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Topic:- English Essay.

Child Labour : A Neglected Issue

Outline

1) Introduction

↳ Thesis Statement: Despite constitutional guarantees, international conventions and policy commitments, child labour remains a deeply neglected issue due to weak governance, socio-economic inequality and social normalization.

2) Conceptual Understanding of Child Labour

- a) Definition of child labour as per ILO
- b) Difference between child labour and child work
- c) Child labour as a human rights violation

3) Global Perspective on Child Labour

According to ILO-UNICEF, approximately 160 million children are engaged in child labour worldwide.

4) Child Labour in Pakistan : A Grim Reality

Pakistan includes sector-wise and provincial magnitude of child labour despite constitutional

safeguards of Article 11 and 25-A.

5) Child Labour as a Neglected Issue

a) Institutional Neglect and Weak Enforcement

b) Poverty as Justification, Not Explanation

c) Educational Neglect and poor schooling quality.

d) Social and cultural normalization of child labour.

e) Political apathy and lack of electoral incentive.

6) Legal Framework and Implementation Gaps in Pakistan

a) Constitutional provisions

b) National and provincial child labour laws

c) Pakistan's commitments under ILO

d) Enforcement gaps and fragmented governance

7) Consequences of Persistent Neglect

Weakening of long-term economic growth, intergenerational poverty, health and psychological damage, ethical and moral cost.

8) The Way Forward: From Neglect to Action.

a) Strengthen enforcement mechanisms

b) Expand poverty alleviation programs

c) Improve access to quality education

d) Community-level awareness campaigns.

9) Conclusion

Child labour remains one of the most gravest yet most persistently neglected social problems of the contemporary world. Despite global consensus that childhood should be a period of learning, growth and protection, millions of children continue to be trapped in exploitative labour that robs them of education, health and dignity. While international conventions, constitutional guarantees, and national laws exist to curb this practice, the reality on the ground tells a different story and it remains a deeply neglected issue due to weak governance, socio-economic inequality and social normalization.

According to ILO Convention no. 138 and 182, "Child Labour includes hazardous work, bonded labour, domestic servitude and commercial exploitation."

Child Labour must be distinguished from harmless child work or skill-learning activities. Child work is generally harmless, age-appropriate and often beneficial for a child's development. **Child labour**, on the other hand, is exploitative, harmful and interferes with their education and well-being.

Modern frameworks treat child labour not merely as an economic necessity but as a violation of human rights, embedded with wider issues of inequality, discrimination and social exclusion. According to social development theorists, the presence of child labour is symptomatic of system socio-economic failure, where families are pushed to rely on children's earnings to survive rather than invest in education and future productivity.

Globally, child labour remains widespread. Although progress was made between 2000 and 2016, recent years have seen stagnation and even reversal due to economic shocks, pandemics, conflicts and climate change.

According to ILO-UNICEF, approximately 160 million children are engaged in child labour worldwide. The persistent neglect of child labour globally demonstrates that legislation alone is insufficient. The elimination of child labour is inseparable from the achievement of decent work for adults, noted by ILO.

Pakistan presents a particularly

troubling case. Despite constitutional safeguards such as Article 11 (prohibition of child labour) and Article - 25A (right to education) - millions of children remain engaged in exploitative work. Provincial surveys supported by UNICEF reveal alarming statistics:

In Sindh, over 1.6 million children are engaged in child labour, with more than 50% involved in hazardous work.

In Punjab, nearly 17% of children aged 5-17 are economically active, many in informal sectors.

Children are commonly found working in brick kilns, agriculture, domestic service, auto workshops and street vending. These sectors operate largely outside formal regulation, making child labour both invisible and normalized.

Pakistan does not suffer from a lack of laws, it suffers from institutional neglect and weak enforcement. Labour inspections are infrequent, penalties are weak and informal sectors remain beyond effective oversight - This enforcement gap reflects state neglect.

Despite the Punjab Prohibition of Child Labour at Brick Kilns Act, 2016, ~~thousand~~ of children continue to work in brick kilns under bonded labour conditions.

While poverty is a major driver of child labour, it is often used as an excuse for policy inaction. The absence of robust social safety nets, adult employment opportunities, and living wages forces families to depend on children's income. In this sense, child labour becomes a coping mechanism in a failing welfare system.

According to ILO and HRCP reports, ~~thousand~~ of families working in brick kilns across Punjab and Sindh are trapped in debt bondage (peshgi system).

Education is theoretically free and compulsory in Pakistan, yet millions of children remain out of school. Poor infrastructure, low teaching quality, hidden costs reduce the perceived value of schooling. This educational neglect reinforces a vicious cycle: lack of education leads to child labour, and child labour ensures lifelong poverty.

UNICEF Pakistan reports that urban domestic child workers, especially girls, are among the most educationally excluded groups.

In many communities, child labour is socially accepted as skill training or family assistance. Domestic child labour, especially of girls, remains hidden due to its occurrence within private households. This cultural normalization suppresses public outrage and transforms exploitation into tradition.

“When exploitation becomes tradition, injustice becomes invisible.”

In major cities like Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad, thousands of young girls aged 8-14 work as domestic servants. However, reports by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) documents that includes excessive working hours, physical and psychological abuse and complete denial of education.

Child labour lacks electoral salience. Children do not vote and

marginalized families lack political influence. As a result, child labor rarely appears in political manifestos or budget priorities. Policy responses are often symbolic, driven by international pressure rather than domestic commitment.

Despite Pakistan having over 12 million child labourers, mainstream political parties rarely prioritize child labour in election manifestos. This reflects the reality that children neither vote nor mobilize politically, making the issue electorally low-return.

Children labour deprives the nation of its ~~future~~ children's bright future. The Constitution of Pakistan explicitly prohibits all forms of forced labour under Article 11 and sets restrictions on the employment of children in hazardous occupations. It provides a foundational legal basis but despite this article, children are widely found working in brick kilns, carpet weaving and glass factories which are recognized as hazardous, reported by Human Rights Watch, 2021.

The Employment of Children Act, 1991 prohibits employment of children under 14 years in factories, mines and hazardous occupations. Each province has passed amendments like Sindh Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 2016 and Punjab Employment of Children Rules, 2017. Despite all these laws, ILO reported that children under 14 are still working in hazardous occupations.

Pakistan has committed internationally to eliminate child labour and developed a National Child Labour Policy in 2016 to comply with ILO standards. Yet, according to ILO 2022 report, over 3.3 million children are still engaged in hazardous work.

In Pakistan, labour inspection mechanisms are inadequate like few inspectors per province and corruption. For example, Punjab has only 17 labour inspectors for the entire province's industrial and agricultural sector.

Children labour oversight is divided among various sectors, creating overlap and confusion.

The persistent neglect of child labour inspection caused many severe consequences including the human capital erosion. Child labour deprives the nation of its future skilled workforce by pulling children out of schools and into unskilled, low-productivity work. For Pakistan, this translates into a workforce trapped in low-value sectors and slower long-term economic growth. Pakistan's textile industry, which employs millions, suffers from low productivity due to lack of skilled workforce.

When child labour starts prematurely, they remain confined to informal, low-paying jobs throughout their lives. As adults, they lack the education, compelling their own children to work for survival. This creates a self-perpetuating cycle where poverty reduces itself across generations. For example, in Sindh and Punjab all families are trapped into bonded labour systems.

Many working children are employed in hazardous environments, including brick kilns, workshops, mines and

domestic service. Prolonged exposure results in chronic illnesses, injuries and disabilities. Equally damaging are the psychological effects like stress, anxiety, trauma and loss of self-worth. Children in brick kilns suffer from severe respiratory diseases.

A society that tolerates child labour undermines its moral foundations and developmental vision. Child labour represents a collective failure to protect innocence, dignity and fundamental rights. As UNICEF observes,

“No country can claim to be developed if its children are denied their childhood.”

Thus, the persistence of child labour reflects not only economic failure but also ethical bankruptcy.

Eliminating child labour requires a holistic and integrated approach. Strengthening labour inspections and enforcement mechanisms is essential to ensure compliance with existing laws. The proper implementation and check and balance on child labour is an important direction to change the

way from neglect to action.

Expanding social protection programs, such as cash transfers and livelihood support, can reduce families' economic dependence on child labour. Benazir Income Support Program (BISP) provides conditional cash transfers that encourage school participation. These have shown improved school enrollment, reducing labour in some districts.

Improving access to quality education, especially in rural and marginalized areas, is critical to offering viable alternatives. Punjab's Education Reform 2018-2024 increased attendance by improved teacher accountability and infrastructure upgrades.

Formalizing the informal economy can regulate workplaces where child labour thrives, while community-level awareness campaigns can challenge social acceptance of child exploitation. Most importantly, child labour must be treated as a justice and governance issue, not merely a welfare concern.

NGO campaigns in Sindh and Punjab,

supported by UNICEF and provincial education departments, highlight child rights in communities and schools, slowly transforming norms that accept child labour.

Child labour in Pakistan persists due to political apathy, social normalization, economic necessity and weak governance. It is neglected not because it is unrecognized but because enforcement is weak, accountability is dispersed and political incentives are misaligned. Evidence and statistics shows that millions of Pakistani children are deprived of basic rights. True progress requires political commitment, legal enforcement, education investment and social transformation. Until child protection becomes a central national priority rather than a marginal welfare issue, Pakistan cannot claim real development.

