critical for us to understand the importance of education for girls as an essential step along the path to gender equality and a catalyst for change in the lives of women (Souraya, 2018). Therefore, one female child domestic laborer stated in these words that 'I know that girls' education is very important. If you are educated then people give you respect and honor' (Participant C1: interview 15 June, 2024).

Theme 4: Patriarchal Mindset about Female Education

A worth noting revelation in this research is that almost all employers and workers realize the importance of female education but parents of female child domestic laborers, especially fathers of workers, were not of the view that girls' education is important. Almost all of the fathers of female child domestic laborers' were of the view that girls' education is useless. One employer, one guardian and many parents (fathers) of female child domestic laborers' were of the view that sooner or later girls' have to do domestic chores so they should train themselves in domestic work rather than getting formal education (Participant E6: interview 01 August, 2024; Participant G2: interview 13 August, 2024; Participant PF1: interview 18 July, 2024; Participant PF4: interview 26 July, 2024; Participant PF5: interview 02 July, 2024; Participant PF6: interview 04 August, 2024). Domestic work is associated with female in many societies. As found in the literature that the stereotypical assignment for women has always been associated with household labor and care for the children (Polachek and Wallace 2015; Valentova 2016 cited in Bailon, 2019). In fact, the expectation that care work is a women's responsibility starts at an early age. A study of 33 countries shows that girls aged 7–14 do more household work than boys the same age and perform other tasks, including care of younger siblings (UN Women, 2018).

Around the world, different gender roles and stereotypes are based on society's values and traditions. Child domestic labor is considered safe and culturally acceptable for women and girls in Pakistan. CDL is more diverted towards girls than boys, not only in Pakistan but around the world. An estimated, 4.4 million girls (compared to 2.8 million boys) are involved in domestic work. It is reported that in Pakistan, 85% of the domestic labourers are girls (Salman et al. 2025). This is because they are expected to learn domestic work as future housewives. Such as, people consider education useless for females because they would not be allowed to do professional jobs. Further, they will be shouldering the responsibility as a mother and wife (Jayaweera, 2007 cited in Sahibzada et al. 2019). Moreover, it is described in literature that in Pakistan, it is a common view that education is not important for female. One of the main problems we are facing in Pakistan is a higher dropout rate in female students (Yasin & Aslam, 2018). As mentioned in another study that a basic reason, for why there are fewer girls than boys enrolled in school in Pakistan not just in the financial calculations of parents but also in the "socio-cultural taboos and inhibitions against female education (Sahibzada et al. 2019). As another study reported the socio-cultural taboos in terms of gender as many girls drop out of school as they are more engaged in domestic work than boys (Chanda, 2014).

Theme 5: Women Views about Female Education and Social Boundaries

In contrast to views of female child domestic laborers' fathers, mothers of workers, in this study, recognize the importance of female education but practically they were bound by the social, economic and cultural constraints that they couldn't play their role adequately. As revealed in the study conducted by Ali et al. (2022) that due to male ownership and the patriarchal structure of the Pakistani society women are submissive to men, their rights are ignored, and their identity is lost. A female cannot take an independent decision, someone else decides on her behalf, mainly father before marriage then husband and son. Similarly, Saryal (2014) noted the challenges and prospects of women's rights in India in those words that women face gender-based violence, unequal access to education and healthcare, and limited participation in decision-making. Decision making is the role of empowered person and female are usually deprived of this right. They are confined to many social and cultural boundaries that they can't play their role independently and alone. In the present study, when mothers' of workers were asked about that what kind of steps they could take for the better future and education of their daughters, many responded in the following way: 'I wish to do something but can't do it alone due to social boundaries' (Participant PM1: interview 18 July, 2024;

Participant PM4: interview 26 July, 2024; Participant PM5: interview 2 July, 2024; Participant PM6: interview 04 August, 2024). Likewise, three female child domestic laborers' shared that they don't want to stress their mothers because their mothers are not in a position to fulfil their dreams (Participant C1: interview 15 June, 2024; Participant C4: interview 6 July, 2024; Participant C5: interview 28 July, 2024). Such statements of workers showed the weak social and financial position of mothers in the context of support and contribution of female for her daughters' education.

Conclusion

The current study concludes that the female child domestic laborers and their employers have positive views about female child's education in terms of family, community and society's social and economic development. But practically, only views are not enough for the overall development of society. Development and progress of society and community needs implementation of these positive ideas and views. These positive point of views demands from the researcher to explore the actual role played by these significant stakeholders in the female child laborer's education. The present article is based on one section of the overall study that explore the behaviors of female child domestic laborers, their parents and employers regarding their education. The actual role played by these stakeholders have been discussed in the complete research. In this article, the parents of female child domestic laborers, specifically their fathers' views clearly signify gender discrimination and gender inequality in education. In South Asia, there are some gender specific roles which are associated with women such as domestic chores, cooking, cleaning, washing, rearing and caring of children are only linked with women. These gender roles become barriers to female education. Therefore, female child domestic laborers' mothers were so confined to the social, cultural and economic boundaries that they couldn't support their female child in pursuing education despite of their positive views.

Recommendations

On the basis of the results of the study, following recommendations are given:

1. Patriarchal mindset of society about female child laborer's education could be changed through adult education programs run by the government.
2. Through community civic engagement activities, patriarchal views about female child laborer's education could be modified.
3. While modifying behaviors and changing mindset require long time, in the short run, alternative/informal modes of female child's education should be developed.
4. Women economic empowerment programs launched by government could lead to break the vicious circle of social and cultural taboos to deny female education.
5. Non-governmental sector could plan and implement social action projects to curb gender inequality and discrimination in education.

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