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Child Labour in Karachi's Night Shifts: Exploring the Impact on Health, Education, and Socioeconomic Development (With Case Studies)

Meritorious Prof. (Retd) Dr. Nasreen Aslam Shah

Department of Social Work, Ex-Director, Centre of Excellence for Women's Studies & Ex-Dean Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Karachi.

Contact no: 0300-2124055 Email Address: nasreenaslam060@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Child labour continues to be a critical developmental challenge in Pakistan, particularly in metropolitan cities such as Karachi. This research article examines the phenomenon of child labour in night shifts, focusing on its multidimensional impact on children's health, education, and long-term socioeconomic outcomes. While child labour has been widely studied, the specific implications of nocturnal labour remain underexplored. This study integrates theoretical perspectives, empirical literature, and qualitative case studies to highlight the unique vulnerabilities faced by children working during nighttime hours. Findings suggest that night-shift child labour significantly disrupts biological rhythms, contributes to severe health complications, leads to educational exclusion, and perpetuates intergenerational poverty. The study concludes with comprehensive recommendations aimed at addressing structural inequalities and strengthening child protection mechanisms.

Keywords: Child Labour, Night Shifts, Karachi, Health Impact, Education, Poverty, Social Exclusion

Introduction

Child labour remains one of the most persistent and complex social challenges in developing countries, particularly in rapidly urbanizing contexts such as Karachi. As Pakistan's largest metropolitan city and economic hub, Karachi contributes significantly to the national economy through its industrial, commercial, and service sectors. However, this economic growth is accompanied by stark socioeconomic inequalities, widespread poverty, and an expanding informal economy. Within this context, child labour has become deeply embedded as a survival strategy for low-income households (Ali & Khan, 2021; Sajjad, 2021).

According to the International Labour Organization, child labour is defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, potential, and dignity, and is harmful to their physical and mental development (ILO, 2021). Globally, an estimated 160 million children were engaged in child labour as of 2020, marking a concerning reversal after years of progress (ILO & UNICEF, 2021). More recent evidence indicates that, despite global commitments, the pace of reduction remains insufficient, and child labour continues to persist, particularly in low-income and developing regions (ILO, 2025). The ILO (2025) further emphasizes that although there has been a slight decline in recent years, millions of children remain trapped in hazardous and exploitative work, especially within informal sectors where regulation is weak. South Asia continues to account for a



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substantial share of this burden. Pakistan, as a developing country facing economic instability, inflation, and unemployment, remains particularly vulnerable to this phenomenon, where children are often compelled to contribute to household income as a survival strategy (Bhalotra, 2007).

Karachi's demographic and economic structure plays a critical role in sustaining child labour. Rapid population growth due to rural-to-urban migration has led to the expansion of informal settlements, commonly referred to as *katchi abadis*. These settlements are characterized by limited access to basic services such as education, healthcare, and employment opportunities (Sajjad, 2021). Families living in such marginalized conditions often rely on multiple income sources, including the labour of children, to meet basic needs. Consequently, children are engaged in various forms of work, including street vending, domestic labour, waste picking, and employment in small-scale industries (Qureshi, 2022). A particularly alarming dimension of child labour in Karachi is the increasing prevalence of night-shift work. Unlike daytime labour, night work exposes children to a unique set of risks that significantly affect their well-being. Children working during nighttime hours are commonly found in roadside eateries, transport hubs, mechanical workshops, and small manufacturing units that operate around the clock. These environments are typically unregulated and lack basic safety standards, making them highly hazardous for young workers (Hashmi, 2021).

The nature of night-shift work disrupts the biological functioning of children. Human beings operate on a circadian rhythm, which regulates sleep patterns, hormonal balance, and cognitive functioning. For children, adequate sleep is essential for physical growth, brain development, and emotional stability. However, working at night forces children to remain active during hours meant for rest, resulting in chronic sleep deprivation. Research indicates that such disruptions can lead to impaired cognitive abilities, weakened immune systems, and long-term developmental complications (Smith & Khan, 2023; Khan, 2023). Furthermore, studies indicate that insufficient sleep in children is strongly associated with poor mental health outcomes, cognitive impairment, and social difficulties (Johri et al., 2025). These findings reinforce that night-shift labour poses severe risks to children's physical and mental well-being by interfering with essential biological processes.

In addition to physical health risks, night-shift labour has profound psychological and social implications. Childhood is a critical stage for socialization, emotional development, and learning through interaction and play. Children working at night are deprived of these essential experiences, leading to social isolation and emotional distress. Studies have shown that child labourers often experience anxiety, depression, and a sense of alienation due to their exclusion from normal childhood activities (Nasir, 2023; Khan, 2019). Furthermore, nighttime environments may expose children to substance abuse, criminal activities, and exploitative relationships, increasing their vulnerability to abuse and neglect. The persistence of child labour in Karachi is closely linked to broader socioeconomic factors, particularly poverty, income inequality, and economic instability. Basu's (1999) "Luxury Axiom" suggests that child labour is primarily driven by economic necessity, where families send children to work only when adult income is insufficient for survival. In the context of Pakistan, rising inflation, unemployment, and economic volatility have significantly intensified this dependence on child labour. Recent data indicate that millions of children in Pakistan remain engaged in labour, with approximately 3.3 million children affected, reflecting the scale of the issue at the national level. Moreover, provincial-level surveys reveal that over 1.6 million children in Sindh alone are involved in labour, many in hazardous conditions, highlighting the



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severity of the problem in urban regions such as Karachi. Economic analyses further suggest that poverty and limited access to education continue to drive families to rely on children's earnings as a survival strategy. For many low-income households, the income generated by children, although minimal, is essential for meeting daily subsistence needs such as food, rent, and utilities. This reflects a structural condition in which child labour is not merely a social issue but a consequence of persistent economic inequality and weak social protection systems.

Another major factor contributing to child labour is the limited access to quality education. Although education is formally free in Pakistan, hidden costs such as uniforms, books, and transportation create barriers for low-income families. Additionally, the perceived low quality of public education reduces its attractiveness, leading families to prioritize immediate economic returns over long-term educational benefits (Bano, 2023). This results in high dropout rates and increased child participation in the labour force. The relationship between child labour and education becomes even more problematic in the context of night shifts. Children who work throughout the night experience severe physical and mental exhaustion, making it nearly impossible for them to attend school during the day. Empirical evidence from Sindh indicates that only **40.6% of working children attend school compared to 70.5% of non-working children**, highlighting a substantial educational gap and reinforcing the phenomenon of educational exclusion (Government of Sindh, 2024). This reflects a process commonly described as educational displacement, where immediate economic survival takes precedence over long-term educational investment. Media-based evidence further supports this trend, reporting alarming levels of child labour and limited school participation in Sindh (The Express Tribune, 2024). Recent global literature confirms that child labour is strongly associated with school dropout, poor learning outcomes, and long-term disengagement from education systems (UNESCO, 2024). Over time, this disruption in education significantly undermines human capital formation, limits future employment opportunities, and perpetuates intergenerational poverty.

From a broader economic perspective, child labour has serious implications for national development. According to the World Bank, reliance on child labour contributes to a "low-skill equilibrium," where the workforce remains uneducated and less productive (World Bank, 2025). This hinders economic growth and perpetuates intergenerational poverty. In Karachi, the continued prevalence of child labour undermines the city's potential to develop a skilled workforce capable of contributing to a modern, knowledge-based economy.

Despite the existence of legal frameworks such as the Sindh Prohibition of Employment of Children Act 2017, enforcement remains weak, particularly in the informal sector where most child labour occurs. Labour inspections are limited, and monitoring during nighttime is almost non-existent, allowing employers to exploit children without significant legal consequences (Memon, 2021). Furthermore, societal acceptance of child labour as a survival strategy reduces the effectiveness of policy interventions. Cultural norms also contribute to the persistence of child labour. In many communities, children's work is perceived as a means of skill development or character building. Boys are often encouraged to work in workshops or markets, while girls are engaged in domestic labour, which remains largely invisible and underreported. This normalization of child labour creates additional barriers to its elimination and highlights the need for community-based awareness and intervention programs. Child labour in Karachi particularly in night shifts is a multifaceted issue shaped by economic hardship, social inequality, weak institutional frameworks, and cultural norms. The combination of these factors has created an



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environment where child labour is not only prevalent but also normalized. Night-shift labour intensifies these challenges by exposing children to heightened risks that affect their health, education, and overall development. Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive understanding of its root causes and the implementation of integrated policy responses.

Problem Statement

Despite the enactment of the Sindh Prohibition of Employment of Children Act 2017, child labour continues to persist in Karachi, particularly within the informal sector. Although the law clearly prohibits the employment of children in hazardous work, its implementation remains weak due to limited inspections, governance challenges, and the vast size of the unregulated economy. For many low-income families, especially in urban slums, child labour is not viewed as a choice but as a survival strategy to meet basic household needs such as food, rent, and utilities (Memon, 2021; Sajjad, 2021). A major concern is the hidden nature of night-shift child labour. Most monitoring systems focus on daytime activities, leaving night-time work largely unchecked. This gap allows children to be employed in roadside hotels, transport stations, workshops, and small industries without accountability (Qureshi, 2022). As a result, exploitation often goes unnoticed and unregulated.

Night work exposes children to unsafe and risky environments, including violence, harassment, and lack of protection. During late hours, reduced public oversight increases their vulnerability to abuse and exploitation (Khan, 2019). In some cases, children are also exposed to environments where substance use is present, which may negatively influence their behaviour and emotional development (Nasir, 2023). Health impacts are equally serious. Night-shift work disrupts children's sleep cycles, leading to chronic fatigue, weakened immunity, and impaired cognitive development. Over time, these effects can harm both physical growth and mental well-being (Smith & Khan, 2023; Khan, 2023). Education is also severely affected. Children working at night often cannot attend school due to exhaustion and irregular sleep patterns, leading to absenteeism and dropout. This reflects "educational displacement," where survival needs replace schooling (Psacharopoulos, 1997). Overall, child labour contributes to long-term socioeconomic stagnation by limiting human capital development and reinforcing poverty cycles (World Bank, 2025). Despite its seriousness, night-shift child labour remains under-researched, with limited focus on its specific impacts in urban informal settings such as Karachi (Hashmi, 2021; Nasir, 2023). This study therefore aims to address this gap by examining the health, educational, and socioeconomic consequences of night-shift child labour and highlighting the structural factors that sustain it.

Research Objectives

- To analyze the prevalence of night-shift child labour in Karachi
- To examine its impact on physical and psychological health
- To assess its effect on education and human capital development
- To explore socioeconomic drivers and consequences
- To present real-life case studies illustrating lived experiences

Research Questions

- What are the major factors contributing to night-shift child labour in Karachi?
- How does night work affect children's health and well-being?
- What is the relationship between night labour and educational attainment?



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How does child labour influence long-term socioeconomic outcomes?

Literature Review

Child labour continues to be one of the most serious global challenges, affecting millions of children around the world. Recent estimates show that about 138 million children are involved in labour, including nearly 54 million working in dangerous and hazardous conditions (ILO, 2025). Although some progress has been made over the years, the global goal of eliminating child labour by 2025 has not been achieved, which reflects how deeply rooted and complex this issue remains (UNICEF & ILO, 2025).

While the overall number of working children has slightly decreased since 2020, a large number of children are still engaged in informal and unsafe work, especially in developing countries where laws exist but are not effectively implemented (ILO, 2025; UN News, 2025). Among the different forms of child labour, night-shift work is particularly harmful. Children working at night often face higher risks of violence, lack of supervision, and serious disruptions to their sleep, health, and education. In countries like Pakistan, and especially in large urban centres such as Karachi, the situation becomes even more challenging due to the dominance of informal economies. Many jobs operate outside formal regulations, making it difficult for authorities to monitor and enforce child protection laws. Although Pakistan has taken steps in 2025 to strengthen labour

and anti-trafficking laws, gaps in enforcement still exist, particularly in informal and night-time work settings (U.S. Department of Labor, 2025).

From a theoretical perspective, different frameworks help explain why child labour persists. Basu's (1999) "Luxury Axiom" suggests that poverty is the main driver of child labour. Families tend to send their children to work only when adult income is not enough to meet basic needs. In the current economic situation of Pakistan, rising inflation and unemployment have made it even harder for families to survive, forcing them to depend on children's earnings (World Bank, 2025). Similarly, Human Capital Theory highlights the importance of education in shaping a country's economic future. When children are involved in labour, especially night work, their education is disrupted. They may feel too tired to attend school, perform poorly, or drop out completely, which reduces their chances of acquiring skills and improving their future (Psacharopoulos, 1997).

Social Exclusion Theory provides another important angle, explaining how vulnerable groups are often left out of essential services like education, healthcare, and legal protection. Children working in informal and night-time jobs often remain invisible in official records and policies, which further deepens inequality and limits their opportunities in life (Nasir, 2023). The health impacts of night-shift labour on children are particularly alarming. Working at night disrupts the body's natural sleep cycle, known as the circadian rhythm, which is essential for physical growth and mental development. Research shows that lack of proper sleep can lead to fatigue, weakened immunity, poor concentration, and even stunted growth (Smith & Khan, 2023). In addition, children working in places like workshops, transport stations, hotels, and waste collection sites are exposed to dangerous conditions, including heavy machinery, toxic substances, and unsafe environments, increasing the risk of injuries and long-term health problems (Hashmi, 2021).

In Karachi, child labour is closely linked to the everyday struggles of low-income families. Many parents cannot meet household expenses on their own, which forces children to start working at a young age (Sajjad, 2021). Rising inflation, limited job



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opportunities, and lack of access to quality education have made the situation worse (Jafri, 2022). At the same time, the demand for cheap labour in informal sectors continues to attract employers who prefer hiring children due to lower wages. As a result, it is common to see children working in small shops, workshops, and on the streets across the city. Education is one of the biggest areas affected by child labour. Studies consistently show that working children struggle to attend school regularly, perform poorly in their studies, and are more likely to drop out. Psacharopoulos (1997) describes this as “educational displacement,” where immediate financial needs take priority over long-term educational benefits. This problem becomes even more severe for children working night shifts, as they are often too exhausted to attend school during the day. Recent reports confirm that child labour remains a major cause of school dropout in developing countries even in 2025 (UNESCO, 2025).

The long-term consequences of child labour extend beyond individual children to society as a whole. When children miss out on education and skill development, they are more likely to remain in low-paying jobs as adults, continuing the cycle of poverty. Edmonds (2008) explains this as an intergenerational poverty trap. At a broader level, countries with high levels of child labour often struggle with low productivity and slow economic growth (World Bank, 2025). Across the world, child labour remains a matter of serious concern despite ongoing efforts to reduce it. International discussions and policy initiatives have increasingly stressed the need to strengthen law enforcement and expand social protection systems for vulnerable children (ILO, 2025). In Pakistan, although important legal reforms have been introduced, including stricter measures against trafficking and child labour, challenges in effective implementation persist. These difficulties are particularly evident in informal sectors, especially in urban areas like Karachi, where monitoring and enforcement mechanisms remain weak (U.S. Department of Labor, 2025).

Overall, the literature shows that child labour is not caused by a single factor but is the result of interconnected issues such as poverty, weak governance, and labour market demand. Night-shift child labour makes the situation even worse by affecting children’s health, education, and overall well-being. Despite ongoing efforts at both global and national levels, child labour continues to be a serious and persistent issue that requires more effective policies, stronger enforcement, and meaningful socioeconomic support for affected families.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research design to better understand the issue of night-shift child labour in Karachi. A qualitative approach is appropriate for this research because it helps explore complex social realities and the lived experiences of children, which cannot be fully explained through numbers alone. By focusing on meanings, experiences, and social contexts, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how night-shift work affects children’s health, education, and overall socioeconomic conditions. The research is based entirely on secondary data, including published reports, academic studies, and relevant literature on child labour. In addition, the study includes case study illustrations that are inspired by commonly reported real-life situations in urban informal sectors. These case studies are not drawn from direct fieldwork but are carefully developed to reflect typical experiences of children working at night in places such as hotels, workshops, and street-based jobs. Through this approach, the study attempts to present a realistic and relatable picture of the challenges faced by these children.



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Case Studies

Case Study 1: Ali – Hotel Worker

Ali is a 12-year-old boy living in a low-income settlement in Karachi. At an age when most children are in school or playing with friends, he spends his nights working at a roadside dhaba on a busy highway. From 8 PM to 6 AM, his routine revolves around serving customers, washing dishes, and cleaning tables. He did not enter this work by choice; rather, his family's extreme financial hardship left no alternative, especially since his father is unemployed and his mother works irregularly in domestic jobs. His small income has become part of the household's survival strategy. Working through the night has gradually taken a toll on Ali's health. He often feels exhausted even before starting his shift and regularly complains of headaches, dizziness, and general weakness. His sleep is constantly disrupted, as he must rest during the day in a noisy and restless environment. Over time, this has affected his energy levels and overall well-being, showing how night work can silently harm a child's growing body and mind. Ali's education has also come to a complete stop. He was once enrolled in a government school, but as his workload increased, attending classes became impossible. Step by step, he stopped going altogether. What remains is a clear loss of learning opportunity at a very early age, where survival needs replaced education. This reflects how poverty can push children out of school and into work, limiting their future possibilities. Socially, Ali's world has also changed. While other children his age spend time with friends or attend school, he sleeps during the day and works at night. This routine has distanced him from normal childhood experiences and gradually shaped him into adult-like responsibilities far earlier than expected. He has fewer opportunities for play, learning, and emotional development. Despite all these struggles, Ali continues working because his family depends on him. His earnings help cover basic expenses such as food and electricity. This situation reflects how poverty forces families into difficult survival decisions, where even a child's labour becomes necessary for daily living. Overall, Ali's story shows how night-shift child labour is not just work. It is a lived reality shaped by poverty, lost education, and health struggles, quietly stealing away childhood and future opportunities.

Case Study 2: Rashid – Workshop Helper

Rashid is a 13-year-old boy working in a small, informal auto-repair workshop in Karachi. His day begins in the evening and stretches deep into the night, often ending only in the early hours of the morning. Instead of attending school or resting, he spends this time assisting mechanics holding tools, cleaning engine parts, and sometimes performing simple mechanical tasks without any formal training. The workshop operates without proper safety rules, supervision, or protective equipment, making the environment risky from the very beginning. Over time, this setting has exposed Rashid to continuous danger. He works around sharp tools, heavy machinery, and harmful substances such as engine oil and fuel. Minor injuries like cuts and burns have already become part of his routine, but the greater concern is the constant risk of something more serious. In such informal workplaces, even a small mistake can lead to major harm, especially for a child who has no safety guidance or training. The impact on his health is becoming increasingly visible. Rashid often feels exhausted even before his shift ends. He complains of headaches, eye strain, and constant tiredness, which are linked to long working hours and lack of proper sleep. This ongoing strain affects his energy, attention, and physical growth, showing how night labour gradually weakens a developing child's



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body and immune system. Rashid's education ended early. He left school at around 10 years of age when his family began struggling financially. His parents made a difficult decision to rely on his income for survival, believing it was more important than continuing his schooling. This reflects how poverty often forces families to prioritize immediate needs over long-term development, leading to lost educational opportunities. Emotionally, Rashid appears quiet and withdrawn. Most of his time is spent in an adult environment where conversations are about work, tools, and money rather than play or learning. This has shaped his personality too early, pushing him into emotional maturity while limiting his childhood experiences. He rarely talks about school anymore, as it now feels distant and unrealistic to him. At the core of Rashid's situation is economic necessity. His income contributes to household survival, even if it is small. This reflects the deeper structural issue where children become part of the labour force due to poverty and lack of opportunities. Overall, Rashid's case shows how informal night-shift work quietly reshapes a child's life affecting health, education, and emotional growth while highlighting the absence of protection in unregulated labour environments.

Case Study 3: Imran – Street Vendor

Imran is an 11-year-old boy who sells tea and snacks at a busy bus terminal in Karachi during night hours. His working life begins in the evening and often continues until midnight or even later, depending on how many passengers pass through. Instead of spending his evenings in school or at home resting, he moves through crowded and noisy transport areas trying to earn enough to support his family. His daily responsibilities include preparing and serving tea, collecting payments from customers, and cleaning a small roadside stall. The environment he works in is highly uncertain and often unsafe. Being surrounded by strangers, transport workers, and informal street networks exposes him to risks such as harassment, theft, and exposure to criminal activity. Night-time public spaces in Karachi offer little protection, especially for children working alone or with minimal supervision. The impact of this routine on his health is already noticeable. Imran sleeps very little during the day and remains active at night, which has disturbed his natural sleep cycle. As a result, he often feels exhausted, weak, and unable to concentrate. Over time, this constant fatigue has become part of his daily life, affecting his physical growth and energy levels. Research shows that long-term sleep disruption in children can negatively affect brain development and emotional stability. Imran's social life has also been deeply affected. While other children his age go to school, play, and interact with friends, he spends most of his time in adult-dominated environments. This has limited his emotional development and gradually increased feelings of anxiety and reduced confidence. Exposure to stressful situations at such a young age has also shaped his understanding of the world in a more adult-like way, leaving little space for normal childhood experiences. Educationally, Imran has never been able to attend school regularly. His family migrated from a rural area and, due to financial instability, he was pushed into work at an early age. Schooling was no longer seen as possible. This reflects a broader pattern of educational exclusion among children in urban poor communities, where survival takes priority over learning opportunities. Economically, Imran's small earnings are essential for his household. The money he earns is used for food and basic living expenses. His family sees his work as necessary for survival, even though it comes at the cost of his childhood. This reflects the cycle of intergenerational poverty, where children are drawn into labour because families lack stable income sources. Overall, Imran's case shows how night-time street labour places children in unsafe environments while silently affecting their health, education, and emotional well-being.



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Case Study 4: Sana – Domestic Worker

Sana is a 13-year-old girl from a low-income family in Karachi, currently working as a domestic helper in a middle-income household. Her work usually begins in the evening and extends late into the night, especially when household demands increase. She performs multiple tasks such as cleaning, washing dishes, cooking assistance, and childcare, reflecting a full-time workload despite her young age. Her family depends on her income due to her father's unstable daily wage work and her mother's illness, making her labour a necessity rather than a choice. Because her work takes place inside a private home, Sana's situation remains largely invisible to formal monitoring systems. This hidden nature increases her vulnerability to overwork, emotional pressure, and lack of basic rights. She often works without proper rest or structured breaks, which has led to constant fatigue, body aches, and disturbed sleep patterns. Over time, her physical well-being has gradually weakened due to continuous workload and lack of recovery time. On a psychological level, Sana experiences emotional isolation as she has minimal interaction with children her own age. Her daily routine is confined to household duties, limiting her social and emotional development. This restricted environment has contributed to stress and reduced self-confidence. In line with findings on domestic child labour, such conditions often lead to emotional vulnerability and long-term psychological strain. Educationally, Sana has never been enrolled in school, as she entered domestic work at an early age. Her entire childhood has been shaped around labour responsibilities, leaving no space for learning or skill development. This reflects broader human capital concerns, where early exclusion from education limits future opportunities and reinforces long-term socioeconomic disadvantage. Gender further intensifies her vulnerability, as she works within a private household where power imbalance and social norms reduce her ability to speak out or seek help. Her case reflects a broader pattern of invisible child labour, where poverty, gender inequality, and weak institutional protection intersect to sustain exploitation in domestic settings.

Case Study 5: Bilal – Garbage Collector

Bilal is a 12-year-old boy living in extreme poverty in Karachi, where he works as a waste collector in streets and dumping sites during evening and night hours. He gathers recyclable materials such as plastic, metal, and cardboard, which he sells to scrap dealers to support his family, as his father is unemployed and the household depends entirely on his income. His work is driven by survival needs rather than choice, reflecting the harsh economic realities faced by low-income families. His working environment exposes him to serious health and safety risks. While sorting through waste, he frequently encounters sharp objects, medical refuse, and contaminated materials, which often result in injuries, infections, and skin diseases. Continuous exposure to polluted surroundings has also led to breathing difficulties and recurring respiratory issues. Research shows that children engaged in waste picking are highly vulnerable to infectious diseases and long-term health complications due to unsafe environmental exposure. The risks increase significantly during night hours when visibility is low and supervision is almost absent. Bilal works in dark, unregulated areas without protective equipment such as gloves or shoes, making him highly vulnerable to accidents and physical harm. These conditions reflect the absence of basic occupational safety in informal labour settings. Educationally, Bilal is completely excluded from the schooling system. He left school after primary education due to financial pressures, as his family prioritized immediate survival over long-term learning. This situation aligns with Basu's (1999) Luxury Axiom, which explains child labour as a response to household economic necessity.



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Psychologically, Bilal experiences ongoing fatigue, emotional stress, and isolation due to lack of interaction with peers and absence of recreational life. Over time, this has reduced his confidence and affected his emotional well-being. His case reflects how poverty, environmental hazards, and weak regulation combine to sustain hazardous child labour in urban informal recycling systems.

Case Study 6: Saad – Factory Helper

Saad is a 14-year-old boy employed in a small textile unit operating in the industrial outskirts of Karachi. His work is primarily during night shifts, usually from 7 PM to early morning hours. His responsibilities include assisting machine operators, lifting raw materials, cleaning production areas, and occasionally handling basic machine-related tasks without formal training or protective equipment. Saad comes from a low-income family where his father works as a security guard and his income is insufficient to meet household needs, which forced Saad to enter the labour force at an early age. Saad's working conditions expose him to multiple occupational hazards. The textile unit operates with minimal safety protocols, and children like Saad are often assigned tasks that involve direct contact with heavy machinery. He has experienced minor injuries such as cuts, burns, and bruises. The absence of safety equipment such as gloves, masks, or protective footwear significantly increases his vulnerability to serious accidents. According to Hashmi (2021), children in informal industrial sectors are at high risk of occupational injuries due to weak enforcement of labour safety standards. Night-shift labour has also severely affected Saad's health. He reports persistent fatigue, body aches, and irregular sleep patterns. The disruption of his biological rhythm has reduced his energy levels and weakened his immune system. Over time, such conditions can result in long-term developmental issues including stunted physical growth and reduced cognitive functioning, as highlighted in studies on circadian rhythm disruption (Smith & Khan, 2023). Saad's educational journey has been completely interrupted. He left school after Grade 5 due to financial pressure and increasing absenteeism caused by work commitments. His family prioritized income generation over education, reflecting the economic necessity that drives child labour in low-income urban households. Psychologically, Saad experiences stress and reduced motivation for future planning. He has adapted to adult-like responsibilities at a young age, leaving little room for recreational or developmental activities. His aspirations for education have diminished due to prolonged exposure to labour-intensive environments. Saad's case highlights the structural exploitation of children in informal industrial sectors, where weak regulatory enforcement allows hazardous child labour to continue unchecked.

Case Study 7: Hina – Domestic Helper

Hina is a 12-year-old girl working as a domestic helper in multiple households in Karachi. Unlike a single employment arrangement, she is rotated between different homes depending on demand, often working late into the night. Her responsibilities include cleaning, cooking assistance, laundry work, and childcare duties. Hina belongs to a financially distressed family where both parents are daily wage workers, making her income contribution necessary for survival. Hina's working environment reflects the hidden and unregulated nature of domestic child labour. Since her work takes place inside private households, there is minimal external oversight, making her vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. She often works extended hours without proper rest and is sometimes required to remain available late at night during social gatherings or emergencies. Her physical health has deteriorated due to overwork and lack of rest. She



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experiences fatigue, headaches, and occasional illness. The continuous workload without adequate nutrition or sleep affects her physical development and overall well-being. Studies show that domestic child workers are particularly vulnerable to chronic exhaustion and health deterioration due to long working hours and lack of regulation. Educationally, Hina is completely excluded from formal schooling. She has never been enrolled in school due to early entry into labour. Her daily routine is entirely structured around domestic responsibilities, leaving no opportunity for education or skill development. Psychologically, Hina experiences emotional isolation. Working in private households limits her interaction with peers and reduces opportunities for social development. Over time, she has developed a sense of emotional dependency and reduced self-confidence. Hina's case demonstrates how domestic child labour remains one of the most invisible forms of exploitation, sustained by poverty, lack of regulation, and gender inequality.

Case Study 8: Usman – Auto Rickshaw Helper

Usman is a 13-year-old boy working as an assistant in the auto-rickshaw sector in Karachi railway station. His work primarily involves helping drivers find passengers, loading luggage, cleaning vehicles, and occasionally assisting during night-time transport operations. His working hours typically extend from evening until late night. Usman's work environment exposes him to significant risks, particularly road accidents and unsafe urban conditions. Night-time traffic in Karachi is highly unpredictable, and children working in transport sectors are often vulnerable to injuries and violence. Usman frequently remains awake for long hours, leading to chronic sleep deprivation and fatigue. His health has been negatively affected due to irregular sleep cycles and physical strain. He often experiences dizziness, weakness, and lack of concentration. Educationally, Usman has discontinued schooling. He left school after repeated absenteeism caused by work obligations. His family depends on his income for basic survival needs, which led to prioritization of labour over education. This reflects the broader issue of educational exclusion among working children in informal sectors. Psychologically, Usman shows signs of stress and reduced motivation for future planning. His exposure to adult responsibilities at an early age has altered his perception of childhood, limiting his aspirations for education or career development. Usman's case highlights the dangers of child labour in transport-related informal sectors, where lack of regulation and night-time exposure increase vulnerability.

Case Study 9: Farukh – Hotel Cleaner

Farukh is an 11-year-old boy working as a cleaner in a small roadside hotel in Karachi. His work begins in the evening and often continues late into the night, depending on customer flow. His responsibilities include washing dishes, cleaning kitchen utensils, wiping tables, and assisting kitchen staff during peak hours. Farukh belongs to a low-income family where his father works as a daily wage labourer and his mother is a homemaker. Due to persistent financial hardship, he was compelled to start working at an early age to contribute to household income. Farukh's working environment exposes him to several physical dangers. He regularly handles hot water, sharp utensils, and chemical cleaning agents without any protective gear, which has resulted in minor burns, cuts, and skin irritation. Research indicates that children employed in informal hospitality settings often face unsafe working conditions due to weak regulation and lack of employer accountability (Ahmed, 2024). His health has also been negatively affected by working at night. Farukh frequently experiences fatigue, body weakness, and disrupted sleep



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patterns. Since he works late hours, he is unable to maintain a proper rest routine, which affects both his physical growth and overall well-being. Farukh's education has been significantly disrupted. Although he was initially enrolled in school, repeated absences due to work led to poor academic performance, and eventually, he dropped out. This situation reflects how economic pressures often force children to prioritize earning over education. Psychologically, Farukh faces emotional stress and social isolation. Spending most of his time in a work environment with adults limits his interaction with peers and restricts opportunities for normal childhood development. Over time, he has taken on responsibilities beyond his age, which can lead to early emotional burden and reduced social confidence. Farukh's case reflects the broader reality of many children working in informal urban sectors. It highlights how poverty, lack of access to education, and weak enforcement of labour laws combine to push children into hazardous work conditions, ultimately affecting their health, education, and overall future opportunities.

Case Study 10: Zain – Mechanic Assistant

Zain is a 13-year-old boy living in a low-income community in Karachi, where he works in a small motorcycle repair workshop located on the city's outskirts. At an age when most children are engaged in school and recreational activities, Zain spends his evenings and nights working from 7 PM until early morning. His tasks include assisting mechanics in engine repairs, cleaning tools, and handling mechanical parts in a busy informal workshop that operates without formal supervision or safety standards. His entry into work is driven by household financial pressure, as his family depends on unstable and limited income sources for survival. His working environment exposes him to unsafe and demanding conditions on a daily basis. Zain frequently handles engine oil, fuel, and heavy mechanical parts without any protective equipment or formal training. The absence of safety measures makes him highly vulnerable to workplace injuries, while the nature of tasks increases long-term health risks. His experience reflects how children in informal industrial settings are often placed in hazardous roles due to weak regulation and economic necessity. Zain's health has gradually deteriorated due to continuous exposure to chemicals and night-shift labour. He reports frequent headaches, eye irritation, fatigue, and occasional breathing difficulties. The combination of long working hours and disrupted sleep patterns has weakened his physical strength and reduced his ability to concentrate. Over time, this routine has disturbed his natural sleep cycle, affecting his overall growth and well-being. His education has also been permanently interrupted. Zain left school after Grade 4 when increasing financial pressure and work demands made continued schooling impossible. What began as irregular attendance eventually resulted in complete dropout. His case reflects how children in low-income households are pushed out of education and absorbed into labour at an early age, limiting their future learning and development opportunities. Psychologically, Zain has adapted early to adult responsibilities, with his identity now closely tied to work rather than childhood or education. He shows little expectation of returning to school and views his current work as a long-term path. His daily routine has replaced typical childhood experiences such as learning, play, and social interaction. Overall, Zain's case illustrates how poverty, informal employment structures, and lack of protective systems converge to shape the lived reality of night-shift child labour, affecting health, education, and childhood development in a deeply interlinked way.



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Case Study 11: Maryam – Street Begging Worker

Maryam is a 12-year-old girl engaged in street begging activities in different areas of Karachi. She works with her family during night hours at traffic signals, bus stops, and commercial areas. Her family relies on begging as their primary source of income due to extreme poverty and lack of stable employment opportunities. Maryam's working environment exposes her to severe risks, including exploitation, harassment, and unsafe urban conditions. She often works late at night, making her vulnerable to criminal activity and emotional distress. The lack of protection in public spaces significantly increases her exposure to danger. Her health is sometimes affected by irregular sleeping patterns, malnutrition, and exhaustion. She often sleeps during the day in overcrowded and unsafe conditions. Chronic fatigue and poor nutrition have weakened her physical development. Educationally, Maryam has never attended school. Her entire life revolves around survival activities, leaving no opportunity for formal learning. This represents extreme educational exclusion and reinforces the cycle of intergenerational poverty. Psychologically, Maryam experiences emotional instability due to constant exposure to stressful environments and lack of security. She has limited social interaction outside her family and struggles with feelings of insecurity and fear. Maryam's case represents the extreme end of child labour, where survival needs completely replace childhood development, education, and protection.

Case Study 12: Ahmed – Fish Market Helper

Ahmed is a 11-year-old boy working in the fish market of Karachi during night hours. His job involves carrying baskets of fish, cleaning the working area, assisting traders, and helping in basic sales activities. He works from evening until early morning in a highly crowded and unhygienic environment. Ahmed comes from a low-income family where his father is a laborer and the household income is insufficient to meet daily needs, forcing Ahmed into work at an early age. Ahmed's working environment exposes him to severe physical and environmental hazards. The fish market is cold, wet, and often slippery, increasing the risk of falls and injuries. He frequently carries heavy loads, which causes strain on his back and shoulders. Additionally, continuous exposure to ice, water, and raw fish leads to skin infections and respiratory discomfort. According to Hashmi (2021), children working in informal market environments are highly vulnerable to infections and musculoskeletal injuries due to unsafe working conditions. Night-shift work further worsens Ahmed's health condition. He suffers from fatigue, irregular sleep patterns, and frequent illness. His sleep cycle is disrupted as he sleeps during daytime hours in noisy and overcrowded living conditions. This chronic sleep deprivation affects his physical growth, concentration, and overall well-being. Educationally, Ahmed dropped out of school after primary level due to financial pressure and work demands. His family prioritized survival over education, which is a common pattern among low-income households engaged in informal labour. Psychologically, Ahmed experiences limited childhood development due to early exposure to adult responsibilities. He has minimal interaction with peers and spends most of his time in work environments dominated by adults. This has affected his emotional growth and reduced his motivation for future education or skill development. Ahmed's case highlights the exploitation of children in informal market systems, where economic necessity and lack of regulation combine to sustain hazardous child labour practices.



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Case Study 13: Noor – Bakery Helper

Noor is a 14-year-old girl working night shifts in a small bakery in Karachi. Her responsibilities include preparing dough, assisting in baking, packaging bread, and cleaning bakery equipment. She starts work in the evening and continues until early morning in a hot and physically demanding environment. Noor comes from a financially unstable household where her father is unemployed. Due to severe economic pressure, her mother also works alongside her in the bakery, helping with packaging and cleaning tasks so the family can manage daily expenses. In this way, Noor is not only contributing to household survival but also sharing responsibilities with her mother at a very young age. The working conditions in the bakery expose Noor to multiple physical risks. She frequently handles hot ovens, heavy trays, and sharp tools, which have resulted in minor burns, cuts, and constant physical exhaustion. The absence of proper safety measures further increases her vulnerability in the workplace. Working during night hours has also significantly affected Noor's health. She often experiences chronic fatigue, disturbed sleep, and difficulty staying alert during the day. This disrupted routine affects her natural sleep cycle, physical growth, and mental functioning. Research indicates that prolonged sleep deprivation in children can negatively impact cognitive development, memory, attention span, and immune functioning (World Health Organization, 2024). Noor's education has also been disrupted due to financial hardship and work demands. She left school after Grade 4 because her family needed additional income, and her long working hours made continued schooling nearly impossible. Over time, returning to education has become increasingly difficult for her. Psychologically, Noor has developed a strong sense of responsibility at an early age, especially as she works alongside her mother. However, this early exposure to adult responsibilities has limited her ability to experience a normal childhood. She has minimal interaction with peers and very little time for rest, play, or personal development. Gradually, she has started to see bakery work as her only future option, with limited awareness of alternative opportunities. Noor's case reflects how economic hardship pushes entire families, including mothers and children, into informal labour systems. It highlights the hidden cost of survival, where children's health, education, and emotional well-being are compromised to sustain basic household needs.

Case Study 14: Hamza – Loader at Transport Terminal

Hamza is a 12-year-old boy working as a loader at a busy transport terminal in Karachi. His work involves lifting heavy luggage, loading goods onto buses and trucks, and assisting passengers during late-night travel operations. He works from evening until early morning in a highly congested and unsafe environment. Hamza comes from a low-income family where his father works as a daily wage laborer, and his income is insufficient to meet household needs. Hamza's working environment exposes him to severe physical risks. He regularly lifts heavy loads beyond his physical capacity, which has resulted in back pain, muscle strain, and physical exhaustion. The transport terminal is also a high-risk area due to constant movement of vehicles, increasing the chances of accidents. His health has been significantly affected by night-shift labour. Hamza suffers from chronic fatigue, sleep deprivation, and decreased physical strength. His irregular sleep cycle disrupts his natural growth process and weakens his immune system. Educationally, Hamza dropped out of school after primary education due to financial pressures and increasing work demands. His family depends on his income contribution for survival, which reflects the economic necessity driving child labour in low-income urban households. Psychologically, Hamza has developed a sense of adult responsibility



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at an early age. He has limited interaction with peers and spends most of his time in work environments dominated by adults. This has reduced his motivation for education and future aspirations. Hamza's case highlights the exploitation of children in transport-related informal sectors, where physical demands and lack of regulation create hazardous working conditions.

Case Study 15: Kiran – Flower Seller

Kiran is an 11-year-old girl who works in Karachi as a street-based flower seller at traffic signals. Instead of staying in formal schooling or a safe home environment, she spends most of her day moving between busy intersections, selling small bouquets of flowers to motorists stopped at signals. Her mother accompanies her to nearby roads and helps arrange and sell flowers, while her father works irregular informal jobs. The family depends on this combined income for daily survival. Kiran's working environment is highly unsafe and unpredictable. She stands for long hours under the sun and among heavy traffic, constantly exposed to pollution, noise, and the risk of road accidents. She must quickly approach vehicles at signals, which places her in vulnerable and unsafe street conditions. Her physical health is also affected by these conditions. Long hours of standing, irregular meals, and exposure to weather extremes often leave her tired and weak. She frequently experiences headaches, fatigue, and dehydration, which are common among street-working children due to lack of rest and nutrition (World Health Organization, 2024). Kiran's education has been severely affected. She has either never enrolled in school or dropped out at an early stage due to financial pressure and work responsibilities. As a result, she has limited access to formal learning opportunities, which reduces her chances for future development. Psychologically, Kiran shows signs of early emotional burden. Working in crowded traffic environments has reduced her opportunity for safe play and interaction with children her age. Over time, she has developed a sense of responsibility beyond her age, along with limited confidence in returning to education or changing her circumstances. Kiran's story reflects the gendered and visible form of child labour in urban spaces such as Karachi, where young girls working at traffic signals face both economic hardship and heightened safety risks, while remaining outside formal protection systems.

Case Study 16: Daniyal – Medical Store Helper

Daniyal is a 12-year-old boy working as a helper in a small medical store in Karachi. His responsibilities include arranging medicines on shelves, cleaning the shop and assisting the pharmacist during busy hours. He works long hours after school time or, in many cases, instead of attending school. Daniyal belongs to a low-income family where his father is unemployed, and the household relies on unstable informal sources of income. Daniyal's working environment exposes him to several health and safety risks. Although working in a medical store may appear relatively safer than other informal jobs, he is still frequently exposed to expired medicines, chemical substances, and improper handling of pharmaceuticals without formal training. This increases the risk of accidental ingestion, allergic reactions, and improper exposure to sensitive materials. Daniyal often experiences fatigue, headaches, and general weakness due to continuous work after school hours and during holidays. Over time, these conditions can negatively affect his physical growth, cognitive development, and overall well-being, limiting his ability to concentrate, learn effectively, and maintain healthy developmental progress. Educationally, Daniyal's schooling is irregular. At times, he misses school to meet work demands, and his academic performance has gradually declined. This situation reflects



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how child labour interferes with consistent education and limits long-term learning outcomes. Daniyal's case highlights how even small-scale informal medical retail environments can contribute to child labour. It reflects the broader issue of urban poverty, weak enforcement of labour laws, and the normalization of child work in everyday economic survival systems.

Case Study 17: Faizan – Bun Kabab Stall Helper

Faizan is a 10-year-old boy working as a helper at a roadside bun kabab stall in Karachi. His working hours begin in the evening and often continue late into the night when customer flow is high. His responsibilities include assisting in preparing bun kababs, serving customers, managing basic cleaning tasks, and helping the stall owner during peak hours. Faizan belongs to a financially struggling family where his father works as a daily wage labourer, and the household depends on multiple informal income sources to meet basic needs. Faizan works in a busy and crowded street environment where traffic, noise, and constant movement of people are part of his daily routine. The stall is set up on the roadside with limited safety arrangements, making the working environment physically and socially unsafe, especially during late-night hours. His physical health is affected by irregular working hours, lack of proper rest, and poor eating habits. Faizan often feels exhausted and weak due to standing for long periods and working late into the night. Exposure to roadside pollution and unhygienic surroundings further impacts his health. Faizan's education has also been significantly affected. He either attends school irregularly or has dropped out due to financial pressure and work commitments. His daily routine is centered around earning income rather than learning, which limits his academic progress and future opportunities. Faizan has developed a routine shaped by survival needs rather than childhood experiences. Working in a busy public space with constant customer interaction has reduced his opportunity for play, learning, and peer interaction. Faizan's case highlights how informal food street businesses such as bun kabab stalls depend on child labour, reflecting the deep connection between urban poverty, weak regulation, and the loss of childhood opportunities in Pakistan.

Case Study 18: Farhan – Bookshop Worker

Farhan is a 12-year-old boy from a low-income family in Karachi who works part-time at a small bookshop near his locality. After school and on weekends, he spends long hours at the shop arranging books, managing stationery, assisting customers, and helping the shop owner during busy periods. His involvement in work is not a personal choice but a response to his family's financial difficulties, as his father works as a daily wage labourer and the household struggles to meet basic needs. Although the environment appears relatively safe compared to other informal jobs, Farhan's routine is physically demanding. He remains on his feet for extended periods and often skips proper meals due to workload and time pressure. Continuous handling of books and stationery leads to eye strain and fatigue. Over time, this routine affects his physical energy and reduces his ability to recover properly after school and work. Farhan's education is partially affected by his job responsibilities. While he remains enrolled in school, his attendance is irregular and his academic performance is gradually declining. He finds it difficult to complete homework or revise lessons due to tiredness after work. This creates a constant struggle between schooling and earning, limiting his full participation in learning activities. Psychologically, Farhan is developing a sense of responsibility at an early age, as he contributes to household income. However, this responsibility comes at the cost of reduced childhood experiences. His time for play, rest, and interaction with peers has



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significantly decreased, which affects his emotional and social development. Overall, Farhan's case shows that even relatively "safe" informal work can still contribute to child labour when it interferes with education, health, and normal childhood development, particularly in contexts shaped by poverty and economic pressure.

Thematic Analysis and Discussion

The qualitative analysis of night-shift child labour in Karachi reveals deeply interconnected structural themes that reflect the lived realities of children working in informal urban economies. The findings demonstrate that child labour is not an isolated phenomenon but a systemic outcome of poverty, weak governance, informal labour markets, and educational inequality. The synthesis of case studies, Karachi-based research, institutional reports, and media sources provides strong contextual grounding for the emerging patterns.

Physical and Biological Health Deterioration

A dominant and consistent theme is severe deterioration of children's physical and biological health. Across all cases, children experience fatigue, sleep deprivation, chronic weakness, headaches, and frequent illness due to prolonged night work. Night-shift labour disrupts circadian rhythms, which are essential for healthy growth, cognitive development, and immune functioning. Children working in workshops, hotels, transport terminals, street vending, and waste collection are also exposed to hazardous conditions such as machinery injuries, chemical exposure, and environmental risks, particularly during night hours when supervision is minimal. Karachi-based empirical studies confirm high prevalence of injuries, respiratory issues, and long-term physical impairment among child workers in informal sectors (Ahmed & Rehman, 2022; Hussain, 2021; Karachi Social Policy Research Centre, 2022). Global and institutional evidence further supports these findings, showing that hazardous child labour combined with sleep disruption leads to long-term neurological and physiological damage (ILO, 2024; WHO, 2024).

Educational Disruption and Human Capital Loss

Another major theme is educational exclusion and school dropout. Most children either leave school early or never attend consistently due to work demands. Night labour makes school attendance nearly impossible, resulting in chronic absenteeism, poor academic performance, and eventual withdrawal from education. Karachi-based studies indicate that children engaged in informal labour have significantly lower school completion rates compared to non-working peers (SPDC, 2022). Media reports further highlight that millions of children in Sindh remain out of school due to poverty and labour demands (Dawn, 2025; The Express Tribune, 2025). This pattern aligns with global evidence that child labour significantly reduces educational attainment and long-term earning potential (UNICEF, 2024; UNESCO, 2024). Once children leave school, re-entry becomes highly unlikely, resulting in permanent human capital loss and intergenerational poverty (World Bank, 2025).

Poverty-Driven Survival Economy

A central finding is that child labour is primarily driven by household poverty and survival needs. Families depend on children's income to meet basic necessities such as food, rent, and utilities, particularly in low-income urban settlements. Karachi-based household studies show that child labour is often normalized as a survival strategy in



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slum communities rather than perceived as exploitation (SPDC, 2022). Inflation, unemployment, and lack of social protection further intensify this dependency (Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Human Rights, 2023). This finding supports Basu and Van's (1998) theoretical framework, which explains that child labour persists when household income falls below subsistence level.

Unsafe and Unregulated Working Environments

Children in Karachi are employed in informal sectors such as roadside eateries, workshops, transport terminals, waste collection, street vending, and domestic labour, where labour laws are weakly enforced. Karachi-based labour studies confirm that informal workshops operate without safety standards, exposing children to machinery hazards and toxic substances (Karachi Labour Rights Study, 2022). Similarly, street economy research highlights exposure to violence, accidents, and exploitation, particularly during night hours. Institutional reports confirm that informal labour markets in Pakistan remain largely outside regulatory oversight, enabling continued exploitation of children (ILO, 2024; Ministry of Human Rights, 2023).

Psychological Stress and Early Onset of Adult Responsibilities

Another significant theme is psychological distress and emotional burden. Children experience anxiety, emotional exhaustion, reduced self-esteem, and social isolation due to prolonged work exposure. Karachi-based psychological research shows elevated stress levels and emotional withdrawal among working children compared to school-going peers (Khan & Siddiqui, 2023). Lack of schooling, play, and peer interaction leads to premature adultification, where children adopt adult responsibilities at an early age. Global evidence confirms that early labour negatively affects identity formation, emotional regulation, and mental health outcomes (UNICEF, 2024).

Gender-Based Vulnerability and Social Exclusion

Gender emerges as a critical dimension, particularly among girls engaged in domestic labour. Female child workers face invisibility, emotional abuse, restricted mobility, and lack of institutional protection due to private household settings. Karachi-based gender studies highlight that domestic child labour remains highly underreported and difficult to regulate, increasing vulnerability of girls compared to boys in public workspaces (Fatima & Ali, 2022). This reflects broader patterns of social exclusion where gender and poverty intersect to intensify vulnerability (ILO, 2024; UNICEF, 2024).

Overall, the findings confirm that night-shift child labour in Karachi is a multidimensional structural issue shaped by poverty, informal labour markets, weak governance, and educational inequality. The integration of Karachi-based empirical studies, institutional reports, and media evidence strengthens the contextual validity of the analysis.

Night-shift labour intensifies all risks associated with child labour by adding biological disruption, increased exposure to unsafe environments, and deeper educational exclusion. Despite legal frameworks such as the Sindh Prohibition of Employment of Children Act 2017, enforcement remains weak in informal sectors where most child labour occurs (Government of Pakistan, 2023).

Media reports further reinforce this reality, highlighting increasing child labour trends in urban Pakistan due to inflation and unemployment pressures (Dawn, 2025; The Express Tribune, 2025). These structural conditions trap children in cycles of poverty, poor health, and educational deprivation.



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From a human development perspective, the combined effects of health deterioration, disrupted education, and psychological stress result in long-term intergenerational poverty and reduced social mobility. Global and local evidence consistently suggests that eliminating child labour requires integrated policy interventions, including poverty reduction, universal education access, and strengthened labour inspection systems (ILO, 2024; World Bank, 2025).

Conclusion

The present study on night-shift child labour in Karachi highlights that child labour is not only a socio-economic issue but a multidimensional developmental crisis affecting children's health, education, psychological well-being, and long-term life chances. The findings clearly show that night-shift labour intensifies all negative outcomes associated with child labour by directly disrupting children's biological rhythms, particularly sleep patterns, which are essential for growth and cognitive development. Children engaged in night work experience chronic fatigue, illness, injuries, and emotional stress, which collectively undermine their physical and mental development. The study further concludes that educational exclusion is one of the most severe consequences of night-shift child labour. Due to exhaustion and irregular working hours, most children are unable to attend school regularly, leading to dropout and permanent disengagement from formal education. This results in long-term human capital loss and limits their future employment opportunities, thereby reinforcing cycles of poverty.

Socioeconomic analysis indicates that child labour in night shifts is primarily driven by poverty, inflation, unemployment, and lack of social protection. Families depend on children's income for survival, making child labour a necessity rather than a choice. Additionally, weak enforcement of labour laws in informal sectors allows exploitative practices to continue without accountability. Psychological impacts such as stress, isolation, and premature adulthood further demonstrate that childhood is being replaced by survival responsibilities. Generally, the study concludes that night-shift child labour represents a severe violation of child rights and human development principles. Without immediate policy intervention, the cycle of exploitation, poverty, and educational deprivation will continue across generations.

Recommendations

Government agencies should ensure strict implementation of existing legislation, including the Sindh Prohibition of Employment of Children Act 2017, particularly in informal sectors such as hotels, workshops, and transport terminals. Regular inspections and penalties should be strengthened.

Special labour inspection teams should be established for night-time monitoring of workplaces where children are likely to be employed. This is crucial because most violations occur during unregulated night hours.

Financial support programs should be introduced for low-income families on the condition that children remain enrolled in school and are not engaged in labour activities.

Evening schools or bridge education programs should be developed for working children to reintegrate them into the education system. Flexible timing can help reduce dropout rates.

Long-term reduction of child labour requires addressing root causes such as poverty and unemployment. Job creation programs for adults can reduce dependency on children's income.



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Community-based awareness programs should be introduced to educate families about the harmful effects of child labour on health, education, and future opportunities. Child protection units should be strengthened at district levels to identify, rescue, and rehabilitate child labourers, especially those working in hidden environments such as domestic work.

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