

Child Victimization: Case Study of Child Scavengers in Twin Cities of Pakistan

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Abstract

The piles of garbage and dump sites in Pakistan reflect the lives of innocent children whom survival is dependent on garbage picking. These young scavengers reflect the growing phenomenon worldwide of child labor. It is a phenomenon that has been closely linked with poverty and urbanization and it has serious impacts on the socio-physical wellbeing of children. These children are offering their contribution in the economic gains of family at the expense of their lives. Exploitation and violence are two important but neglected aspects of child scavenging. This study describes the violence against child scavengers at different places like on workplace, home etc. Moreover it also highlights the people who are responsible for violence against these children. This research was carried out in Kachi abadi of Peer Wadhaye, Islamabad Pakistan, through using participant observation, informal interviews, and purposive sampling techniques of data for this qualitative study was collected.

Keywords

Scavengers, Violence, Dumpsite and Twin Cities.

Background

Children always work especially in such settings where social hierarchy exists at large scale; it is normal for children from a disadvantaged background to work for betterment of families at an early age. Children in such societies are considered as the property of the employer or family, and do what they are instructed to do (Burra, 1995). Children are working both in formal and informal sector and their jobs include: agricultural labor, domestic labor, work in mines, work in industries, rag picking, shoe polishing carpet weaving, car washing etc and all of these works contain risk of exploitation and violence.

There are several cultural drivers and the predominant and primary factor of sending a child to work is poverty. This poverty may have been aggravated by family tragedy such as the loss of parents, or other economic shocks. Children below minimum working age often state that they are working because of their families' poverty status (Fallon & Tzannatos, 1998). Sending their children to work instead of school can be seen as part of a 'Faustian bargain' that poor parents make for immediate economic gain (Wood 2003).

The environment in which under-aged children are sent to work is usually unsupportive of child rights; thus physical, psychological protection and sexual violence is often ignored (Black 1996). Although risk of violence and exploitation

has become a part of every working activity but its intensity goes high in informal sector. Due to lack of rules and regulations in informal economic activities violence is a widespread act especially against children. This study describes the nature and extent of violence against a particular group of our society “Child Scavengers” (ILO 2004). This research further highlights the risks which are attached to the profession of scavenging. The children are not only being exploited at workplace but at different spheres of life also. Violence against child scavengers has only remained 'invisible' because the direct question is rarely façade so this study is helpful in identifying the nature and extent of violence against child scavengers. Findings of this study are helpful for Government and law enforcement agencies as they could take severe actions to punish the offenders. In addition it is also helpful for non-profit organizations to launch welfare projects to empower this marginal group of society.

Objectives of Study

Keeping in view the nature of the study this study intends to:

1. Find out the major forms of violence practiced on child scavengers
2. Explore the perpetrators of violence against child scavengers

Materials and Methods

This study was undertaken in *Kachhi Abadisof 'Peer Wadhaye'* Islamabad to capture the forms and perpetrators of violence against child scavengers. It was qualitative in nature and the unit of analysis of the research was the children living in *Peer Wadhaye* that were engaged in collection of waste and recyclable material and were facing violence for their continuous survival in society. All the male n female scavengers under 18 working in the Islamabad were considered the unit of analysis of the current study. Fifty respondents were selected for data collection through purposive sampling.

Results & Discussions

It was sketched to map out the information related various sort of violence in the settings where child scavengers usually spend their time i.e. home, family, schools, workplaces and the community. In order to get a better picture of the scenario it is necessary to grasp the socio- economic statuses and the demography of child scavengers to know about the context of violence against children, contributory factors and risks.

For this study 50 respondents including 10 female, young scavengers, were interviewed. It is pertinent to mention that the entire female scavenger were non-Pakhtunes. Through the data it is found that it is customary in Pakhtune culture that girls are not allowed to do work outside the home. It was observed during the field work that majority of children are involved in scavenging and their ratio is

increasing continuously. Majority of the respondents belonged to the comparatively young age groups as the child scavengers are considered the fast rag pickers (ILO, 2004). According to the research, 70% of respondents were migrated Pashto speaking while Punjabi scavengers were 30% of the sample. It is revealed that in the target area, all respondents were migrants and adopted this profession because there were no other opportunities in formal sector for them. Couple with this it was new place where they feel no hesitation, disgrace or shyness in performing these filthy activities.

It is observed that 30% of respondent's were getting education in community school and were passionate for higher education to change their social status along with this profession. They think after getting education they will be able to get good position and will be able to run the family expenditure properly. Some of the respondents were getting education without the permission of their parents. One of the respondent are of the view that our parent claimed that time should be utilized in earning something not wasting time in other non-productive work (Education and Games). According to the Gul Bad-shah (father of one of the respondent) "*HunarKhe de, cha pa las k we darsara* –it's better to have a skill in hand". It expresses the future planning/prospects which the parents feel for their children.

Factors of Child Scavenging

These are always some background force behind each activity and profession as well. In this study the background factors were also summarized that compelled children to join this exploitative profession of scavenging. Prior to all, poverty is the main reason behind the scavenging profession. The poor economic conditions force the children to involve in scavenging because it is considered a source of earning to fulfil the basic needs of the family. Peer group and established culture of the study locale was also provoking the child for scavenging and majority of children in the area were involved in this profession.

The scavenging was the established profession of the target area and group as well and is transmitted from generation to generation in the area. Every family of the area desires to sustain their status and guide their children to support family through scavenging. The orphan hood was another factor responsible for the scavenging in the locale and most of children adopted this profession on the instructions of their guardians. The family size in the research locale was very high that also added to the scavenging activities. In addition the child scavengers face bundle of problems in continuing their profession like health hazards, stigmatization, exploitation, deprivation from basic rights (Medina 2005) but worse of them is 'violence' and it is the most neglected part of previous studies on child scavengers.

Violence Against Child Scavengers within Family Context

Indeed family is a place of love and protection for children but sometimes it proves dangerous for children and causes violence on children. In the case of child scavengers, families were seen as a basic institution of creating violence against these children. Violence occurred in different forms and the reasons of its occurrence are different. Despite the fact that the children were contributing to the family income at the cost of their childhood rights yet they were experiencing violence by their family members, parents and relatives. Forms, perpetrators and reasons of violence are given below in the table:

Table 1: Type / Perpetrators and Reason of Violence within Family Context

Type of Violence	Percentage of victim	Perpetrators of Violence	Percentages of Respondents	Reason of Violence
Physical Violence (Beating, Physical torture & punishments)	Boys= 48% Girls =8% Total= 56%	Father	14%	Low Daily Income
		Mother	12%	Attending School
		Sister	4%	Spending Some Part of Daily Income
		Brother	8%	
		Relative (Uncle)	12%	Delay in Accomplishment of Household Tasks
		Aunt or Cousins	6%	
Psychological Violence (Insult, Threats, Isolation, Rejection)	Boys= 80% Girls =20% Total= 100%	Father	32%	Not Performing Household tasks
		Mother	28%	
		Sister	10%	Adoption of Scavenging Profession
		Brother	20%	
		Relative (Uncle)	8%	Parental Loss
		Aunt or Cousins	2%	No Income of Father
Sexual Violence	Boys=0% Girls=4% Total 4%	Uncle	2%	Sub-ordinate Position of Female Scavengers
		Cousin	2%	

In the mentioned above table major forms of violence against child scavengers like psychological, physical and sexual by their family are discussed. Perpetrators of such type of violence include mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters and close relatives like uncle, aunts, and cousins. Violence is a neglected aspect of this profession and the violence by the family is normally kept secret. The respondents of the study were facing the physical torture, beating, insults, threats and sexual abuse from their family members but they hesitate to express the attitude of their family members. They were beaten and insulted due to bringing less income at home; they were also tortured physically when they spend some of their part of income at workplace. The

orphan children living with their uncle/aunts are being tortured physically and psychologically because of their sub-ordinate position in the family. The female scavengers has to play dual roles i.e. work outside the home and work within home in such cases and whenever there is delay in household tasks, then they are tortured by their family members. There was some female respondents who were sexually abused by their relatives (cousins) who force them to sleep with them at night while outside the home police; shopkeepers abused them through touching, hugging and kissing.

Some of the respondents were attending schools without the permission of their family members and are forced to stop schools but when they go against the desires of their family members then they are beaten by their fathers especially fathers and elder brothers. Some children were indulged in scavenging activities by their own while their families were against this dirty occupation. So they were physically and psychologically abused by their family members due to joining the scavenging profession. Some children were of the view when their fathers do not earn anything that day they release their frustration by physically torture them. One of child scavengers 'Usman Gul' expressed his views while saying that:

"I feel that I am treated just like waste at every place; my value in my family and society is just like the waste"

Violence Against Child Scavengers in Schools

Educational institutions are the institutions which play an important role in the socialization and personality development of children but now-a-days many of these institutions are damaging the personality of innocent children instead of making them useful citizens of the society. In this study 30% were getting education own their own interest but they were also experiencing violence and discrimination due to their lower socio-economic status in society. Following table describes the scenario in the better way:

Table 2: Type/Perpetrators and Reasons of violence at Educational Institutions

Form of Violence	Percentages of Respondents	Perpetrators of Violence	Percentages of Respondents	Reasons of Violence
Physical Violence	Boys = 10%	Teachers	6%	Late arrival at school
	Girls = 0	Students	4%	
	Total = 10%	Principal	0	Not completion of home work
Psychological Violence	Boys = 20%	Teachers	12%	Marginalization
	Girls = 0	Principal	6%	
	Total = 20%	Students	2%	Blame of stealing, Not wearing Uniform, Pencils/erasers

As it is described above that 30% child scavengers were going to schools and all were males. So these children were facing the psychological, physical violence from their teachers, principal and other students. Most of the time the violence occurs when they come to school late or do not wear uniform. The victim children were of the view as they work outside the home after school timings so they usually return home late that's why they get late for school. Then sometimes due to dirty uniform, they are unable to wear it because they had to wash their uniform by themselves. Another reason they told that due to late arrival from work, they could not complete their home work so resultantly they have to bear physical punishment from teachers and sometimes from principal side. They are also treated as secondary citizens of our society so all people exploit them even other students in school blame them for stealing their pencils, book or notebook. Child scavengers told that resultantly they are not only beaten by the students after school timings but also punished by the management staff of the school. One of child scavengers 'Ibrahim' told that:

“Other students consider us as thieves, we are not thieves, we work hard and never bargain while Punjabi scavengers do such kind of things”

It is necessary to alleviate discriminatory attitudes, violence and exploitation against these children so that they could spend a happy life just like other children without any fear.

Violence Against Child Scavengers at Workplace

Scavenging is an informal kind of activity so no rules and regulations exist in this profession that's why the children are exploited and abused frequently. On the obtained data the following categorization has created to address the issue of violence against child scavengers at workplace:

Table 3: Type / Perpetrators and Reasons of Violence at Workplace

Form of Violence	Percentages of Respondents	Perpetrators of Violence	Percentages of Respondents	Reasons of Violence
Physical Violence	Boys = 56%	Junkyard dealers	8%	Bargaining with dealers
	Girls = 16%	Adult scavengers	22%	
	Total = 72%	Co-workers	42%	
Psychological Violence	Boys = 80%	Junkyard dealers	32%	Competition with other child scavengers
	Girls = 12%	Co-workers	22%	
	Total = 92%	Adult scavengers	38%	Subordination Low Quality material

Findings show that child scavengers have to bear physical and psychological violence at workplace in order to continue their work activities. They are insulted, beaten and tortured by junkyard dealer, co-workers and adult scavengers due to several reasons. The children who work for dealers are usually beaten by them because of providing them low quality and quantity of scavenged material. Some scavengers are tortured in order to bargain with dealers or junkyard owners. Then some scavengers are also tortured at workplace by their co-workers because they fight with each other for recyclable material as there is competition among the children so when they found recyclable material they fight with each other that is mine “Da Ma Ledele De Awal” (because I saw it before). Female scavengers are abused in a greater way because they could not raise their voices against anyone. Lastly these children are tortured physically and psychologically by the adult scavengers due to working in their territory. Adult scavengers show their dominancy over the child scavengers and they force and forbid them to work in their territory. So there should be some rules and regulations in this profession that every scavenger would have to follow and in this way violence against child scavengers at workplace can be removed.

Violence Against Child Scavengers in Community

Community is a place which gives the feeling of protection to its members but at the same time community can prove a dangerous place for weak and marginalized group of society like old people, children, minorities and women. This study states that child scavengers are marginalized group of our society and most of them 50% are migrated from Afghanistan. This thing tags them as minority group and their children are violated and abused by the local community members. The children shared their views about what type of violence they have to face from community side. Attitude of community towards child scavengers has summarized in the following table:

Table 4: Type/Perpetrators and Reasons of Violence in Community

Form of Violence	Percentages of Respondents	Perpetrators of Violence	Percentages of Respondents	Reasons of Violence
Physical Violence	Boys = 58%	Police	38%	For the sake of money
	Girls = 8%	Shopkeepers	22%	
	Total = 66%	People of Residential areas	6%	
Psychological Violence	Boys = 72%	Police	8%	Blame of theft
	Girls = 12%	Shopkeepers	54%	
	Total = 84%	People of Residential areas	22%	
Sexual Violence	Boys = 0	Police	4%	Not holding nationality of Pakistan
	Girls = 6%	Shopkeepers	0	
	Total = 6%	People of Residential areas	2%	

Violence in community against child scavengers cannot be ignored because community sees this segment of our society with disgrace and in humiliated way. These innocent children are also tortured by the members of community like police officials, shopkeepers, gangs and people of residential areas. First of all law enforcement institutions like police officials are considered as protector of our society but these people do not miss any chance to get benefit from these children. They torture, arrest and beat the child scavengers in order to fulfil their financial demands. They release these children when they pay them as one of child scavengers 'Rehan Khan' told that:

“We are arrested by police sometimes because they demand money from us and sometimes when we have no money then they keep us in jail for one or two nights until we will pay money to them. They release us after getting 200-300Rs”

Then a girl scavenger told that:

“They are also psychologically, physically and sexually abused by the community. They expressed their views that police officials and shopkeepers call us near them and then kiss and hug us”

The girl scavengers are immature and they could not understand the intention behind such kind of acts, they perceive it just a kind of sympathy but actually it is also a psychological abuse. Then expressing views about shopkeepers and common people, these children said that these people of society force us to run away from their shops or houses as they perceive we are thieves. In nutshell, whole society is responsible for creating violence against child scavengers consequently there is need to take strict actions against such type of brutal acts.

Conclusion

After studying the phenomenon of violence against child scavengers, it makes clear that violence does not occur at work place only every institution of society like family and educational institutes are also responsible for creating violence against child scavengers. Violence is done due to different reasons like their sub-ordinate position in family and society, not holding nationality, low socio-economic status, blame of theft, illiteracy etc. These children are contributing in the economic gains of family but even after making contribution in the family income and development of country, they are mistreated and tortured. Their services and contribution is ignored and unacknowledged. It is needed to take action against the offenders who are responsible for violence and exploitation of these innocent children. Some strategies should also be designed for the welfare of these children so they could also become an active and useful citizen of our country.

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