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A Sociological Study of Trash Picker Children in Faisalabad City, Punjab, Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Trash picking has become an increasing phenomenon of urban informal settlements and one of the major exploitative and vulnerable forms of child labor in Pakistan. This paper focuses the factors influencing the perpetuation and existence of trash picker children (TPC). It also examines their social activities and health problems within the socioeconomic context. The study was conducted in 10 Katchi Abadis/Slums of Faisalabad city, Punjab, Pakistan. A sample of 250 TPC aged 7-18 was taken to explore the study objectives. Descriptive (frequency distribution) and inferential (chi-square) statistics was applied to analyze the study sample. The study found that 72.0 percent of TPC were illiterate while 52.4 percent were belonged to the Changar caste. About 41.2 and 22.8 percent of TPC responded that they involve in trash picking to get meal twice a day and secondly want to continue their forefather occupation respectively. Different variables like nuclear family structure, larger family size and low family income play an important role in the life of TPC. Similarly, causes of trash picking are found to be significant (P=0.000) with household monthly income and the number of family members. It is suggested that education should be free and hunger should be addressed properly to meet their food needs.

INTRODUCTION

Poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, terrorism, poor health, slothful economic growths are the important issues of Pakistani society. These challenges compel a child to work, who should be in a school rather facing the harsh reality of the world (Ali, 2011). Child labor is an existing phenomenon in Pakistan, and about 12 million children do labor for their survival (UNICEF, 2013). The most hazardous, humiliating and destructive of self-worth for children is the work of trash picking. It is an inferior and an exploitative economic activity that refers to hazardous work and exposes children to physical, psychological or sexual abuse. "Trash picker" is a person who collects recyclable or reusable waste material. Pakistan's urban population increased and dramatic social changes have led to the rapid urbanization. With the growing tendency of migration from rural to urban and high population growth, waste material is increasing at a high level. This issue exists in urban areas where the solid waste management system is violated; children roam around the garbage heaps and residential areas to collect recyclable materials.

Trash picker children (TPC) live in slum areas and face many problems as shelter, poor drinking water, security, illiteracy, health and exploitation and unhygienic conditions. These children are the major breadwinner of the family; roam through garbage at a landfill work as scavengers to pick rubbish such as glass, scrap, aluminum, plastics and iron, which can be sold (Dhruvarajan and Arkanath, 2000). TPC work throughout the year, except during extreme winters and rainy season (Barki and Manhas, 2013). Several studies have been able to demonstrate that the family background, living conditions, father's occupation, and education of parents are the influencing factors behind the trash picking phenomenon (Malik et al., 2002). It is argued that low literacy level, poverty, low skill, father's occupation and migration of a family played an important role in seeking a livelihood from waste (Savita and Vijaya, 2013).

The economic freedom at early ages indulge them into anti-social activities, particularly boys encourage to develop bad habits as pan-chewing, consumption of alcohol, tobacco, gutka, pick pocketing, gambling, theft and some have tended to go for homosexuals, frequently

visit to cinema and other cheap source of entertainments (Thapa et al., 2009). They are exposed to injuries and diseases because of hazardous environments; radioactive materials mixed with the garbage heaps that is harmful for them (Niloufer, 2013; Salam, 2013). Oza (2013) illustrated that these children suffered from chronic diseases like typhoid, jaundice, malaria and TB, AIDS & HIV cases are now widely seen. The theoretical framework explains a number of factors which effects on the life of trash picker children. Theory of the culture of poverty (Lewis, 1998) suggests that young children who are born into poverty will remain poor because they lack the ability to receive education and are not financially stable (poor diet, filthy clothes, and unhygienic living conditions). Some poor families share a distinct culture of poverty which constitutes a "design for living" that is passed on from one generation to the next. They are not class conscious; the ability to break out of this cycle is limited or not possible. They have strong feelings of marginally, dependency, inferiority, helplessness and hopelessness. The characteristics of these families are unstable family, larger family size, low income wages and teen parents. Within the passage of time slum children have absorbed the attitudes and basic values of their subculture. This theory is designed to illustrate how the process of culture of poverty motivated to a child for trash picking in the perspectives of socioeconomic characteristics; and how the consequences are constituted a "design for living".

Figure 1 presents the conceptual model for TPC. Assumptions are formulated on the basis of a conceptual model to investigate the realities of the issue.

Individual Characteristics: Socioeconomic Background Some contributory factors of trash picking are highlighted here in the conceptual model (Fig. 1) as sex, age, education, family's occupation (trash picking), family income, size and structure. Furthermore, it is mentioned in the model that the set of the expected findings of social environment would affect the individual's health status.
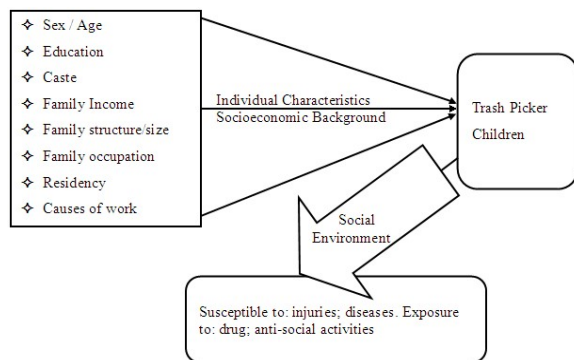

Fig. 1: Conceptual model for trash picker children

Resultantly, trash picking is a widespread and a major socioeconomic problem of the developing countries. The main purpose of the study is to identify the socioeconomic characteristics of TPC and factors that influence to trash picking in Faisalabad city. The study examined the social activities and health problems of these children. There is almost no study exists based on the socioeconomic profile and problems of TPC in Pakistan. Since it was the first ever study of this issue in Faisalabad City, even in Punjab, Pakistan.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was designed to determine the socioeconomic characteristics and problems of TPC. The study was conducted in the katchi abadis/slums of Faisalabad city. The total number of katchi ababis and slums in Faisalabad city is 170, in these 102 are situated on government ownership land (katchi ababis), and 68 are situated on private land known as slums (FDA, 2011). About ten katchi abadis/slums were selected randomly out of 170. Target population of the study was trash picker children in the age group of 7-18 years from ten katchi abadis/slums of Faisalabad city. A sample of 250 TPC was taken through snowball sampling technique. The study was delimited to ten katchi abadis/slums and twenty-five TPC were taken from each katchi abadis/slums. The data were collected with the help of the well-designed interviewed schedule (structured questionnaire) and data was analyzed by applying descriptive (frequency distribution and percentages) and inferential (chi-square and gamma tests) statistics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The socioeconomic characteristics of trash picker children (TPC) in Faisalabad city are shown in Table 1. The sex-wise distribution indicates that the majority 83.6 % of respondents was boys and remaining were girls. Parents did not allow their girls to trash picking because dump sites are not safe place; prefer to keep them at home for domestic work and sibling care. Anschütz et al. (2004) concluded that teenage boys 88% clearly dominated at the dump and street picking in Tanzania and this appears in Kenya as well. About 22.0%, 25.2%, 34.0% and 18.8% of the respondents were belonged to the age group of 7-9, 10-12, 13-15, 16 years & above respectively.

Educational attainment among TPC is found to be very low as majority 72.0% of respondents were illiterate. Tidke (2014) studied that children belonged to the poor families were illiterate. The earnings per week were found to be very low as majority 54.8% of children were earned from 401 to Rs. 600. The majority 87.2% of the respondent's family structure was nuclear. Barki

Table 1: Socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents (n = 250)

Variables	F (%)	Variables	F (%)
Sex		Caste	
Boy	209 (83.6)	Changar	131 (52.4)
Girl	41 (16.4)	Masali	40 (16.0)
Age		Lahori	34 (13.6)
7 - 9	55 (22.0)	Pathan	27 (10.8)
10 - 12	63 (25.2)	Fakeer	18 (7.2)
13 - 15	85 (34.0)	Family members	
16 + above	47 (18.8)	< 3	4 (1.6)
Education		3 - 5	29 (11.6)
Illiterate	180 (72.0)	6 - 8	136 (54.4)
Up to 2nd	37 (14.8)	9 + above	81 (32.4)
Primary	19 (7.6)	Family occupation	
Middle	9 (3.6)	Trash picker	119 (47.6)
Matric + above	5 (2.0)	Laborer	50 (20.0)
Earning per week from trash (Rs)		Hawker	21 (8.4)
Up to 200	11 (4.4)	Not working	60 (24.0)
201 - 400	74 (29.6)	Household monthly income (Rs.)	
401 - 600	137 (54.8)	Up to 3000	41 (16.4)
601 + above	28 (11.2)	3001 - 5000	98 (39.2)
Family structure		5001 - 7000	72 (28.8)
Nuclear	218 (87.2)	7001 + above	39 (15.6)
Joint	29 (11.6)	Type of house	
Extended	3 (1.2)	Katcha	39 (15.6)
		Semi pacca	109 (43.6)
		Pacca	22 (8.8)
		Temporary shed	80 (32.0)

Table 2: Factors responsible for trash picking (n = 250)

Variables	F (%)
(Causes/factors)	
Getting meal twice a day	103 (41.2)
Forefather's occupation	57 (22.8)
Unemployment of father	52 (20.8)
As a profession	38 (15.2)

and Manhas (2012) concluded that TPC earned from 50 to 99 Rs. per day and most of them belonged to the nuclear families living under one roof.

Majority 52.4% of the respondents were belonged to the Changer caste. Anwar et al. (2006) studied that Changer community engaged in low-paying income activity from generations. Study shows that 54.4% of TPC belonged to large family size and mostly families were involved in garbage picking. Another study showed that family size of rag picker children was found to be 6 to 10 members (Barki & Manhas, 2013). Respondent's household monthly income was also low and 43.6% among of them were lived in semi pacca and a substantial proportion 32.0% of them were living in temporary sheds made of wood, polythene sheet and mud. Literature shows that nomads move from one part of the city to another; have temporary residence made of wood and polythene sheet (Anwar et al., 2006).

About 41.2% of TPC were commenced themselves into trash picking in getting meal twice a day; while 22.8% were commenced themselves into trash picking because of their forefather's occupation. Children who are born in poor families remain poor, that is the main cause of their poverty. According to Tidke (2014) illiteracy, poverty, indebtedness and poor economic status of parents are found to be important factors responsible for their rag picking.

The social activities and health status of TPC are shown in Table 3. Majority 79.2% of the respondents did not involve in any type of anti-social activity but a substantial proportion 10.4% of the sample were involved in gambling; they spent most of their earnings on gambling, even did not care about their food. A size able proportion of TPC were involved in anti-social activities such as pick pocketing, gambling and theft (Savita and Vijaya, 2013; Tidke, 2014). It was also found that 32.0% and 22.4% were addicted of cigarette, pan and gutka sometimes and frequently respectively. Child rag pickers (TPC) had bad habits of smoking, chewing pan, tobacco and gutka and also exposed to be alcohol (Savita and Vijaya, 2013); almost 80% of rag picker children take gutka, tobacco and cigarette (Tidke, 2014). Injuries are common among trash pickers because of hazardous environment of work. Their bare feet may injure with sharp metals, broken glass pieces, needles lying hidden in the garbage heaps. It was found that the majority 72.8% of respondents were injured during trash picking, cuts were viewed on their hands, arms, feet and legs. Another study showed they faced various physical hazards during the work, received cuts on their hands when collecting rusted iron pieces (Batool et al., 2015). Almost a half percent of

Table 3: Social activities and health problems of the respondents (n = 250)

Variables	F (%)	Variables	F (%)
Anti-social activities		Injuries	
Pickpocket	3 (1.2)	Yes	182 (72.8)
Begging	8 (3.2)	No	68 (27.2)
Theft	15 (6.0)	Diseases (since the last six months)	
Gambling	26 (10.4)		
Not involved	198 (79.2)	Fever	7 (2.8)
Addiction (pan, gutka, cigarette)		Cough	9 (3.6)
Never	114 (45.6)	Back & joint pain	13 (5.2)
Sometimes	80 (32.0)	Headache	15 (6.0)
Frequently	56 (22.4)	Respiratory problem	21 (8.4)
		Skin problem	28 (11.2)
		Digestion problem	37 (14.8)
		Not ill	120 (48.0)

Table 4: Relationships between the socioeconomic characteristics and causes of trash picking

	Getting meal twice a day	Forefather's occupation	Unemployment of father	As a profession	Total
Household monthly income					
Up to 3000	(7) 2.8	(10) 4.0	(10) 4.0	(14) 5.6	(41) 16.4
3001 - 5000	(51) 20.4	(11) 4.4	(30) 12.0	(6) 2.4	(98) 39.2
5001 - 7000	(29) 11.6	(24) 9.6	(12) 4.8	(7) 2.8	(72) 28.8
7001 + above	(16) 6.4	(12) 4.8	(0) 0.0	(11) 4.4	(39) 15.6
Total	(103) 41.2	(57) 22.8	(52) 20.8	(38) 15.2	(250) 100.0
Chi-Square: 53.248; Sig. Level: 0 .000; Gamma: - 0.146; Sig. Level: 0.061					
Number of family members					
< 3	(2) 0.8	(2) 0.8	(0) 0.0	(0) 0.0	(4) 1.6
3 – 5	(10) 4.0	(3) 1.2	(4) 1.6	(2) 0.8	(19) 7.6
6 - 8	(66) 26.4	(25) 10.0	(9) 3.6	(16) 6.4	(116) 46.4
9 + above	(25) 10.0	(27) 10.8	(39) 15.6	(20) 8.0	(111) 44.4
Total	(103) 41.2	(57) 22.8	(52) 20.8	(38) 15.2	(250) 100.0
Chi-Square: 41.809; Sig. Level: 0.000; Gamma: 0.412; Sig. Level: 0.000					

* Causes of trash picking (F) %

respondents reported that they had been ill for the last six months. Among these most 14.8% of them had digestion problems due to unhygienic food, even sometimes eat items found in the garbage heaps; while other had skin problems and respiratory problems due to the infectious atmosphere at dump sites. Another studies concluded that about 31.2% had skin diseases, 21.9% had cough and cold, 20.1% had fever, 19.1% of diarrhea and 3.1% suffered from jaundice (Andalib et al., 2011); they suffered from infections, headache, skin diseases and allergic diseases (Tidke, 2014). The association between the causes of being trash picking and the household monthly income of TPC shows a significant association, but the gamma value - 0.146 shows a negative relationship between these variables. It means that as the household monthly income decreased, children started more work for getting meal. The association between the respondent's causes of trash picking and their numbers of family members are also found to be significant that is viewed by the value of chi-square 41.809. Study illustrated that the size of the family is an important reason, as the family size is increased, children started work for getting meal twice a day was also increased because children of bigger families are forced more for rag picking.

Conclusions and recommendations

Study findings led to the conclusion that illiteracy, poor residential areas, the number of family members and low family's income plays an important role in the life of trash picker children. Most of them choose this profession as forefather's occupation, unemployment of father, getting a meal, beer family expenditure and fulfill their own needs. From the present results, it has been found that they were highly vulnerable to the major health risks such as injuries, respiratory problems, digestion problems and skin problems. In the light of the study findings, it is recommended that income generating programs for poor families should be launched by developing small scale business and credit facilities which can eliminate the number of trash pickers. There is a need to build educational institutions in these settlements and government should provide compulsory and free education. Informal education and vocational training should be provided; it would enable them to do a reliable profession for their livelihoods. The government should ban on drug subsistence's and awareness campaigns should be launched as soon as

possible to realize people about the bad effect of this subsistence's.

Authors' contributions

All authors contributed equally in this research paper for developing questionnaire, data collection, analysis, write-up and developing conclusions and recommendations. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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