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Child Labor as a cultural Norm: Causes and Consequences

- 1) Introduction
- 2) Grim Reality of child labor in Pakistan
- 3) Causes of child labor as a cultural norm:

3.1 Rampant poverty perpetuates the cultural norm of child labor

[→ Global Poverty Outlook Report
→ World Bank report on poverty in Pakistan]

3.2 Mass unemployment paves way for child labor to support family
[The Economic Survey of Pakistan]

3.3 Heavy fees of educational institutes give way to child labor
[Report of Educational Institutes survey]

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3.4) Bounded labor propagates the cultural norm of child labor
- [UN Human Rights Commission Report].
- [Iqbal Masih case study]

3.5) Meagre social safety nets for poor people
[World Bank Report].

3.6) Elite capture of resources leads to child labor
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3.7) Mass migration of people due to conflict and climate catastrophes results in child labor
[UNEP Report]

3) Consequences of the cultural norm of child labor

4.1 Increase in the number of out of

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school children
[UNDP Report]

4.2 Sexual exploitation
of child labour by
paedophiles
[Roshni Helpline
Report]

4.3 Physical violence
of child labor
[→ Ridwana case
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4.4 Reduces growth
and future opportunities
for children
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Report]

4.5 Debilitate mental
faculties and physical
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children working
in unpleasant conditions
[Human Right
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juvenile crime rate

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[Report of juvenile criminals in Pakistan]

5- Measures to reduce the cultural norm of child labor:

(i) Increase in educational opportunities for children

(ii) Provision of social safety nets to discourage child labor

(iii) Strict enforcement of legislation to deter child labor

6- Conclusion

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ESSAY

The reality of a child labor is different from that of other children. He is a child without childhood.

His primary motive is survival and getting two times meal in a day. It is a story of every child labor. Child labor is so rampant that it has become a cultural norm.

There are myriad cause of child labor. To begin with, rampant poverty and mass unemployment are the primary causes. Similarly, the menace of bonded labour and meagre social safety nets are also the reasons which lead to child labor. Moreover, mass migration of people from one place to another pushes children towards child labor.

This menace of child labor has several negative consequences. These include

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increase in illiteracy rate and juvenile crime rate. Moreover, it also leads to sexual exploitation and domestic violence of child labor. Therefore, corrective measures should be taken to root out the evil of child labor from society. These include the provision of social safety nets and enforcement of child protection laws. Thus, child labor has emerged as a cultural norm due to poverty and elite capture of resources. It has dire consequences; therefore, it should be eliminated.

Child labor is a grim reality of Pakistan. There are several children who are trapped in the shackles of child labor in Pakistan. According to the United Nations Report, "There are over 4 million child labor in Pakistan. They are working in hazardous environment which has ~~for~~ negative impacts on

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their health." Thus, child labor is rampant in Pakistan.

To begin with, rampant poverty perpetuates the cultural norm of child labor. People do not have resources to cater to their need.

As a result, most children start to work as a child labor to support their family.

According to the "Global Poverty Outlook report," There are 800 million poor ~~family~~ people who go without food everyday." Similarly, as per the report of World Bank, "45% of people in Pakistan live below the poverty line." Thus, poverty is the main cause of child labor.

Similarly, mass unemployment paves way for child labor to support one's family. There are less opportunities of job in market owing to lower population and increase in competition. Therefore, children are compelled to earn money.

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The Economic Survey of Pakistan has captured this grim reality, "9 million people in Pakistan are unemployed. Moreover, the rate of unemployment is higher in educated people than uneducated people."

Hence, unemployment leads to the menace of child labor.

Similarly, hefty fees of educational institutes give way to child labor. It is nearly impossible for the poor to get admission in schools. As a result, parents employ them to earn skill to support the family financially. It has been clear from the survey of educational institutes that due to absence of regulation, most schools charge high fees. Hence, the high expense of education paves way for child labor.

Furthermore, bonded labor propagates the cultural norm of child labor. Most

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people cannot repay their debt. As a result, they employ their children with lenders to compensate for it." Around 4 million children in Pakistan are victim of bonded labor [Human Right Commission Report]. Similarly, Iqbal Masih, a young child, was the victim of child labor. His case highlighted the plight of child labor in Pakistan. Hence, bonded labor perpetuates the vicious cycle of child labor.

Moreover, meagre social safety nets give rise to child labor. It perpetuates in a society where state fails to extend social safety nets to financially weak families. As per the World Bank report "Pakistan provides meagre social safety nets to poor people." It results in child labor. Hence, less social safety nets give rise to the menace of child labor.

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Similarly, elite capture of resources also lead to child labor. When resources are not equally distributed, the poor get stuck in the cycle of poverty. As a result, they meet the rate of child labor. According to the United Nation Developmental Programme report, "10% of wealthy people controls 50% of wealth of Pakistan, the next 20% controls 40%, while 70% of people are left with 10% of resources." Hence, unequal distribution of wealth paves way for child labor.

Lastly, mass migration of people due to conflict and climate catastrophes results in child labor. When people migrate from one place to another, they have less resources to fulfill their needs. For survival, the young members of family start working to support their family financially. According to the United

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Nations Environmental Programme report, "children are compelled to work owing to climate related migration. Moreover, this trend will increase in future." Thus, mass migration also leads to child labor.

The above paragraphs have explained the causes of child labor. The following paragraphs will explain its consequences.

Firstly, it results in the increase of out of school children. Most ^{children} drop out of school to support their families financially. It leads to increase in the illiteracy. As per the United Nations Development Programme report, "There are 26 million out of school children in Pakistan." Hence, child labor increases illiteracy level of a country.

Similarly, child labor leads to sexual exploitation of child labourers by paedophiles. Most children, working in

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unregulated environment, fall prey to sexual molestation. This leads to a vicious cycle of sexual abuse in society. According to the Roshni helpline report, "In 2025, 20,000 child labor became victim of sexual exploitation." Hence, child labor result in sexual exploitation of children.

In addition, it also results in ~~physical~~ violence. The owners often resort to harsh penalties when dealing with child labor. They look towards them with disdain and indifference. For instance, Ridwana, a 10 year child, became a victim of physical violence at the hand of her employee. Her case was highlighted by media in 2023. Similarly, as per UN report, "Around 2 million child labor has become victim of physical violence." Hence, child labor becomes a victim of physical violence.

Similarly, it reduces growth and future opportunities for children. Children involved in child labor have bleak chances of taking higher positions due to illiteracy. It hinders their growth opportunities. It has been mentioned in Journal of Sociology that child labor is a hindrance in the way of children up-ward mobility in life. Hence, child labor limits the prospects of success in future.

Moreover, it debilitates mental faculties and physical development of children working in unpleasant conditions. Children do not get enough nutrients to support their growth. Moreover, hazardous working conditions like factories and brick kilns further reduces their growth. As a result, they suffer from malnutrition. To illustrate, as per the Human Right Commission of Children report,

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hazardous working conditions of child labor have negative impacts on their health?

Thus, child labor hinders the mental and physical growth of children.

Lastly, it increases the rate of juvenile crime in Pakistan. Children often resort to illegal means to earn money. It instills criminality in children.

For example, as per the statistics of juvenile criminals in Pakistan, "10,000 juvenile are imprisoned on the account of delinquency". Thus, child labor leads to juvenile delinquency.

There are several measures to reduce child labor in Pakistan. To begin with, the state should provide ^{free} educational opportunities and vocational training to children. Similarly, state should extend social safety nets to the poor in the country. This will

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reduce the urge for child labor. Moreover, the state should strictly enforce the legislation, **child Protection Act 1991**, to deter child labor. Thus, these measures should be implemented to reduce child labor in Pakistan.

In a nutshell, child labor took the shape of a cultural norm owing to the rise in its proportion across the country. The causes of this menace include poverty, unemployment and mass migration. It has dire consequences for children and society at large. It results in children exploitation and crimes in Pakistan. Therefore, this menace should be reduced with state efforts to create an environment where the children thrive not just survive.