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NEWS FROM THE OFFICE OF PRC

Workshop on Adopting Gender-Focused Methodology in Research

In October 2023, members of Team PRC including Dr. Khadija Bari, Ms. Maria Hasan and Ms. Sadia Mehboob represented the Centre at the 4 day workshop on **Adopting Gender-focused Methodology in Socio-cultural Research** organized by the Population Council and UNFPA. The workshop aimed to equip academic researchers with advanced skills and insights necessary for conducting gender-sensitive research.

Through immersive training sessions and collaborative discussions, participants were empowered to develop methodologies that fostered a deeper understanding of gender dynamics within various socio-cultural contexts. At the heart of the workshop was a recognition of the profound impact that gender dynamics have on societal structures and individual experiences. By centering gender in research methodologies, scholars gain a more comprehensive understanding of complex social phenomena and uncover previously overlooked disparities. One of the key takeaways from the workshop was the importance of addressing gender-based inequalities through targeted research and advocacy efforts.

Students' Engagement

The Population Research Centre (PRC) is committed to engaging students in research and writing on topics related to population and demography. To this end, in the last quarter, we issued a call for articles, specifically inviting students from IBA to participate. This initiative garnered a significant response, with many students from various programs submitting their work. Among these submissions, one article stood out and was selected for publication. Authored by PhD scholar **Shagufta Shabbar**, this well-written piece focused on the topic of **women's empowerment** and was featured in the PRC's October 2023 bulletin.

Faculty Achievement

Director PRC, Dr. Khadija Bari participated in the **Empowering Women Leaders' Summit**, a workshop organized as part of Michigan State University and HEC Pakistan's National Academy of Higher Education fellowship. This prestigious program aims to enhance the leadership capabilities of emerging women leaders in academia.

The workshop focused on equipping women leaders with essential skills for senior leadership roles within the realm of higher education in Pakistan. The participants highlighted the significance of the program, emphasizing its role in fostering skills such as communication, strategic planning, organizational management, and mentoring.

Webinar - Global Demographic and Human Capital Futures

On February 16th 2024, the PRC hosted a webinar featuring **Dr. Anne Goujon**, the POPJUS Program Director at IIASA. She provided invaluable insights into the latest global population projections, with a specific focus on Pakistan.
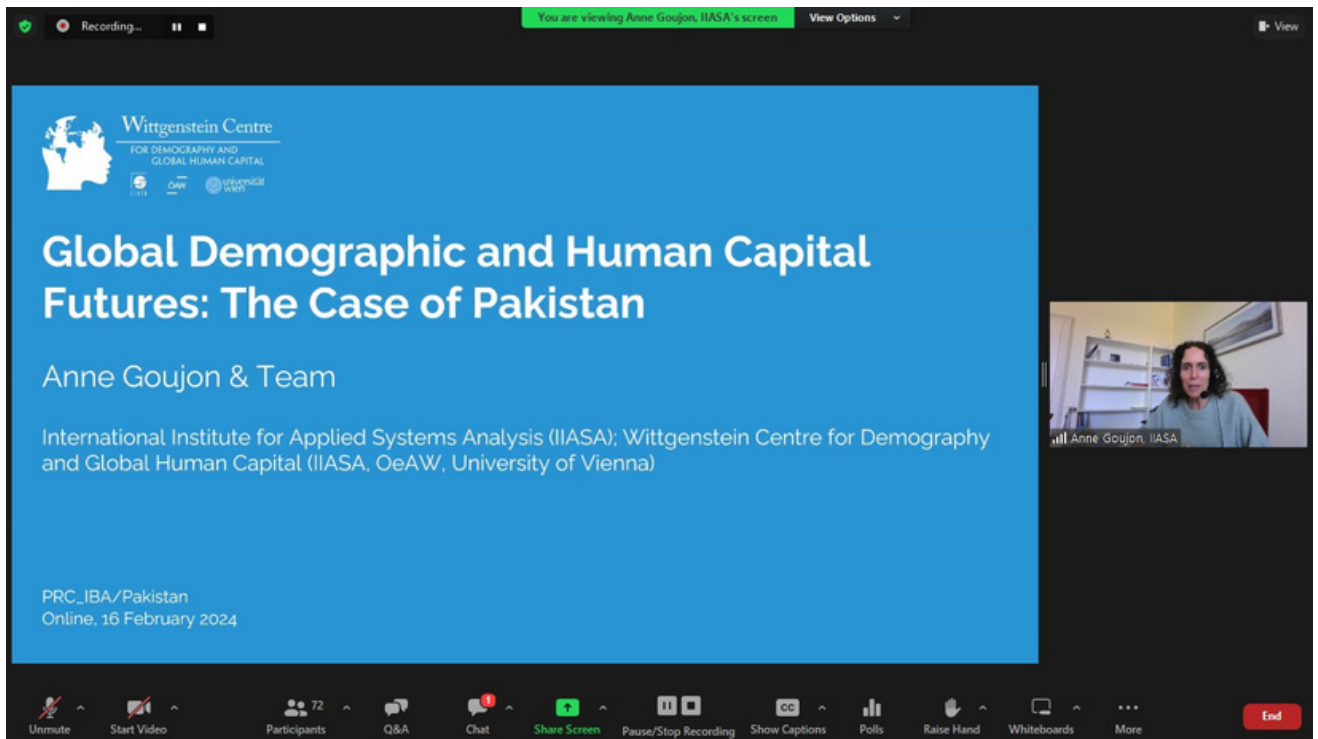
The presentation highlighted the significance of understanding population trajectories for effective policy planning, especially in a country like Pakistan where the fertility transition has been slower than anticipated. Dr. Goujon presented projections based on the Shared Socioeconomic Pathways (SSPs) scenarios, revealing that Pakistan's population is expected to reach 370 million by 2050 and a staggering 491 million by 2100 under the SSP2 middle-of-the-road scenario. These updated projections underscore the importance of considering demographic trends in policy formulation and resource allocation.

The webinar shed light on the implications of these population projections, particularly in terms of age and education structure. As Pakistan grapples with demographic shifts, understanding the dynamics of population growth becomes imperative for addressing socio-economic challenges and fostering sustainable development.
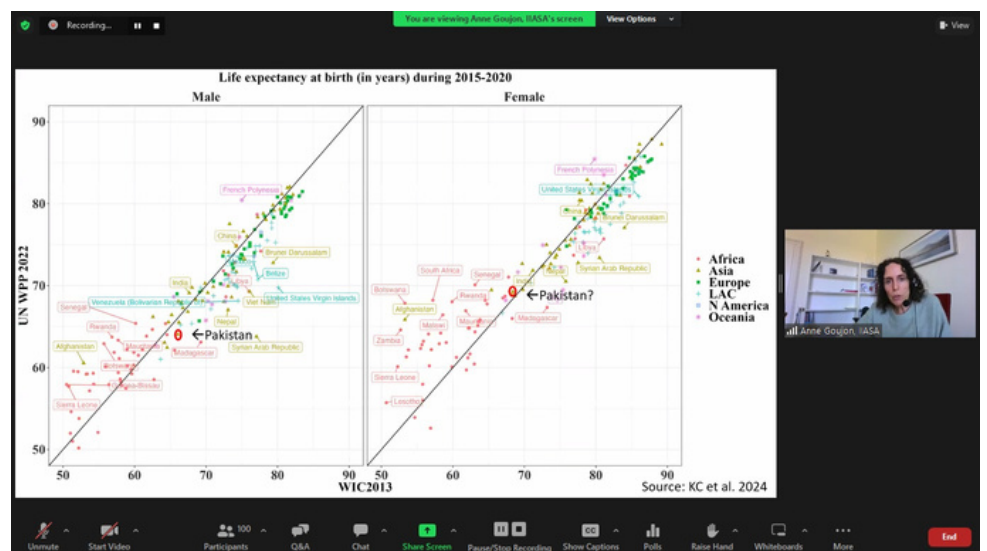
The session attracted a diverse audience, including students, faculty, and research scholars from government departments and private organizations.

"Innocence at Risk: Unveiling the Shadows of Child Labour in Pakistan"

By Team PRC

Child labour remains a significant issue in many parts of the world, including Pakistan. Despite international efforts to eradicate it, child labour continues to undermine the fundamental rights of children worldwide. The prevalence of child labour in Pakistan is attributed to a complex interplay of factors such as poverty, lack of access to quality education, and limited enforcement of child labour laws.

The practice has deep historical roots, intertwined with socio-economic structures and cultural norms.

Traditionally, children have been involved in various forms of work, often seen as a means of learning skills or contributing to the family income. However, with the evolution of industries and the economy, many of these work forms have become more exploitative and hazardous.

The state has implemented a series of laws aimed at combating child labour, yet enforcing these laws remains a significant challenge. The challenges also stem from factors like limited resources, corruption, and societal acceptance of child labour.

Key Legal Instruments

The Employment of Children Act 1991: This act prohibits the employment of children in certain hazardous occupations and processes.

Article 11.3 of the Constitution of Pakistan explicitly states, "No child below the age of fourteen years shall be engaged in any factory or mine or any other hazardous employment." Article 37 provides similar safeguards against child labour.

Factories Act 1934: Section 50 of this act reads, "No child who has not completed his fourteenth year shall be allowed to work in any factory," thus reinforcing the constitutional prohibition.

The provinces have their own acts, such as The Punjab Restriction on Employment of Children Act 2016, The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh Prohibition of Employment of Children Act (2017). These acts further prohibit the employment of children and restrict the employment of adolescents in certain occupations and processes.

The Balochistan Child Protection Act (2016) and the Balochistan Payment of Wages Act (2021) also aim to safeguard children's rights in the workplace.

Pakistan is a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which obligates the country to protect the rights of children, including the right to be free from economic exploitation.
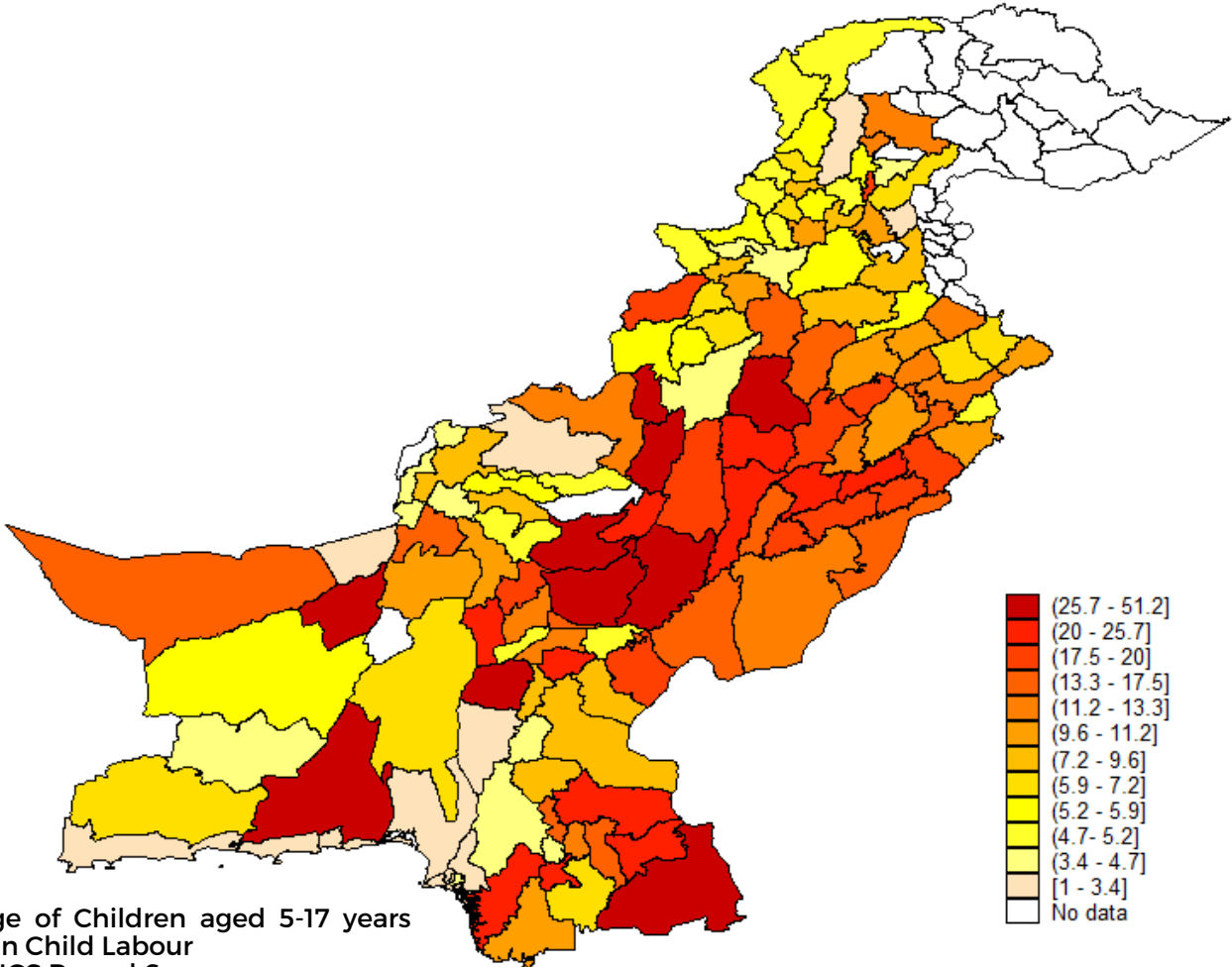
The analysis in this article uses data from MICS Round 6. The Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (or MICS Surveys), is an international household survey program initiated by UNICEF (https://mics.unicef.org/). It aims to collect data on various indicators related to the well-being of children, women, and households. The methodology of the MICS Indicator on Child Labour uses the following three age-specific thresholds for the number of hours children can perform economic activity without being classified as child labourers.

A child that performed economic activities during a week for more than the age-specific number of hours is classified as in child labour:	A child that performed household choresduring the last week for more than the age-specific number of hours is classified as in child labour:
i. age 5-11: 1 hour or more ii. age 12-14: 14 hours or more iii. age 15-17: 43 hours or more	i. age 5-11 and age 12-14: 28 hours or more ii. age 15-17: 43 hours or more

Overview

Data findings reveal significant rates of child labour in Pakistan.In Baluchistan, the districts with the highest incidence are Musakhel (51.2%), Awaran (43.6%), and Dera Bugti (42.4%). These figures are particularly alarming and highlight the acute challenges faced in these areas. Similarly, in Punjab, districts such as Khanewal (20.4%) and Muzaffar Garh (24%) report significant rates of child labor. Sindh also demonstrates concerning figures, with districts like Qambar Shahdadkot (30%), Tharparkar (29%), and Sanghar (26%) showcasing high rates.

Child Labour

Legend:
- (25.7 - 51.2]
- (20 - 25.7]
- (17.5 - 20]
- (13.3 - 17.5]
- (11.2 - 13.3]
- (9.6 - 11.2]
- (7.2 - 9.6]
- (5.9 - 7.2]
- (5.2 - 5.9]
- (4.7- 5.2]
- (3.4 - 4.7]
- [1 - 3.4]
- No data

Percentage of Children aged 5-17 years engaged in Child Labour
Source: MICS Round 6

The prevalence of child labour in the country is closely linked to poverty and lack of education. Many families rely on the income generated by their children to survive, and the expense of education, even when accessible, frequently remains out of reach due to its high cost. This economic compulsion, coupled with insufficient social security systems, drives many children into the workforce at a young age. Another factor contributing to child labour in Pakistan is the lack of awareness about the rights of children and the long-term negative impacts of child labour. Many parents and employers view child labour as a norm or necessity, not fully understanding the detrimental effects it can have on a child's physical, mental, and emotional development.

Looking at region wise distribution, the rural areas consistently show higher percentages of child labor compared to urban areas.

It's important to consider that the actual numbers in rural areas might be even higher as in these areas, children are often engaged in agricultural labour, which is sometimes not counted in formal statistics. Urban areas, on the other hand, have a higher concentration of industries and services that often employ children in hazardous conditions.

Child Labour - Region

Source: MICS Round 6
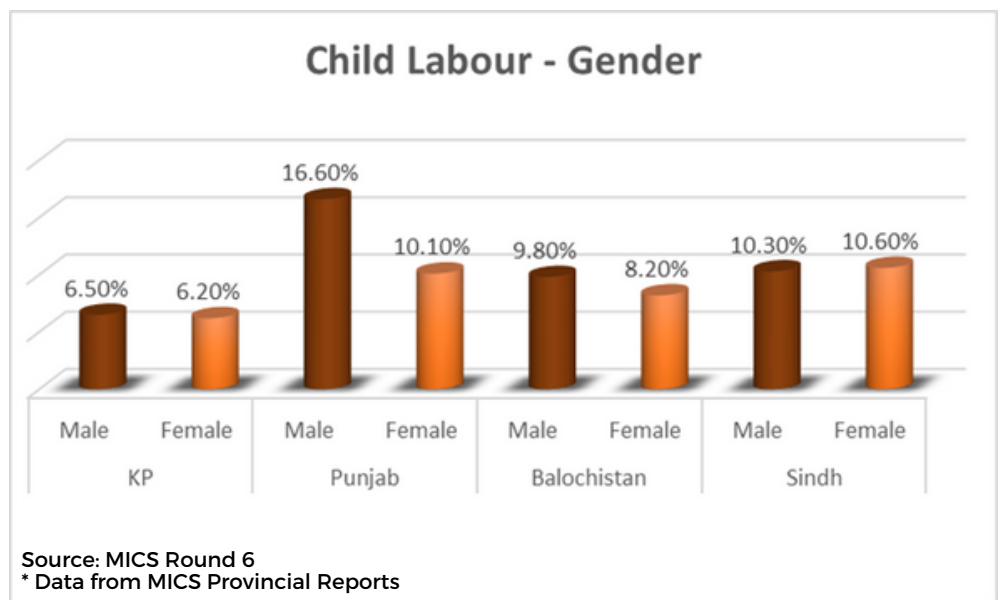* Data from MICS Provincial Reports

Examining the distribution based on gender, there are notable differences among the regions, with Punjab showing a significantly higher rate of male child labor compared to other regions.

While the data shows that female child labour is lower except for sindh (Sindh the only province where the reported percentage of female child laborers is higher as compared to males) its important to note that the reported stats may not

Child Labour - Gender

Source: MICS Round 6
* Data from MICS Provincial Reports

fully capture the extent of female child labor. In Pakistan, female children are often employed in domestic jobs, working within homes, which are either not accounted for in the formal definitions of child labor or are underreported. These roles, typically invisible in official labor statistics, warrant that the actual number of female child laborers could be significantly higher than reported. The informal nature of domestic work, coupled with societal norms that often see female children engaged in household tasks, contributes to the underreporting and lack of visibility of their labor.
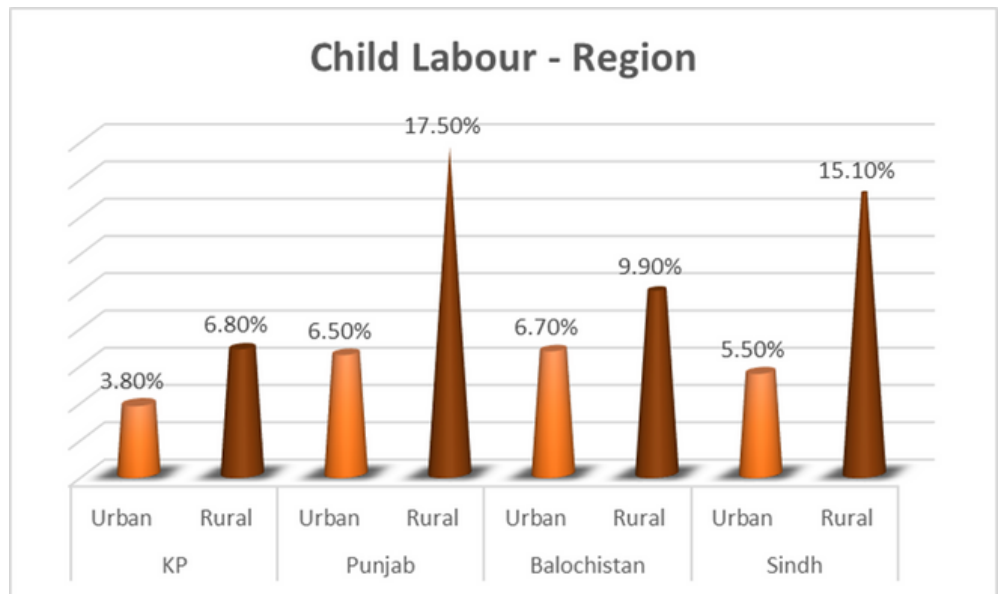
Children Working under Hazardous Work Conditions

The MICS data also reveal that a significant number of children are engaged in hazardous activities. Looking at provisions in law The Employment of Children Act 1991 prescribes 4 occupations and 34 processes wherein employment of children (under the age of 14) is prohibited. These include transport of passengers or goods; underground mining; manufacturing; mixing and applying pesticides and insecticides;stone crushing; scavenging including hospital waste; working at railway stations or ports; carpet weaving; spice grinding; working in boiler house; deep-sea fishing; construction; working in the glass bangle industry and manufacturing cement, explosives, and other products that involve the use of toxic substances. Night work and overtime work is also prohibited under new legislation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab and Sindh.

Percentage of Children (5-17 years) Working Under Hazardous Conditions
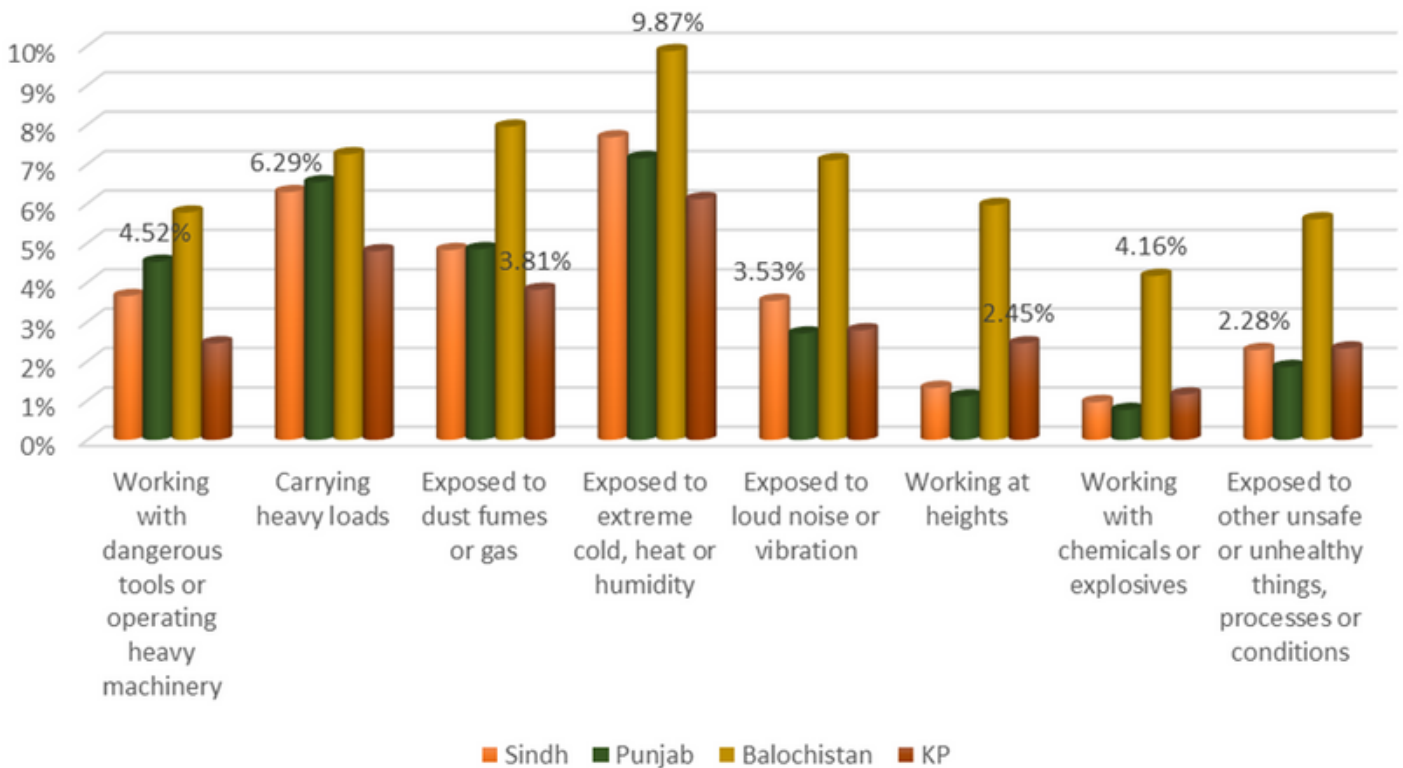
Source: MICS Round 6
*KP and Baluchistan Data from MICS Provincial Reports. Numbers for Sindh and Punjab are calculated using Microdata.

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Despite stringent legal frameworks, data reveals that across all provinces, children aged 5 to 17 are engaged in perilous work conditions. In Balochistan, 5.7% of children are employed in environments where they use dangerous tools or operate heavy machinery, amplifying the risks they face. Furthermore, approximately 8% encounter hazardous substances like dust, fumes, or gases. In Punjab, statistics show that 6.54% of children are burdened with heavy lifting, and 7.15% endure work in extreme temperatures or humidity levels. These conditions are not just dangerous; they threaten the children's immediate and long-term health and well-being. The use of hazardous tools and machinery can result in severe injuries, including cuts and fractures, exacerbated by the children's limited experience and physical development. Exposure to harmful substances can lead to respiratory ailments and chronic conditions, impacting them throughout their lives.

Impact on Children

Along with profound implications on physical health, psychologically, the stress and trauma associated with such labor can lead to long-lasting emotional and cognitive impairments, affecting their ability to learn, communicate, and develop healthy social relationships. Child labour also significantly disrupts educational attainment. Children engaged in labor are often unable to attend school regularly, leading to high dropout rates and limited literacy and numeracy skills. This educational deficit hinders their ability to secure better employment opportunities in the future, trapping them in a cycle of poverty. Consequently, this not only undermines the individuals' potential but also hampers the broader economic progress by fostering an under-skilled workforce.

This situation underscores the need for urgent interventions to protect children from such dangerous and unhealthy work environments and to enforce their right to a safe and healthy childhood.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Child labour remains a significant issue. This detrimental practice not only deprives children of their childhood but also exposes them to hazardous working conditions, jeopardizing their health and overall well-being. Moreover, the engagement of children in labour undermines their access to education and diminishes their prospects for a brighter future, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and inequality. Thus, addressing child labour remains imperative for safeguarding the rights and welfare of children.

To combat child labor effectively in Pakistan a comprehensive and multifaceted approach is required. Learning from international examples provides a blueprint for effective interventions, the following recommendations are proposed:

- **Implement Conditional Cash Transfer Programs:** Programs that offer financial support to families based on conditions like children's school attendance and health check-ups can be introduced, directly addressing poverty and educational disparities. Similar initiatives, such as Brazil's Bolsa Familia, which provides financial aid to impoverished families contingent on school attendance and vaccinations, have significantly reduced child labor by tackling the root causes of poverty and promoting education.

- **Enhance Legal Frameworks:** Strengthening and enforcing legal measures to establish clear age limits for employment and regulate working conditions can protect children from labor exploitation. This approach mirrors the success seen with the U.S. Fair Labor Standards Act and the European Union's directive, which have effectively safeguarded young workers through stringent regulations and penalties for non-compliance.

- **Expand Educational Opportunities:** Programs aimed at providing flexible education options to out-of-school children can be rolled out, prioritizing learning over labor. This strategy has seen success with Bangladesh's Reaching Out-of-School Children (ROSC) Project, which has reintegrated child laborers into the education system through flexible learning schedules and financial incentives.

- **Engage Communities:** Community-based initiatives can be developed to identify and support children at risk of labor, involving local stakeholders in creating a protective environment. Nepal's Community-Based Rehabilitation for Children at Risk, has effectively reduced child labor by offering educational, vocational, and social support at the community level.

- **Raise Public Awareness:** Nationwide campaigns can be conducted to educate the public about the detrimental effects of child labor and the critical role of education, aiming to change societal attitudes and norms.

By integrating these recommendations, Pakistan can create a robust strategy to eradicate child labor, ensuring a brighter and more secure future for its children.