

**Journal of Sociology & Cultural Research Review (JSCRR)**Available Online: <https://jscrr.edu.com.pk>Print ISSN: [3007-3103](#) Online ISSN: [3007-3111](#)Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)**BONDED LABOR IN CAR WORKSHOPS OF RAWALPINDI,  
PUNJAB, PAKISTAN****Faiq Fatima Durrani**

Lecturer, Higher Education Department Punjab

**ABSTRACT**

*This study focuses on bonded labor in car workshops in the district of Rawalpindi, Punjab, Pakistan. It aims to examine explicit and implicit violence against children, determine the reasons behind bonded labor, and highlight the lived experiences and problems faced by children working in car workshops. Although bonded labor in Pakistan has received some attention, it remains a pervasive social issue. The primary objective of this study is to draw attention to bonded child labor in Pakistan. Data collection took place at two significant sites: Sultan da Khu and Khada Market, which are considered hubs for car spare parts and car workshops. The researchers employed face-to-face interviews and covert observations for data collection. The findings suggest that children face various forms of violence and problems. Additionally, the reasons behind their bonded labor include family issues such as debt, poverty, and deprivation. The overall inference from the data is that despite the efforts of non-state and state actors and existing laws, bonded child labor remains prevalent in society. The government should enforce laws and regulations more effectively to eliminate child-bonded labor in Pakistan.*

**Keywords;** Bonded Labor, Child labor, Debt bondage, Peonage, Modern day slavery, car workshops

**Introduction**

Millions of children in Pakistan toil as strivers in various industries, unable to get away from the jobs that will leave them deprived, destitute, illiterate, and often halting to death. These are the children which are bonded laborers. Tied to their jobs in exchange for a loan, they may never be able to escape their debt since they earn so little and are unable to leave their jobs. The Pakistani government is required to release these kids and is aware of their whereabouts. Instead, many government employees deny their existence entirely due to apathy, caste prejudice, and corruption. Thus, this small-scale and short-period study focuses on child labor, one type of bonded labor, in the domain of an automobile workshop in Rawalpindi, Punjab. This study aims to unpack and explore the lived experiences of children in the automobile workshop. We deem it essential to stress it here that children working in the automobile workshop are in bonded labor which subjects them to a multiplicity of explicit, and implicit violence and abuse daily. Being bound to a certain employer became a fact of life and beyond for individuals in the subcontinent's laboring classes under the given condition of affairs. Poverty and marginal position kept the workers in debt indefinitely. Liabilities are passed on from generation to generation and this type of enslavement became known as bonded labor (Singh 2007). However, in Pakistan, the Bonded Labor System (Abolition) Act, passed by the Federal Assembly in 1992, renders unlawful all arrangements that put limits on labor or services as a condition for loans and advances. Pakistan's constitution forbids all types of forced labor and human trafficking. It has also ratified ILO Conventions Nos. 29 and 105, which prohibit

forced labor. In addition to that, there are more than 15 acts and ordinances, federal as well as provincial dealing with children in one form or another. There is the pledging Laborer Act 1933, the workers' children Act 1955, and Punjab Children Ordinance 1983. Besides all these agreements and laws, bonded labor is still prevailing in Pakistan specifically in the agricultural, brick kiln, car workshops, carpet, and tanning industries. According to ILER research on bonded labor, the number of people in forced sharecropping households in Pakistan ranges from 1.8 to 6.8 million due to poverty (Muhammad & Aly 2000). According to the UN report 2016, debt bondage is the most common modern forced labor in the world most succinctly happening in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, India, and Indian migrants in the Persian Gulf. The International Labor Organization reported that 20.9 million individuals worldwide were compelled to work in 2012. The majority of these people, 11.7 million, or 56% of the total, were located in Asia-Pacific (Reed 2017).

By engaging SDG no 10 (Reduced inequalities) this project, however, tries to highlight the problems faced by the bonded laborers in car workshops in Rawalpindi, Punjab of Pakistan.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite persistent efforts by NGOs and INGOs, ILO, Transparent Hands Trust, Idonate Foundation, etc. almost 11 million children keep the country's factories and workshop functioning (Child Labor Report 2011). A considerable number of these children are working in automobile workshops. The menace of child labor not only continues to exist, but its volume has widened and increased. It is worth mentioning that children in bonded labor, like children in automobile workshops, fuel many major social problems i.e., suicide, human trafficking, and depression. This short time and small-scale study, in collaboration with SSDO, will unpack and explore the menace of child labor in twin cities.

### **Research Question**

1. What push children to work in automobile workshop?
2. What are the explicit, and implicit violence and abuses they experience?
3. How do they explain their lived experiences? What are the major problems of bonded laborers in car workshops?

### **Objective**

1. To examine the explicit and implicit violence against children in automobile workshops;
2. To determine the different reasons behind bonded labor in car workshops
3. To highlight the lived experience of the children in the automobile workshop.

### **Methodology**

This study is not intended to be a comprehensive analysis of all forms of bonded child labor or the application of the law throughout Pakistan. Instead, it is based on a field investigation of bonded child labor in workshops in Rawalpindi district Punjab, Pakistan. This study aims to collect reliable and robust data on bonded labor to make informed judgments essential to combat and reduce crime effectively. Two locations for data collection are considered by researchers; 1) Khadda Market Rawalpindi, and ii) Sultan Da Khu Rawalpindi.

### **Why these locations?**

Sultan Da Khu and Khadda Market are considered the hub of car spare parts and car repairing sites in Rawalpindi. These are the finest location to gather the data relevant to our research i-e bonded labor.

### Data Sources

The data source includes both primary and secondary primary sources including the interviews and covert observations which include 1) in-person interviews at each individual's place of employment: this method was presumed to be too risky for the laborer and researcher, too challenging to locate physically and obtain permission to enter worksites, to have a low chance of receiving sincere responses from laborers. ii) in-person interviews conducted in the residences of workers in both "destination" and "source" places: This method has been considered impractical due to the lack of a concentration of workers who migrated to Rawalpindi in particular locations and the lack of physically recognizable accommodations frequently provided by owners. iii) in-person interviews in busy market areas: This method used a site where workers congregate, both more likely to provide access to them and allow for more freedom in their conduct. For children which are below the age of 14, a body mapping technique and vignette are used for further analysis.

In the quantitative part, the survey is considered the ultimate tool to examine the laborer's demographics, market-going habits, violence, working circumstances, savings, any lost liberties, and participation in government programs in addition to their wages, loans, and debts. In the end, this methodology is determined to be the most practical strategy for getting accurate information from the respondents.

### Sampling Strategy

Children for data collection are taken on a random sampling technique with the consideration of children definition by "The Employment of Children Act 1991" "child" as a person below eighteen years of age. Furthermore, all children's names have been altered to preserve their confidentiality and prevent any possible reprisal from their employers.

### Coding in terms of labor types

These are the labor types and criteria for trafficking which have been extracted from literature and field are as under

Act	Means	Purpose
i) Bonded labor recruitment by agent	Advance payment	Bonded labor in terms of restriction on movement
ii) Bonded labor recruitment by a family member	Not Paid just agreed on the amount fixed	Bonded labor in terms of restriction on employment
iii) Bonded labor recruitment by employer	Not Paid just agreed on the amount not fixed	Bonded labor in terms of the debt obligation
iv) Transportation by agent	Cannot work elsewhere	Bonded labor in terms of low wages
v) Transportation by a Family member	Cannot move elsewhere	Bonded labor in terms of no wage at all
vi) Transportation by employer		Work on excessive hours
vii) Transportation by relatives		Receives excessive deduction in payment

### Variables and Data Structure

The survey asked a series of questions to assess freedom constraints, wage payment, and the presence of an advanced to ascertain whether a laborer is bonded or not. The prevalence of trafficking in bonded labor, the act of trafficking (what is done), the exploitative intent behind it, and how it is done (how it is done) are inculcated while collecting data. Furthermore, the formula used is conservative because the method of gathering the data did not permit a thorough evaluation of the act (which includes the transfer, harboring, or transporting of people into a situation) or means (which includes the use of force, threat of force, kidnappings, force or violence, forgery, misuse of power, or helplessness, or the offering or receiving of payments to obtain permission or consent). All these conditions need thorough investigation, which is impossible in this short analysis. Furthermore, the explicit and implicit violence, their problems, and the reasons behind bonded labor are also gathered through face-to-face interviews. In addition, qualitative data is scrutinized through thematic analysis, and for quantitative data, the researcher analyzed data manually as the respondents were only 20.

### Quantitative Data Analysis

The total number of respondents is 20 out of which, are male children. 19 out of 20 belong to Punjab province and one respondent is from Sindh, Pakistan. 10 out of 20 respondents claimed that their father brings them to the workshops, 5 respondents claimed that their relatives have brought them here in return for bonded debt, remaining 5 stated that they are here due to some links. Moreover, fifteen of the respondents stated that their family receives their wages, three of them claims that they themselves get their pay, and the rest of the two said their relatives receive their wages.

### Qualitative Data Analysis

#### Children's Testimonies on Lived Experience and Implicit/ Explicit Violence.

The study respondents unanimously shared that they have been subjected to various types of outbreaks of violence including physical, emotional, mental, and psychological. An extract from the interviews is shared here:

Ahmed, ten years old, elaborated that he wakes up in the early morning. "I reached the workplace after having breakfast. My master is very cruel and rude. He usually uses abusive language as I am weak and unable to lift heavy metal engines. He scolds me and sometimes beat me. I have injuries on my fingers and hands due to tough work like uplifting heavy languages like steel and metal tools and spare body parts of cars."

**Figure 1 Khadda Market**



**Figure 2 Sultan da Khuu**

We further observed that their masters are rude to them, and they are speaking in favor of their masters. To my opinion, they were feeling insecure. But, when we conducted interviews outside of their workplace then they mention rude behavior, abusive language, and late-night work on workshops.

Another respondent, around the age of six, his parents put him to work in exchange for an advance payment of Rs. 30000 for his sister's wedding. He is here for two years in a car workshop. He admitted to us that the working conditions are really challenging. He said that

"We would receive punishment when we took too long to respond to our master's call. There was no downtime to eat. While working, we usually have lunch. We purchased dinner from the hotel for Rs. 200. Our pay was deducted for this."

Ali age thirteen was wearing slippers and he was without a sweater irrespective of the cold weather. He told us that about a year ago, one car spare part fell on his head. "I was hurt and bleeding. The owner put on a cotton pad and asked me to lie down. But after two hours he asked me to work again. I excused him but he refused to listen. I was forced to work again".

Shihab, age fifteen was quite satisfied with his work. He was not interested in studies, so, he joined the workshop with his brother. His brother was taking care of him. He wears dirty clothes as well as his hands was oily. He was an expert in his work. He had quite enough pocket money, a smartphone, and even permission of listening to songs.

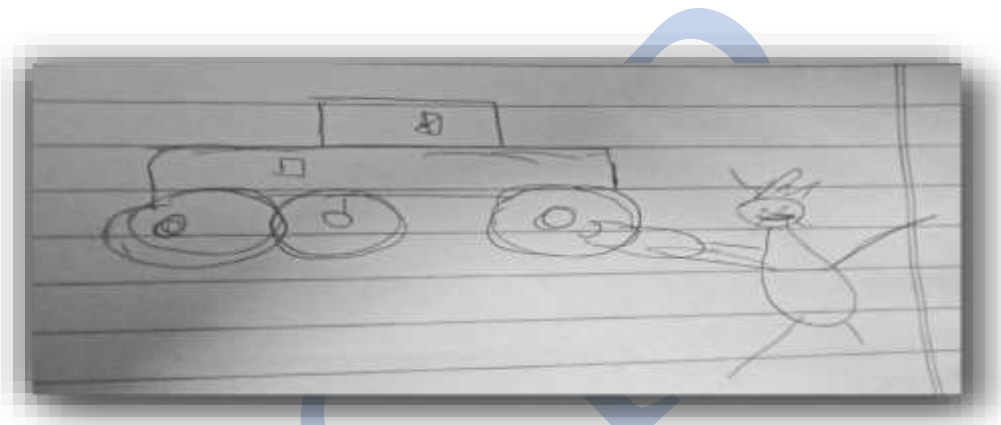
Ali Hassan age twelve was working outside the workshop. When we asked his owner for an interview, he came with us and kept standing there throughout the interview. Ali was so confused, and scared of his boss and gave all the positive answers. Even when we asked him about any abusive language/ words used by his owner, he refused to admit it, and his owner shamelessly admitted and said yes sometimes I do use abusive language. He was also having a fever at that time but still working in the workshop.

Abdullah age seven. He was just sitting outside the workshop with tools. He was confident as he was working under the supervision of his uncle. He just came 3 months ago with no prior experience. He agreed that sometimes he has to face physical abuse. He further added,

“When I don’t work properly, my uncle slaps me and beat me with slippers and other tools.”

Awais age ten. He was also scared. When I asked him about how you manage his daily routine, he said that I work all day and get very tired at the end of the day, and just sleep. He was pressurized to do the work as his family was in debt. We asked him to draw himself on paper and he made the below-mentioned picture.

**Figure 3 Drawing by a Child aged 09.**



### **Children’s Testimonies on different reasons behind Bonded Labor**

One respondent said.

“I was eight to seven years old when I moved here. Before coming here, I attended [a government] school, but after a year I left because of my sister's condition. When my sister became ill, we took her to the hospital. But the doctor stated we would need to pay extra, so my parents bonded me for Rs. 1,7000.”

Muhammad Abrar, age twelve years informed us that his father has passed away and he now lives with his mother and one sibling. He claimed that his mother had bonded him for Rs. 20000 four years prior. Since then, he has awoken around 7:00 or 7:30 every morning, seven days a week, and goes to work. He revealed to us that he puts in a twelve-hour day at the workshop, with an hour off for lunch. He said that

“Although he earns Rs. 9000 every month, a portion of that goes towards paying the loan. He claimed the family has taken out more loans after the initial loan, yet he still owes Rs. 40000. He claimed that while he does not attend school, his boss's children do.”

Another respondent, age nine years claimed that he earns Rs. 10k a month and owes Rs. 8,000 to his father, who used it to settle his sister’s wedding occasion bills debt. Before work, he goes to a government-run school.

He told us, “The owner would yell at me and take one day's pay—Rs. 100 every day—if I fall sick. He yells if there is an error. He is excellent overall. After that, he must correct me. He said, “If there was no school, I would be at some other

work," when we asked him what he loved to do when he wasn't working or in class. He said I cannot escape work even when I was studying.

Usman, age eight, my first loan was from the original owner and was for Rs. 60,000. The second owner then gave us another Rs. 30,000 and reimbursed the original owner. I wouldn't have to go to work if I returned the loan. I could stop working and attend regular school if there were no loans. We are currently unable to repay the debt. As my father is ill, we are incapable to take a break. I don't like the car workshops work, but my parents insist that I should go, so I work. Nevertheless, I don't anticipate the job to be so painful.

To conclude, child bonded labor in car workshops in district Rawalpindi, Punjab, Pakistan is still prevailing and needs due attention. Children are facing explicit and implicit violence and problem and the government should address this issue seriously. Bonded labor is a social problem present in society since ancient times. It is spread worldwide across the globe. It is mainly present in third-world countries like Pakistan and India. Bonded labor can also be termed slavery and debt slavery. Justice is delayed in matters of labor. Corruption makes it easy for employers to practice bonded labor. Workers are harassed in different paths of life to carry out forced labor. Labor is often treated to be criminalized by employers. Bonded labor can be abolished from society if the government takes necessary and adequate measures against it. Justice should be served at a rapid pace. Corruption from the labor department should be terminated. Employment before 18 years should be a non-bailable offense with a high penalty of fine.

#### **Limitations of the Study**

1. The cases for study in bonded labor were extremely low due to the sensitivity of the topic.
2. The time allocated for the case study was less.
3. Bonded children who were suffering from bonded labor were not given data relevant to it due to the Hawthorne effect.
4. Bonded children feared consequences from the employer in every aspect as they were already facing violence.
5. Bonded children were even unable to read, write and draw pictures depicting themselves.

#### **Steps for the Elimination of Child-Bonded Labor**

- i) The Pakistani government should do everything in its power to enforce the laws against child labor and bonded labor, as well as to make sure that enslaved children are located, released, and given opportunities for rehabilitation, and that their employers are punished and alleged. All kids should have access to high-quality, inclusive education.
- ii) More vigorous enforcement of the laws prohibiting child-bonded labor is needed.
- iii) Raising public awareness
- iv) Supporting community actions
- v) Targeting hazardous occupations
- vi) Need to develop a comprehensive labor market information system.
- vii) Preparing thorough employment policy.
- viii) Determine the majority age in accordance with international law. Establish an age restriction for employment.

- ix) Discouragements that currently prevent district magistrates and law enforcement from finding bonded laborers, releasing them, and holding law-breaking employers accountable for their actions should be eliminated. Any official who, whether through carelessness, willful ignorance, or collusion with employers, fails to protect bonded child laborers or punish their employers should also face criminal charges. Verify that the bonded labor vigilance committees are operating effectively in each district.
- x) The ILO should evaluate Pakistan's adherence to its international obligations through its control mechanisms, such as the Committee of Experts, which should encourage the government to make efforts to uphold these obligations and should ask the government to provide information on the progress made in this regard.

#### References:

- Singh, Manjit. n.d (2007). *CEC Working Paper Report on Bonded Labour in Punjab*.
- Muhammad, N., & Aly, E. (2000). *Bonded Labour in Pakistan*. Karachi: Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (PILER)
- Reed, Christiana. 2017. "Bonded Labor as Modern-Day Slavery." *BORGEN*. Retrieved September 23, 2022 (<https://www.borgenmagazine.com/bonded-labor-modern-day-slavery/#:~:text=Bonded%20labor%20makes%20a%20vicious%20cycle%20out%20of,has%20negative%20effects%20on%20both%20individuals%20and%20society.>).
- Ahsan, Syed Abbas. 2017. "Bonded Labour in Pakistan – Impact, Challenges and Role of Government." *SSRN Electronic Journal*. doi: <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3643259>.
- Shah. Tariq. 2007. "Promoting the Elimination of Bonded Labour in Pakistan (PEBLIP)." *Ilo.org*. Retrieved February 19, 2023 ([https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/WCMS\\_083188/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/WCMS_083188/lang-en/index.htm)).
- Ercelawn, Aly, and Muhammad Nauman. n.d. *InFocus Programme on Promoting the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work Working Paper Bonded Labour in Pakistan*.