



DISSONANCE BETWEEN FEMALE CHILD LABOUR AND EDUCATION AMONG FARMING COMMUNITIES: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF SELECTED COMMUNITIES OF SOUTH PUNJAB, PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted in the Department of Anthropology, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan. This study discusses the issue of dissonance between female child labour and education among farming communities of South Punjab. Based on the socio-economic indicators, communities under study were characterized as least developed, less developed and developed communities respectively. Research employed qualitative techniques to collect the empirical data. The study argues that in least and less developed communities provision of education for children was gender biased due to cultural superiority of boys over girls resulting into high dropout for girls particularly at post primary level of education. The focus of the study was to find out perception of child laborer adolescent girls, nature of their involvement in labour within household as well as in agriculture related work. Subsequently it highlights scarcity of financial resources at household level and its impact on girls education. The results indicated that adolescent girls were aware of the importance of education. Parents of these girls also wanted to educate their daughters particularly upto basic level of education. However, they were unable to do so because of financial limitations and inability to meet the cost of education of each child. On the account of scarcity of financial resources parents had to prefer among their children in terms of provision of education. Boys were favoured in this regard that resulted into massive dropout among girls and increased involvement of girls in agricultural related work.

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INTRODUCTION

Child labour is a complex issue fabricated in the social, economic and cultural milieu of a society (Admassie, 2002). Child labour has direct bearing on the education and overall wellbeing of a child (Jorgensen *et al.*, 2010). Child labour takes place mostly in the pretext of poverty, where number of poor children particularly girls do not get access to schools due to the limited resources (Huisman and Smits, 2009). Therefore, it becomes a legitimate choice and reasonable option for parents to keep children busy at household activities and paid labour. Moreover, possession of land and livestock within family demand higher involvement of labour, Similarly in order to finish households activities parents require more and more children to help at home as well as work in the agricultural fields (Dar *et al.*, 2002; Goulart and Bedi, 2008). A study covering socio-economic, demographic and cultural factors, across 178,000 children of 214 districts of 16 developing countries presented that majority of children spend time in agriculture related activities which, significantly hamper educational attainment of

children of school going age (Webbink *et al.*, 2012). Generally, in developing countries there are many children who are busy in paid labour services and never go to school. Most of them work in hidden forms, such as work in household, farm and family business (Amin *et al.*, 2006). There are several choices for the children belonging to developing countries i.e. going to school, working in agricultural farms, marketing and doing house work. However, house work and family activities are mostly considered as hidden child labour. Further, decisions regarding children involvement in labour activities are taken by parents based on estimated cost and benefits of children labour for the entire family (Kamruzzaman, 2015; Alsamawi *et al.*, 2017).

Education is a long process and heavily relies on parents and communities which constitute the "supply side". Parental attitude towards the success of their children education matters the most (David, 2015). Since a child cannot decide or make efforts for his/her education therefore, the role of families is very crucial in this process. whereas the families' particularly uneducated and poor ones face a number of issues

including poverty, low educational status of the parents, large family size, lack of awareness about education and lack of availability of educational facilities. These factors are further aggravated by gender, where getting education is not perceived as mandatory for girls in comparison to boys. Such discrimination starts from birth of girl child and becomes more obvious across genders particularly in the process of education. Majority of the children in the developing countries particularly girls provide unpaid agricultural and domestic labour, for doing so their education gets compromised. One possible reason for such compromise is poverty among poor households as an impetus to keep female child away from school (Jensen & Nielsen, 1997). Parents' expectations regarding social and economic benefit from children earnings and perceptions of labour market discriminates against women and subsequently affects female school enrollment (Buchmann, 2000). A Brazilian household survey data for 1998 revealed intra household gender biasness affects the decision parents to send their sons and daughters to work or to the school. Subsequently, parents make different investments in the education of their children based on gender of their children mainly due to dissimilarities in parental preferences (Emerson & Souza, 2007). Among rural communities income has a stronger positive impact on schooling of both boys than girls (Cockburn, 2001). Developing countries showed gender disparity in education and involvement in child labour (Admassie, 2003). Mostly among poor families, possession of livestock and land is related with child labour (Goulart & Bedi, 2008). Therefore, family need higher level of labour in order to manage and likewise to finish household and agriculture tasks. Parents require more and more children for the execution of household chores (Dar *et al.*, 2002).

Cultural patterns and the local traditions of the society can also affect the parental decisions regarding girls' schooling. Parents having poor socio-economic status traditionally deem little or no need to educate their daughters in particular. Moreover, such parental perceptions get strengthened by similar communal perceptions regarding female's position. Therefore, such parental and communal trends does not favour female (Kravdal, 2004). Dieltiens & Meny-Gibert (2008) asserted that failure to pay school charges, the expenses of uniform, shoes, transport and stationary further deprive children particularly girls from schooling. The present paper aims to analyse the consequences of adolescent girls involvement in the labour activities, both at household as well as in agriculture on their education.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted in the Department of Anthropology, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan. The study was further validated by the Advanced Studies and Research Board of the university. The study is based on information provided by 16 adolescents female child labourers during the course of two independent focus group discussions (FGDs), held in Basti Goden Wala and Chah Kumar Wala in Tehsil Jampur, district Rajanpur, South Punjab, Pakistan. Adolescent girls from each community were approached for conducting FGDs after seeking due permission from their parents. One FGD was conducted on the field, during their break from agriculture work, while the second FGD was conducted in a house which was mutually trusted by the parents of the adolescents. The participants of FGD were taken from 16 different households randomly selected, showing willingness to participate. Prior to the commencement of FGD sessions oral consent of the parents was sought because majority of the parents was illiterate and could not understand how to read and write. However, parents were informed about the objectives of the study. Both the FGD sessions lasted about two hours each. With the prior approval of parents and the respondents of FGDs, the discussions were audio-recorded and written notes were taken by the note taker. The participants were in a face to face circular sitting arrangement. The physical space was private, neutral, interference free and comfortable for the participants.

The reason of purposively selecting FGDs of out of school adolescents for this paper was to highlight the existing gender based realities of girl's life particularly among rural farming communities. Such ground realities, devoid girls from their right to education and expose them to hard work in the fields at a very early age. A huge volume of existing literature had particularly highlighted the negative effect of child labour on children education (Lu, 2012; Islam & Choe, 2013).

In this study, 'adolescent girls' refer to girls between 12-16 years of age, by this age a girl should ideally be involved in middle to secondary level of formal education. In reality, these girls were out of school due to child labour. The age limit defining age of adolescents for the present study was kept in line with formal age of completing secondary education. As a tool of qualitative data collection, a list of probes was developed to guide the flow of discussions and cover perception of the respondents regarding key issues of the study. The probes included questions like, (a) why seeking education has become a problem for adolescent girls, (b) what is their perception regarding

education, (c) what is the justification of child labour instead of going to school, (d) what kind of activities are performed by the adolescents, (e) what is role of their parents towards their involvement in child labour, (f) how much do they earn and (g) how do they spend their earnings, etc.

These discussions were held in *Saraiki* language (the first language of the respondents) for better understanding and richness of data, Young girls were initially shy because this was a unique experience for them. In order to minimise the psychological barriers, the respondents were encouraged to speak, initially key informant of the study was instrumental in gaining their confidence and to make them understand that their point of view was highly valuable. Once the FGDs were off to a good start then the key informant was not made part of the discussions. Care was taken by the researcher to be value neutral.

The questions relevant to the topics of inquiry were asked loudly to make audible for all research-participants. Time for each topic was already planned; and every participant was encouraged to talk during this time (because few respondents were extra-talkative). It was also noticed during discussions that after two or three respondents, the participants tended to lose focus. In such case the researcher helped the participants to stay focused on the topic and kept them on the track.

Participants' characteristics

All sixteen adolescent girls, who participated in FGDs were female adolescents. The age of adolescent was kept in line with minimum age requirements up to class 10th. All of them were unmarried however, few of them were engaged and were about to marry in near future. The common feature among them was that they all were dropped out from schooling for one reason or another. One clear difference between the adolescents of *Basti Chah Kumar Wala* and *Basti Godden Wala* was that female adolescent respondents only had the opportunity to study upto primary level whereas among the other group of adolescents from *Basti Godden Wala* majority of them had even slimmer chances to be in school. Resultantly, their formal education level was low by comparison, while, on the other hand, girls of *Basti Rasool Pur* had high chances of getting education up to higher levels.

Education serves as a vital indicator because it directly gets affected by child labour. Showing that if the involvement of adolescent girls gets raised in education the probability of their involvement in child labour will automatically decrease. None of the participant had parents with education beyond middle level. Majority of the mothers of the adolescents from both communities

were illiterate whereas majority of mothers in *Basti Rasool Pur* were better educated and had better impact on the education of their girls. For the purpose of research paper adolescent girls from *Basti Rasool Pur* were not included due to their heterogeneous background, education and non-involvement in child labour.

Audio- recorded data acquired from the adolescents were transcribed in Urdu and finally translated in English. Acquired qualitative data were further classified as quotations covered under different themes of the study. The researcher was comfortable in all the three languages: *Saraiki*, Urdu and English. In order to ensure the validity of data, initial write-up of the results was shared with the participants who confirmed it and showed no reservation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During the entire course of focus group discussions attempts were made to probe and understand the socio-economic and cultural reasons for drop out of female from formal education system. The study focused on micro level qualitative factors across the communities and households. Such factors streamline the process of education in a diversified way.

Child labour displacing education

International convention of the United Nations defines persons below the age of 18 as children. Contrary to this notion, the idea of child labour has traditional insights in Pakistan, differing from international standards of being a child. Culture standards to describe a child varies with respect to situations, for example in majority of the traditional rural communities of Pakistan, including the field area onset of puberty is positively linked with adulthood and maturity irrespective of actual age of the children. By international standard 18 years of age holds true for a child. Culturally a child is no more taken up as a child and acquires the status of maturity much earlier with the onset of puberty. This is a peak time in the boys and girls life towards learning and taking up their gender specific roles and associated responsibilities. For girls, this transitory stage of life span marks number of important things in their life. Boys have opportunity to participate in the outside world 'public sphere' whereas are largely limited to 'private sphere' to provide help in doing household work (Webbink *et al.*, 2012). This form of child labour among girls is huge and unnoticed. No convincing research and finding are available in this regard. Mothers during their reproductive cycle take great help from their daughters in the form of managing household chores and looking after their siblings. This form of child labour outweighs their educational responsibilities. Highlighting the impact of child labour

on education one of the adolescent was of the view that;

“Baji mai ko perhan da ruh ty hay per mai gher dy kaam keraindi ann, Bhira behan sambhaldi haan tay meri maa kaam ty waindi hay.” Kiran, (11 years old), FGD Adolescents-Basti Godden Wala.

Translation:

“Despite the fact that I wish to study. I have to do lot of household work for instance I have to do madding of my sibilings when my mother is away for work.” Kiran, (11 years old), FGD Adolescents-Basti Godden Wala.

Involvement in such type of labour requires time and full time commitment leaving no room for education. On the other hand, a male child does not perform such type of works. Child labour has various interpretations that suggest that child labour is prevalent because of certain social structures alongwith cultural values, norms and poverty. The results of study show that Child labour was heavily practiced in both communities of Basti Godden Wala and Chah Kumar Wala. There were more number of children working in fields alongwith their families rather than be at schools. Girls were even more unfortunate in this regards because they had to leave their school temporarily or on permanent basis particularly during peak agriculture related activities. In one FGD an adolescent mentioned about the role of parents towards halt to her education;

“Kaam kaaj keraindi han, maa piyo akhday han na perho.” Hira, (9 years old), FGD Adolescents-Chah Kumhar Wala.

Translation:

“My parents stopped me from getting education; they are off the view that I have to work inside the home as well as on the farms.” Hira, (9 years old), FGD Adolescents-Chah Kumhar Wala.

Similarly another respondent was of the view that;

“Assan ae khatir nai perhiyan ky kam keraindiyan sy, vaar chundiya haan, gha golainday hain maal kitay.” Asma, (10 years old), FGD Adolescents, Chah Kumar Wala.

Translation:

“I do not study because of work; we pick cotton on the fields and gather fodder for the livestock.” Asma, (10 years old), FGD Adolescents, Chah Kumar Wala.

The results further indicated that girls were more involved in to child labour on farms as compare to boys. Among the poor and least educated communities women involvement in agricultural activities starts at a very early age and continues throughout their lives. At the beginning it affects her education and later on all indicators of personal growth and empowerment get affected due to poor educational outcomes.

It was noticed that education was viewed as an economic burden by majority of the parents. Moreover, majority of the illiterate parents having least or completely ignorant of backgrounds were unaware of the processes related to their children education. Majority of them were concerned with economic activity performed by the children particularly girls. Girl's education was least bothered because of common perception that girls are viewed as 'other's property' whereas boys are considered as the power and long term support to their family. Therefore, boys had better chances of getting education as compared to girls. Affirmative association of lack of preparedness towards children education and child labour strongly emerged from the data. The following narratives throw light on some of the works on farm by the adolescents;

“Rahinday hy sy, ramba, saafi, Kaali, goda, wala kapainday ha sy, wala katrainday ha sy.” Anila, (13 years old), illiterate, FGD Adolescents, Basti Godden Wala.

Translation:

“Girls help in sowing, lay off unwanted herbs and grass from the crops, level the land right, then we cut tobacco and finally make small pieces of dried leaves.” Anila, (13 years old), illiterate, FGD Adolescents, Basti Godden Wala.

Similarly another girl was of the view that work at the field was very long and tiring for them;

“Kaph ty puti churnday han mul ty, 5-6 rupee kilo, main aik din main 30-35 kilo chuni haan.” Amna, (10 years old), FGD Adolescents, Chah Kumar Wala.

Translation:

“We the girls are cotton pickers and we get 5-6 rupees per kg of cotton. In a day I normally collect 30-35 kgs of cotton.” Amna, (10 years old), FGD Adolescents, Chah Kumar Wala.

Socio economic status of the parents plays a vital role in determining fate of the education of child labourers in the farming communities. Parents from weak socio-economic background have to invest on education

and related expenses of children that becomes a challenge for the parents. The following table presents an estimated cost of education related expenses that parents have to bear for the schooling of their children.

The estimates are based on the interviews from three sites namely Chah Kumhar Wala, Basti Godden Wala and Basti Rasool Pur.

Table 1. Estimated monthly and annual educational expense.

S. No.	Categories	Frequency	Monthly expense (Rs)			Annual expense (Rs)		
			Grade 1-5	Grade 6-8	Grade 9-10	Grade 1-5	Grade 6-8	Grade 9-10
1.	Books	Annual (Covered by school)	-	-	-	-	-	2000*
2.	Copies	Monthly	300	500	600	2400	4000	4800
3.	Stationary	Monthly	200	250	300	1600	2000	2400
4.	Shoes	Bi annual	500	800	1000	1000	1600	2000
5.	Uniform	Bi annual	500	800	1000	1000	1600	2000
6.	Sweater	02 Pair	350	500	1000	700	1000	2000
7.	School Bag	Annual	400	800	1000	400	800	1000
8.	Socks	06 pair each year	30	40	70	180	240	420
9.	Lunch Box	Daily	50	50	50	8000	8000	8000
10.	Transport	Monthly	3000	3000	4000	24000	24000	32000
11.	Head Scarf (Girls only)	04 per year	100	250	350	400	1000	1400
12.	Pocket Money	Daily	20	30	50	3200	7200	20000
13.	Exam Fee	Thrice a year	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total			5450	7020	9420	42880	51440	76020

*Additional books expense covered by the parents

The data depict the financial cost related to educational expense against 13 different categories that are supposed to be borne by majority of the parents mainly from Chah Kumhar Wala and Basti Godden Wala. It was found that majority of the parents from two communities (Chah Kumhar Wala and Basti Godden Wala) consisted of poor parents, having low educational status as compared to parents in Basti Rasool Pur. Parents faced financial constraints and had limited resources to manage their living and simultaneously bear educational expenses of their children. Thus, continuity and sustainability of children education in general and girls' education in particular becomes a big challenge for the parents.

On an average, daily wage of an illiterate labourer ranges from Rs. 300- 500. At times number of days go without work due to non-availability of work or due to unforeseen issues (weather, health, personal and family related issues) that prevent them from going to work.

In Chah Kumhar Wala and Basti Godden Wala, it was observed that both the family size and dependency ratio was high, having number of children of school going age within each family. This situation begets division of financial resources at household level thus further shrinking budget for schooling of the children. Under these compelling financial resources, the question arises how a poor family could give preference to particular children based on expected future returns of educating a child. In most cases of similar nature, girls' education was given least preference since the cultural discourse also supports male gender.

The cost of education at public schools particularly at primary level is low as compared to middle and high schools. One reason for this variation is that the number of primary schools as compared to the secondary and high schools in the rural areas is more. Insufficient number of middle and high schools proximate to the locality pose a serious setback for female education. Majority of the parents particularly from Chah Kumhar Wala and Basti Godden Wala do not allow their girls to travel long distance for the sake of acquiring middle or higher education. They feel over burdened with additional transportation expenses and security issues regarding gender sensitivity. Upto primary level, schools are in close proximity, easily accessible too and are relatively less expensive on the part of the families. Therefore, there are more chances that the female child receives education preferably at public schools because private schools involve high cost (Glewwe & Krafft, 2015). The estimated projection of expenses related to education of a child particularly girls is considered high among majority of the parents in Basti Godden Wala and Chah Kumhar Wala whereas, the parents in Basti Rasool Pur are educationally and financially sound and are able to conveniently afford the education expenses of their children. Resultantly, child labour gets flourished by the positive support by families and community on economic and cultural grounds. Parents of such children also seek encouragement by their peers and relatives. With the notion that their hard work of rearing children has repaid them. Such perceptions pave the way for child labour where the girls mostly attend home and agriculture

related work whereas the boys of 10 years and above work in both agriculture fields, market places such as hotels, shops, workshops, etc.

The study concludes that majority of the locals of less developed and least developed communities were largely poor and illiterate. Moreover, they also possessed large family size and below subsistence level of livelihood earnings, mainly from agriculture. In the pretext of both poverty and illiteracy, education of a child particularly of a girl child became a difficult and expensive enterprise for parents. Moreover, financially constraint families were faced with even more complicated situation when there were number of children of school going age, equally qualifying to getting education. Under the given circumstances male children had obvious advantage over females. Such preference mainly attributed to two main reasons. Firstly, due to cultural superiority of males over females and associated future benefits from education of a male child to his family. Secondly, due to the inability of parents to meet the cost of education therefore, parents have to make choices in prioritizing education of a child. Such choices were generally gender specific. Resulting into high dropout among adolescent girls, particularly at post primary levels of education consequently, girls' involvement in labour both at household and agriculture also increased. These realities were further aggravated and reinforced by strict cultural norms and practices which do not favour girls' education. However, such discrimination against female education was found negligible among the developed community due to both community involvement and non-participation of girls in agriculture related works.

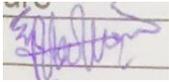
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1.	<i>Nazia Rafiq</i>	Conducted study and compiled data	
2.	<i>Anwaar Mohy-ud-Din</i>	Supervised and guided the project and helped in write-up	