

Child Abuse in Automobile Workshops in Islamabad, Pakistan

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Abstract

Every year, approximately one million children become victims of abuse by peers, teachers, parents and Ustad (master or the head mechanic). The Ustad sodomize these children at workshops, where they come to gain skills, and earn for their families' livelihood. The purpose of this study was to analyze the nature and intensity of child abuse in automobile workshops in Islamabad, and to know the self-perception of these victimized children about such actions of their masters. The social learning theory, which is the most applicable theory to study child abuse, explains that the abuse is learned through actions and observations. The masters learned the abusive behavior from their masters, and thus the vicious cycle goes on from one generation to another in the same pattern. The researchers have used the qualitative research approach, and the data were collected from ten (10) automobile workshops in Barakahu, Islamabad, through semi-structured in-depth interviews (IDIs) with the children and their masters. The findings of the research showed that children with ages ranging from 14 to 17 years, work as trainees for more than 11 hours a day, at different automobile workshops in Islamabad, where they fall victim to physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. They faced abuse frequently, but they were unable to complain anywhere, as they deemed it the right of their masters to abuse them. Only a small portion of the respondents accepted the fact that, they have faced sexual abuse in addition to physical and emotional abuse. There is no such formal way through which physical and sexual abuse can be prevented. The majority of the respondents stated that as long as they are under the tutelage of the masters, they can tolerate the abuse, because masters teach them with skills and know-how. Once, they become masters themselves, they get rid of this ill-treatment. The master and some children accomplice in the abuse have a positive impact on children's learning process, and the parents of these children also encouraged the masters to punish their offsprings during trainings, so they can become perfectly skilled and knowledgeable by the end the target period.

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Introduction

Child labor is practiced in the various parts of the world. In most of the cases it has led to children's physical and sexual abuse in workshops/automobile industry (Muhammad, 2018). A reasonable number of children are working in the automobile workshops in Pakistan, to earn money and to support their families, and learn skills for better earnings in the near future. But, acquiring such skills is always coupled with some threats to the children, as they are mistreated by the masters during the training period. In addition to the physical and sexual abuse, the children also face emotional abuse, which is one of the major impediment in their personality development. Horowitz *et al.*, (2001) revealed that there is a strong correlation between imbuing stress in childhood and stressful life even in adulthood. The threatening and hostile environment not only affects children's mentally and physically, but also disturbs their personality development process.

Child labor always relates to the violation of the basic rights of children (Neil, 2004). Eradication of child labor is only possible through an economically peaceful and abuse free society. The countries should strive hard to legislate and enforce labor laws which prevent children from labor. Pakistan is a developing country, where 24.3% of people live below the poverty line (Pakistan Economic Survey, 2017-8). That is the reason, why a large number of children are forced to work in automobile workshops, which are hazardous to health. Approximately, three million cases of child abuse are reported to the Child Protective Services (CPS), who have been victims of societal neglect, and fall prey to physical sexual and emotional abuse of the perpetrators. Denying the existence of the problem will only make the situation worse. Allowing the abuse to continue unchecked and not making sincere efforts to decrease the child's chance for optimal physical, mental health and their well-being are a national neglect (Marc, 2001). Child abuse is the result of physical, emotional, and sexual harm, which negatively affects the intellectual development of children in automobile workshops. Outcomes of child abuse, results in both short and long-term injuries, and even death in some cases (ILO, 2010).

Globally, there are about 215 million children tricked into child labor, and out of that figure about 115 million children live under hazardous conditions, where they face many problems, like physical, sexual and emotional abuse in different workplaces (Nafees *et al.*, 2012:1075). Many efforts have been made to protect children's rights across the globe. Article 32 of the Convention on Child Right (CRC) to protect children from economic and social exploitation is one of

the prime examples of such endeavors put forward by the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2010).

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), has set a standard that the type of work which is done under the age of seventeen is considered as a child labor, which is harmful to children's mental, physical and emotional health. The reasons to work in automobile workshops are extreme poverty, lack of educational policy at school levels, absence of financial resources, high population growth, old age of father, and single parents (Ahmed, 1991). Working children continuously undergo a great struggle and hard work, just for a diminutive earnings. Even, the working conditions are very painful, harsh and occupy the long hours without taking proper rest, which badly affects the children's physical, mental, and emotional growth. The children, who work for long hours, often face a dangerous and unsafe environment, which further harms their creative skills. The majority of children are working without any payments, and they bear physical and mental abuse just for the sake of learning technical skills. Apart from this, they work with such tools, which badly harm their hands and body parts (Basu, 1999).

Automobile workshop is a business, where individuals engage in repairing, keep the daily maintenance, change oil, denting and painting of automobiles. The person who owns the workshop is called the Master "*USTAD*"- in Urdu language (literal meaning is a teacher). The "*USTAD*" is same as a supervisor, or the CEO of the company, who directs his subordinate staff concerning the work (Abbas et al., 2015). The master or *USTAD* trains the children about the required field skills. According to Muhammad (2018), during the training program, the master abuses the children physically, sexually and emotionally, which not only harms their body parts, but also affects their mental development process. The automobile workshops comprise of car and its engine repairing, motor repairing, cycle repairing as well as trucks workshops, where children are working for more than ten to eleven hours, without taking a rest in a day.

Similarly, Muhammad (2018) stated that working long hours with dangerous chemical tools affects the children's eyes, skin, lungs, and also it can cause throat infections. Further, Basu (1999) mentioned that children dip their hands in chemicals, grease, and glue and paints that burn their skin. According to the International Labor Organization (2008:21) dangerous working conditions are the biggest form of child abuse. ILO predicted that, around 114 million children between ages of 5 to 17 were working in the dangerous conditions in different sectors, like agriculture, mining, construction, automobile workshops, and other domestic work. Such conditions affect children's health. On the other hand, the

Ustad exploits them physically, sexually and emotionally in the automobile workshops (Khan et al., 2018).

In addition, many children are not only being abused by the master, but also by their co-workers in the automobile workshops as well. These children get their body injured as a result of hitting, kicking, shaking, burning, or other show of force of their co-workers (Sandy, 2008). Similarly, Basu (1995) stated that about 1 out of 20 children have been physically abused in their lifetime by their peer. In most cases, children who are abused, suffer greatly from mental ill-health, than physical health damage. Those children who are maltreated or neglected, may have a wide range of reactions, and may even become depressed or develop suicidal and violent behavior. According to Jim (2011) children who are abused are often afraid to complain, because they fear that, they will be blamed and no one will believe them. Children face breathing issues due to toxic chemicals and smoke emitting of vehicles, which makes their health further vulnerabilities in automobile workshops (Basu, 2005).

Annually, approximately one million children are being abused in workplaces in different parts of Pakistan. The government of Pakistan (GOP) has put forward a number of steps to overcome the child abuse. In this regard the Employment of Children Act (ECA) 1991 (ILO 2010), Bounded System Abolition Act 1992, the International Programs of Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC), and National Action Plan and Policy on Child Labor initiated in May 2000, and then in 2002, by the government of Pakistan with the collaboration of the ILO and IPEC has implemented these initiatives (Shah, 2002). These programs were for the elimination of hazardous forms of child labor. All of these steps were taken to protect the child rights at workplaces. The ILO (2012:123) has suggested some recommendations to eliminate the hazardous situation at the workplace, and to renovate the efforts to ensure education, to safeguard the workplace for youth, till eighteen years, and legal actions against hazardous child work.

Around 60% of the children are working in the unfavorable environment in the world, and the majority of them are in Asia, particularly, only in India, approximately, 44 million children are working in treacherous conditions, where they have faced physical, sexual and emotional abuse frequently (Khan *et al.*, 2018:1-2). Similarly, in Asia, less than 14 year old children are supporting their families. Federal Bureau of Statistics (PBS) has conducted a survey with the help of the ILO in 1996, and found that, out that 40 million children between the ages 5 to 14 years were economically active and supported their families. In the majority cases, these children never tell their family members about the abusive behavior in workplaces. Similarly, Khan *et al.*, (2018:1-2) conducted a study in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) in automobile workshops, and stated that, more than half of the

children reported about the physical and drug abuse to their parents. Nearly 85% of children reported punishment in the workplace to their parents. The majority of children were working in dangerous conditions in workshops in KPK.

In the case of Pakistan, child abuse is an alarming issue with a very sharp increase in the recent past years. Many children face physical, sexual and emotional abuses on a daily basis in workplaces. According to Government of Pakistan's (GoP) Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) (2014:22) in the Punjab and Sindh provinces about 81% of working children between the ages of 1 to 14 years reported to have faced abuse at workplaces (GoP, 2014). While, in the case of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) about 85% children reported that they faced physical punishment, emotional and mental stress on everyday basis (GoP, 2016:120). UNICEF's (2017:104-112) study identified that about 26.6% children in labor, in the case of Punjab province have faced different forms of physical violence. In the case of Sindh province 35%, and in Gilgit-Baltistan around 24.7% children have experienced several forms of physical punishment in schools or workplaces.

The Child labor ratio is higher in Islamabad, where a large number of children are working in different automobile workshops, hotels, and other businesses in different locations, such as Khadda Market (G-7), Karachi Company (G-9 Markz), Barakahu, Zero Point, F-10 Markaz and Abpara Market. According to Society for the Protection of the Right of the Child (SPARC), every fourth house in Islamabad employs a child domestic worker, where they face physical, sexual and emotional abuse on the daily basis. Total number of children living in *Katchi Abadis* (slum areas) were 39,338, out of which 10,739 (27.30%) were involved in child labor. Like other places, the children in Islamabad also have faced sexual abuse as well. According to the NGO Sahil 134 cases of child sexual abuse were reported in 2013 and 90 cases in 2014 only in Islamabad (UNICEF, 2015:181-194).

Theoretical Framework

Social learning theory is most suitable model to study the current issue, which states that behavior is learned through actions and observations, which models and shapes a new behavior and personality development (Bandura, 2004). Learning is a cognitive process that takes place in the social context and can occur through direction and observation. Bandura and Walters (1963) mentioned that observing behavior of others, people develop and shape their own behaviors. After the keen observations of others, people assimilate, and relate them to that specific behavior (Bandura, 1977).

The basic principle of learning is assumed to operate in the same way, as they observed, and perceived in their childhood life (Newman & Newman, 2007).

The aggressive behavior can also be learned through the models, that children become more aggressive, if they watch or observe the aggressive behaviors of other (Bandura, 2006). As a result, learning includes moral judgments regarding right and wrong, which can be the part of life through the modeling process. The facts taken from the literature review, there are three main concepts in social learning theory, that people can learn through personal observation, which shapes their mental state, that is called intrinsic reinforcement, and finally, the learning does not necessarily lead to the change in behavior.

The learning follows the modeling process. The social learning theory stated that abuse is learned through actions and observations. The master learns the abusive behavior from his master(s), and this process goes on from one generation to the another. The Master considered the abuse is a better way to train their trainees in automobile workshops. On the other hand, the children perceived that, behavior as a positive way in their learning process. Similarly, Sandy (2008) stated that the majority of masters agreed that, the child who has received more abuse during his training, will become a excellent mechanic in the future. So, they positively associated the abusive behavior in the learning process.

Methodology

For the current study, qualitative research technique was chosen to explore the phenomenon in detail. This research was conducted in Barakahu, Islamabad, which is one of the most the poorest neighborhood of the capital city, where prevalence of child labor can be observed in almost each automobile workshop, hotels, stores, and shops. The inclusion criterion of the respondents was set prior to the visits. Only, those children were taken as samples, whose ages were between 12 to 17 years, and they were working in automobile workshops regularly. The researchers selected ten (10) well-known automobile Workshops, through systematic random sampling. There are specific markets, where three to four shops are considered one workshop, and owner (*Master*) of the same vendor and the researchers took it as one workshop. Approximately, there were fifty (50) automobile workshops of such type. After devising the open-ended interview guide, the researchers conducted in-depth interviews with the children and their masters at automobile workshops. The researchers divided the interview guide into the four sections. The first section consisted of socio-economic status of the respondents, and general information about automobile workshops, i.e. working time, age, lunch, wages, family income, and family structure, etc. The second section included the questions regarding physical abuse, i.e. nature of abuse, how many time in a day or week., etc.

The third section was comprised of the information about the sexual and emotional abuse, where researchers included questions about the intensity and nature of abuse, verbal and non-verbal, magnitude of abuse, etc. The final section

consisted of questions related to the children's perceptions about the abuse. For the master a separate interview guide was prepared, and they were asked about their adaptation of treating children in automobile workshops. Specific themes and sub-themes were drawn from the collected data and interpretations and explanations were done to explore the issue at complete length. Sub-themes were drawn and responses of the respondents were aligned accordingly in a systematic ways.

Results and Discussion

The following section is based on the thematic analysis of the data collected through in-depth interviews with the children working in automobile workshops, and their masters. The data trends show that, the majority of the children were in their adolescence period (ages ranging between 14 to 17 years). Almost all of the children left school in their early ages, and their families pushed them to the automobile workshops to acquire skills, and financial support to the family members. The average income of these children was around 100 to 150 rupees per day, and additionally they were getting food from the master during working hours. Rashid, Abbasi, Farid & Manzoor (2015) asserted that, thousands of children are working under the stressful, unsafe and un-hygienic conditions in automobile workshops. They were very low paid, and the working hours were 11 to 12 hours per day, and in major cases without any break.

These children were working with the approval of their families, and in most of the cases, their fathers were in a continued contact with the masters, and insisted them for strict supervision during the training sessions. Such over-expectations and leverages by the fathers of children also contributed to the liberty on the part of master to physically abuse them for the sake of training. Since, the physical abuse was considered as part, and parcel of these children during work that's why, they had faced injuries and some of them were also admitted to the hospitals for treatment. Khan *et al.* (2018) also mentioned about such nature of incidents in the case of automobile workshops, where children have faced physical abuse and injuries frequently. They also point out that, petty expenses for such injuries were paid by the masters to avoid the severe consequences from the families concerned, and society at large. In the current locale the children also reported that, when they faced injuries their masters and family members admitted them to hospitals and masters paid the treatment expenses accordingly.

The majority of children were working for long hours in the automobile workshops, and were continually doing the activities, which were directed by their masters. In some case these activities were very hazardous to their health, but they had to perform such activities, because they deemed it their responsibility. Most of the masters were paying daily wages to the children on time, which was much

appreciated by the children during interviews. Additionally, the majority of children were agreed that the master provides food during working hours with tea regularly. In the events, like Eid, the master provides them new cloths and shoes with three to four days of holiday.

Table No. 1. Themes Wise Data of In-Depth Interviews

| Themes | Sub-Themes | Quotes | |
|--|---|--|---|
| General Situation in Automobile Workshops | Age, | Trainee- I'm 15 years old, I left school and my father got me here (workshop). | |
| | Duty Timing, | Trainee- I have been working here since 2015, and my master gives me Rs. 150 per day with lunch. I got injured twice in last one year and hospital charges were paid by my <i>USTAD</i> . | |
| | Nature of Work, | Trainee- Daily I'm working more than 11 hours, if we have no work we take rest, when we have more work we even not take break for lunch. | |
| | Food, | Trainee- My master never delayed my daily wages, whether we had work or not on that day. | |
| | Health Facilities, | Master- We are treating them (trainees) like our own children, if they don't follow our instructions and repeat the wrong thing we punish them. | |
| | Mid-day Breaks, Injury, and Pay | Master- Sometime, I slap children when my mood is off and when they don't follow me. | |
| Physical Abuse | Hitting, Kicking, Shaking, Burning, Throwing waste oil, and Tearing apart the Clothes | Trainee- My master hit me with the screw wrench (<i>Chabi</i> -number 16) multiple times in a day. Trainee- When I do not repeatedly follow his instructions, then he punishes me by slapping, twice he grabbed my hair. Master- If I do not punish the trainees they will never become perfect masters, so physical punishment is a part of their training. | |
| | Sexual Abuse | Fondling, Teaser, and Sexual Advances | Trainee- When I was the trainer, I faced multiple time sexual abuse from my master and co-workers. Trainee- It is quite normal for master to use filthy words during trainings. He normally uses words related to male sexual organ. Trainee- I didn't face any sexual abuse, however, in our neighboring workshop the master consumes alcohol and sexually abuse trainees. Master- I treat all my trainees like my own children; even I never think to do such act with them. However, I faced some sort of sexual abuse when I was with my master. |
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| Emotional Abuse | Abusive Language, Discouragement, Threats, and Curse | <p>Trainee-Whenever I forget work my master tortured me and threatened that he will not pay me money.</p> <p>Trainee-When I broke a mirror of car my master didn't gave me daily wages in three days.</p> <p>Master-We sometime discouraged our Trainee for their own betterment.</p> |
| Children and Master Perceptions about Abuse | Masters' Right to Abuse | <p>Trainee- I faced abuse multiple times, however, this is for my betterment.</p> <p>Trainee- The parents of trainee encouraged us to punish their child. We never share with anyone. No one trusts us and we perceived this is the right of our master.</p> <p>Trainee- We consider punishment as a part of training.</p> <p>Master- The child's parents come to us and give us permission that if their child didn't follow the rule punish them.</p> |

The children were facing physical abuse on a daily basis, as they had faced it in various ways. Following were the major categories of physical abuse; a) Hitting with multiple items, normally those which were used in workshop b) kicking, c) throwing waste engine oil on the face and head, and d) grabbing from hair. One of the respondents said that, his master normally hit him with screw wrench (*Chabbi number 16*), which is one of the largest and heaviest tools in the workshop. It hits me, but I can never resist such actions of my master. If the children replicate the same mistake the intensity of the abuse also increases, as the master takes it personally, and says that these children were never in learning mood. Jim (2011) mentioned in line with the attitude of the master as the physical abuse is very helpful to make the children learn during earlier ages. If we do not abuse them, they will never learn the skills. The punishment will make the children a perfect master by the end of the training, added master in an interview. According to Kuddasu & Rahman (2015) criticized the masters perceive that the punishment or abuse leads to improvements in the skills development. Rather, they said that it harmed the physical and emotional health of the children, who have been abused by the masters during trainings in automobile workshops. Such abusive practices could also push children into indulging in deviant activities, as they could use drugs, and also become thieves in addition to other immoral practices.

The children in labor also revealed that, this work is not due to their choice rather they have been pushed to such circumstances by the poverty faced by their families. They were left with no choice other than working in the automobile workshops, as their family was living in a hand-to-mouth situation. We are bearing such dangerous situation, because we wanted to financial support to our family, added one of the respondents. It was very normal among the

working children to face cuts and burns during work. This has also been observed by researchers like, Rashid, Abbasi, Farid & Manzoor (2015:235) who mentioned in their case that, children were facing many problems in automobile workshops, such as cuts and burns (48%), eye infection and physical injuries (10%) and orthopedic injuries (14%) from the sample of 250 children from different workshops in Islamabad.

In addition to the physical abuse, the verbal abuse was also one of the common practice in the automobile workshops. The master has been regularly using the abusive language to address these working children in workshops. Due to the impact of such abusive language, the children felt depressingly low, especially when their masters using such filthy words for them. One of the respondents mentioned that my master regularly used ghastly words for me, and when I reacted to such words he complained it to my father. Similarly, UNICEF's (2000) study also maintained that stress and abuse damaged child health and intellectual development. So, the use of abusive language for the working children in automobile workshops could harm their emotional health as well.

Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977; Walters, 1963) stated that, behavior is learned through actions and observations, which model and shape a new behavior and personality development. Similarly, in the context of current research, the master has learned the abusive behavior from his master, and applying the same method to the subordinate children in their workshop. Learning is a cognitive process that takes place in a social setting, and it can occur through directions and observations (Bandura, 2004). The discussions revealed that, roughly all masters agreed that the punishment is the proper way through which children can concentrate on the work. In the initial stages, Bandura and Walters (1963); Bandura & Walters (1977) mentioned that, by observing the behavior of others, people develop and shape their own behaviors. However, the children favored that, the punishment is for their own betterment, and thus it shapes their skills development. In addition to this, children's families also agreed with the point of view raised by the masters. During the interviews with the masters, the majority of them agreed that the children's parents were advising them to give physical punishment to their children. Similarly, Sandy (2008) stated that, many young children's parents' perception favors physical punishment, because the majority of parents were uneducated, and they had no knowledge regarding child rights and abuse.

According to Khan *et al.* (2018:1-2) stated that, around 60% of the children are working in the hostile conditions in the world. The majority of these are in Asia, particularly in India, where 44 million children are working in unsafe circumstances, where they face sexual and emotional abuse on a daily basis. From

the findings of the present research, it was incredibly clear that, the sexual abuse scarcely existed now; however, some masters said that they had experienced sexual abuse during their training, but nowadays the scenario is relatively different. A small number of respondents reported that, they have faced verbal sexual abuse, but they considered it as a part of their work. One of the respondents mentioned that, a masters in nearby automobile workshop regularly consumes alcohol, and sexually abuses his trainees, but when asked from the trainees, they negated such rumors. The trainees were repressed and seemed to conceal some facts as those revelations could cost them to lose this training, which is the prime source of earning for them and their family members.

It was an incredibly common perception among the children that, when a child leaves one *USTAD* during the training process, then he has never become a perfect skillful master during his whole career. Leaving a workshop is considered as a deviancy act among the children. Whatever the children face in the automobile workshops, they themselves get in this situation and never revealed it to anyone (Nafees *et al.*, 2012).

Conclusion

The state of automobile workshops in most of the settings, especially in the case of the Barakho is alarming, and we need to think about the preventive measures to control such incidents of physical, sexual, and emotional abuses by the masters towards their trainee children. The current research study found out that, the children working in the automobile workshops had faced continued physical and emotional abuse from their masters. In some cases the sexual abuse was there, but the children were very reluctant to share their perspectives on it. The families of these working children, consider the abuse as the prime right of the master to train them well. The social learning theory fits into the current scenario, as the masters and the trainees have learned the physical, sexual and emotional abuse from the precedent environment in which they work, and they practice it the same way when they face similar situation in which they hold control. The vicious cycle of abuse continues from one generation to the other in the same manner. The children who were subject to abuse deemed it the righteous act of their masters to train them well for the future, and thus they lived with it. There is quite a possibility that same physical and sexual advances will be made by those victimized when they become the masters in the future.

Recommendations

The need of the hour is to implement the rule of law to control the damage done to the children working in the automobile workshops in Islamabad, Pakistan. We need to pinpoint the main reasons of the huge number of admittance of

children in such labor activities, as in most of the cases poverty remained a major force, which pushed them to work in such an early age. The free educational facility shall be ensured by the state for the children under the age of 17 years. The families of the children under seventeen years of age must be convinced by the state to send their children to the schools, rather than sending them to the riskiest jobs. The state institutions must maintain a control over such situation through paying regular visits to the automobile workshops to stop children working there.

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