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UNIVERSALIZATION OF BRICK KILN WORKERS' WAGES IN PAKISTAN: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

This study examines the wide range of problems faced by brick factory workers in Pakistan despite the industry's significant contribution to the country's economy. The brick manufacturing sector, which employs about 4.5 million people, is a major player in South Asia, accounting for 3 percent of Pakistan's GDP. However, workers are subject to various forms of exploitation, including non-payment of wages, debt slavery and child labor exploitation. Despite existing regulations, enforcement is weak, perpetuating systemic inequalities in the industry. This qualitative study uses semi-structured interviews and document analysis to explore the root causes and consequences of these issues. Key findings highlight the urgent need for policy reforms, strengthening enforcement mechanisms and increasing workers' awareness of their rights. Recommendations include strengthening regulatory oversight, promoting alternative livelihood options, and addressing underlying socioeconomic factors that perpetuate labor exploitation. By highlighting these issues, this study aims to contribute to the debate on labor rights in Pakistan and advocate concrete solutions to improve the working conditions and livelihoods of brick kiln workers.

Keywords*:* Wages, brick kiln workers, labor law, labor inspection, debt bondage

Introduction

Brick kiln is the most significant industry in Pakistan, which feeds about 4.5 million people as formal and informal labor. (Business Recorder, 2017). According to the available data, there are 20,000 brick kilns in the country, and this sector contributes at least three percent to Pakistan's GDP (ICIMOD, 2018). It is an old profession and still uses old technology to produce bricks.

Punjab is the center of brick kilns, with about 12000 brick kilns out of 20000 followed by other provinces (Business Recorder, 2017); the industry is developing fast in Sindh as construction is a growing sector in urban and rural areas, workers in brick kilns are paid different wages in each province and wages even at different brick kilns in the same provinces.

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The study covered the annual budget and legislation data of four provinces from Pakistan, including the capital territory published from time to time by the government, the author's interviews and discussed the matter with various stakeholders, Union leaders and workers from Punjab and Sindh to describe the findings. The paper is organized so that Section 2 provides legal protection, section 3 explains the wages and data in all provinces of Pakistan, section four explains the issues and challenges brick kiln workers face, and the final section concludes the paper.

Rationale of the Study

In Pakistan, the brick kiln business is a vital component of many industries, particularly the building sector, which makes a substantial contribution to both infrastructural development and economic expansion. However, the pervasiveness of low pay amongst brick kiln workers not only violates their fundamental human rights but also feeds the vicious cycle of exploitation and poverty.

Research Questions

1. What is the current state of wage structures in the brick kiln sector,
2. What are the key challenges and disparities in the existing wage system?
3. What are the socioeconomic, legal, and cultural factors influencing wage policies?

Research Objectives

The main objective of this research is to analyze the factors influencing brick kiln workers' wages in Pakistan. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Examine the current state of wage structures in the brick kiln sector.
2. Identify key challenges and disparities in the existing wage system.
3. Investigate the socioeconomic, legal, and cultural factors influencing wage policies.

Literature Review

Existing literature on brick kiln workers' wages in Pakistan provides a foundation for understanding the historical context and patterns of wage disparities. Previous studies have highlighted the unequal distribution of wages and the need for effective policies to address these disparities.

Current State of Brick Kiln Workers' Wages

An analysis of the present wage structure in Pakistan's brick kiln sector reveals significant challenges and disparities. Key issues include unequal pay, lack of standardization, and inadequate compensation for the strenuous work conducted by laborers.

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Legal Protection

Various national and international laws have protected workers' rights in a brick kiln. Pakistan is also bound to implement ILO laws and standards for brick kiln workers to facilitate fundamental labor rights; however, Pakistan's government has passed various labor laws to protect their rights and wages. The details of significant laws implementable to the brick kiln sector are i) Factories Act 1934, which protects workers' health and safety at work. ii) Minimum Wages Ordinance, 1961; the law protects the minimum wages of workers of different industries, including the brick kiln industry. iii) Payment of Wages Act, 1936; the law guaranteed the wages, payment time and method to provide wages to the workers. iv) Industrial and Commercial Establishments (Standing Orders). Ordinance 1968: The law guarantees bonuses and group insurance to industries' workers. vi) Industrial Relations Act provides rights to workers about trade unions, viii) Employees Social Security Ordinance is about workers' medical benefits, ix) Employees Old-Age Benefits Act deals with pension issues and old-age benefits.

The 18th Amendment in the Constitution of Pakistan 1973 transferred labor department powers to provinces and passed various laws for the workers. Some wage-related rules are the Sindh Payment of Wages Act 2015, the Balochistan Minimum Wages Ordinance, the Balochistan Workers Welfare Fund Ordinance, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Minimum Wages Act 2013, the Punjab Workers Welfare Fund Act 2019 and Punjab Minimum Wages Act 2019. These laws are not being implemented properly in this country. If these laws are correctly enforced, many workers' problems can be solved, and their conditions can be improved.

Wages In All Provinces

The owners of this industry are primarily wealthy businesspeople who do not follow the rules (Thaheem et al., (2020); their earnings are high, but they pay meager wages to the workers. The governments of the country's four provinces fix wages for kiln workers every year, which are unequal. According to the data of 2021, an amount of Rs. 1480 has been set to produce 1000 bricks in Punjab (Punjab Government Notification, 2021). However, the workers are not getting this money. The workers get only 700 to 900 rupees for 1000 bricks (Filed Survey). The situation is similar in other provinces of the country. Even there, the minimum wage is not being implemented. In addition, brick kiln owners receive "interest" (interest on personal payday loans) for the amount they offer to their employees. Employers deduct 20 to 30 per 100 rupees as interest or sood (Kamal, 2014). However, this percentage has risen even more recently, with employees telling us during fieldwork that it has already surpassed 40%. It shows the cruel behavior of brick employers.

Minimum Wages Provided to Workers in Sindh

The minimum rates of wages for skilled and unskilled workers in all industrial and commercial sectors in Sindh shall be given a minimum of 25000 rupees from 2021 (Sindh Labor Department).

Table 01: Minimum Wage in Sindh			
S. No.	Workers	Minimum rates of wages Per day	Minimum rates of wages Per month
1	Skilled and unskilled workers in all industrial and commercial sectors in Sindh	Rs. 961 Rupees	Rs. 25000 Rupees

Source: (Sindh Labor Department).

It is commendable that the Sindh government has kept the workers' minimum wage at 25,000 because the income of the kiln owners is very high, but they pay meager salaries to their workers. However, the minimum wage chart passed by the Punjab government is given below.

Minimum Wages Provided to Workers in Punjab

Table 02: Minimum Wage in Punjab			
S. No.	Workers	Minimum rates of wages per day	Minimum rates of wages per month
1	skilled and unskilled workers in all industrial and commercial sectors in Sindh	Rs. 770 Rupees	Rs. 20000 Rupees

Source: Punjab Government Notification, 2021

The Punjab government has kept the wages of kiln workers deficient compared to Sindh; although many brick kilns in Punjab earn more, the workers are still paid very little. The Balochistan government has also followed Punjab on the issue of low wages and has kept the same wage policy, according to which the minimum wage of a worker is 2000 (Labor Department, Government of Balochistan, 2021).

Minimum Wages Provided to Workers in Balochistan

Table 03: Minimum Wage in Balochistan			
S. No.	Workers	Minimum rates of wages per day	Minimum rates of wages per month
1	skilled and unskilled workers in all industrial and commercial sectors in Sindh	Rs. 770 Rupees	Rs. 20000 Rupees

Source: (Labor Department, Government of Balochistan, 2021)

The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government has given more than Punjab and Balochistan but less than Sindh. They have kept a monthly wage of 21,000 (Labor Department KPK).

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Minimum Wages Provided to Workers In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Table 04: Minimum Wage in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa			
S. No.	Category	Minimum rates of wages per day	Minimum rates of wages per day
1	skilled and unskilled workers in all industrial and commercial sectors in Sindh	Rs. 800 Rupees	Rs. 21,000 Rupees

Source: (Labor Department KPK)

The wage policy of the federal government is not different from that of Punjab and Balochistan. As is the policy of Punjab, the federal government has also adopted it, according to which the minimum wage of a worker should be 20,000.

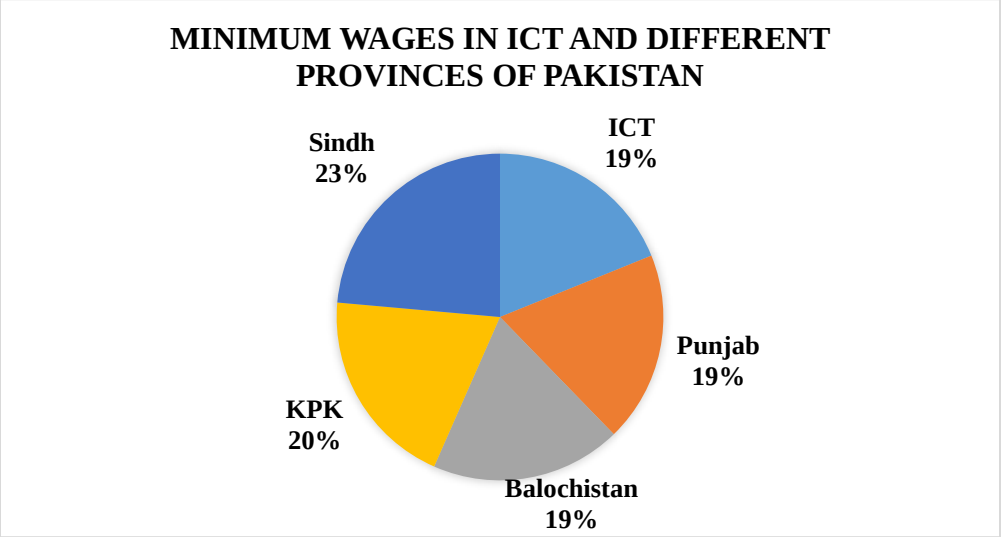
Minimum Wage Rate By Federal Government

S. No.	Category	Minimum rates of wages per day	Minimum rates of wages per day
1	Adult unskilled workers are employed in industrial undertakings in ICT. Islamabad	Rs. 770 Rupees	Rs. 20000 Rupees

Source: Budget 2021, Government of Pakistan

The minimum wage approved by the four provinces and the federal government is included in the Figure below.

Figure 01: Minimum Wages in ICT and different provinces of Pakistan



Source: Author Compilation.

Chart Shows that the minimum salary for a worker in Sindh has been hiked to Rs. 25,000 per month, 4% more than the Punjab wage rates. However, the minimum pay for a worker in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has been increased by Rs. 21,000 per month, 1% more than the wage rate in Punjab.

Similarly, the Punjab and Balochistan governments have finally raised the minimum salary to Rs. 20,000 per month, the same as the Federal Government's daily wage.

Issues And Challenges

Brick kiln workers in Pakistan face many problems, including non-implementation of law, non-payment of minimum wages, non-issuance of identity cards, lack of health and clean water facilities, social security, and children's education described below.

Non-Implementing of Law

There are many laws regarding the rights of workers in Pakistan, which provide solutions to all the problems of the workers, but the owners of the kilns belong to the upper class; the owners of the kilns are Chaudhry, Businessmen, elites, they have contacts with politicians, who do not follow the law because they are powerful. The Labor Department has become the agent of the kiln owners; the Police are with the kiln owners; if a kiln worker refuses to work for low wages, then the kiln owners, through the Police, file a false case of robbery, theft, and betrayal of trust, and locked them in the police station. There are many examples of this all over the country. According to Muhammad Shabbir, secretary of All Pakistan Bhatta Mazdoor Union Lahore, an owner in Rawalpindi filed an FIR of 17 lac theft against a worker when he refused to work for low wages.

Non-Payment of Minimum Wages

Much injustice is being done to the workers in the kiln, one of which is working for low wages. The government has also passed legislation on the salaries of the workers; similarly, the labor department of each province issues a notification for the salaries of the workers of the kiln, in which the wages of the kiln workers, Jamdars, Watchmen are declared monthly and daily, but unfortunately, they are not implemented. The kiln owners take low-wage workers as per their whims and fancies. The employers do not pay the minimum wage set by the government. Several institutions openly refuse to pay the minimum wage set by the state, and state institutions should not bother to take any action against such people. In this regard, Kabir Ahmed says that "kiln owners do not even pay full wages to the workers; a law should be made for this, too." Similarly, worker Aslam Mairaj said, "When we demand higher wages, they fire us or send us to jail on false charges."

Lack Of Health and Sanitation Facilities

The kiln lacks health facilities: they often suffer from TB and other health diseases, as health and hygiene are not taken care of there, leading to health problems. Kiln owners must set up a dispensary there and arrange for doctors and medicine. Still, such facilities are not provided anywhere, so the workers get sick and other diseases. According to Kabir Ahmed, they do not even get clean drinking water.

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Non-issuance of Identity Cards

Workers at the kiln are not even being provided ID cards, and the issuance of ID and social security cards has been blocked; one of the reasons for stopping this is that these workers will be eligible for pension, union or other benefits, their problems will be buried in the files due to lack of card. According to Gulshir Baloch, a kiln worker in Hyderabad, "Social security cards have been issued to some kiln workers, but this process has stopped since then, and the kiln workers are deprived of facilities." At Nankana Sahib, Kabir Ahmed, a laborer, said, "We have neither identity card nor the registration of birth of children; no one is ready to listen to us. The kiln owners do not want our identity cards because they fear we will get education and awareness about rights and laws.

Lack Of Education of Children

The children of the kiln workers are also working with their parents; many complaints of child labor have been reported because there are no schools or education institutions for the children of the laborers, and no government nor kiln owners provide facilities for education to the worker's children, it is unfortunate that the money coming to the education department for the children of the kiln workers going to school in Punjab has also been withheld. In the time of Nawaz Sharif, A monthly stipend of Rs.1000 was given to the children of kiln workers to go to school, but the current Punjab government has stopped that too (Mirza, 2018). PML-N member Sameera Komal has submitted a resolution in the Punjab assembly to provide the stipend to the kiln owner. The resolution said that stopping the monthly expenditure on the education of poor children was cruel.

Gender-Specific Issues

Women workers in the brick kiln industry face sexual harassment and other illegal issues; these women are insecure because the employers harass them, and it is difficult for women workers to report violence. Women workers in the brick kiln industry face a lack of ILO standards and Pakistani law. These workers in the kilns are not recognized as 'laborers' because most women work with their families, the government pays no attention to them, and the owners do not pay them directly. These women have the dual responsibility of working inside and outside the home. During a focused group discussion with women brick kiln workers in Lahore, Punjab, female activists told some grim stories of young women being imprisoned by brick kiln owners; such stories of violence against women workers illustrate the natural work environment for women workers in brick kilns.

Research Methodology

In this study, we aimed to explore and apprehend the problems and challenges related to the globalization of wages in brick factories in Pakistan. We used a qualitative study design to discover the complexities of this social problem. Our primary statistics collection strategies protected semi-structured interviews and document analysis.

Key stakeholders and representatives from the efforts departments of Sindh, Balochistan, Punjab, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) were interviewed in semi-structured interviews. Open-ended interview questions allowed participants to express their opinions, concerns, and experiences related to bricklaying. Furthermore, we performed a file analysis, which involved going through relevant files containing notices from provincial governments regarding minimum wages.

Purposeful sampling was used to choose individuals with first-hand knowledge and experience of labor issues and minimum wage issues in brick kilns. We had conversations with lawmakers, labor rights activists, associations that represent bricklayers, and labor department representatives.

Thematic analysis developed into a technique for examining qualitative data obtained through interviewing and record analysis. We conducted a thorough analysis of transcripts of key documents and interviews to pinpoint recurrent themes, concepts, and subjects related to the globalization of brick factory worker wages.

We followed the study system's guidelines and moral precepts. Each person's privacy was respected, and their informed consent was requested. This analysis aims to provide insight into the pay disparities experienced by Pakistani workers in brick manufacturing facilities as well as data that can be utilized to support policy initiatives that support workers' rights to fair compensation and hard work in the production sector.

Analytical Discussion

The findings of our qualitative studies and the frame of existing literature both display how complex and multifaceted the difficulty of universalizing wages for brick workers in factories in Pakistan is. Our investigation turned up a number of extensive themes that helped make clear the distinctive issues and problems that many Pakistani people face, in addition to the effects of attempts to make wages common.

First, there are extraordinary differences in Pakistani provinces' minimal salary regulation and compliance, according to our studies. Differences in salary rates and methods of implementation were found in a documentary study of minimum wage notices from the labor departments of Sindh, Balochistan, Punjab, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). This result is consistent with other research demonstrating the inconsistent application of Pakistan's hard labor laws and programs.

Second, the horrifying working conditions and employee exploitation of the brick sector were disclosed during important stakeholders' interviews. Employee accusations of poor pay, excessive hours, and insufficient safety precautions indicated structural problems during the quarter (Sadigi et al., 2018). Poverty and social inequality are not only still on the rise, but they also threaten attempts to create consistent and equitable repayment guidelines for architects.

Furthermore, administrative difficulties and prison ambiguities that hinder the hit execution of minimal wage guidelines inside the brick production enterprise have been determined with the aid of our research. Labor officers pointed to a loss of funding, administrative roadblocks, and insufficient potential for oversight and

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enforcement. These findings are in step with earlier studies (Butt, 2015; Tahim et al., 2020) that revealed institutional flaws and bad governance in Pakistani hard work legal guidelines.

The problem of child labor has also grown to be a tremendous difficulty affecting the pay and rights of brick manufacturing unit employees. According to an information article (Mirza, 2018), the authorities' choice to forestall paying college students who attend faculty sheds light on extra general social troubles and political problems related to efforts to eradicate infant exertions in Pakistan. To fight infant hard work effectively, complete strategies integrating exertions, marketplace interventions, social safety, and education are required (Haq et al., 2018).

Conclusion

It is good that the provincial governments have started work on labor law after the 18th Amendment; all four provinces and the federal government have passed various labor laws, including the minimum wage law. Similarly, the seven introductory clauses of the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the laws of Pakistan are related to the worker's wages, which protect the kiln workers' right to timely salaries. The workers have the same problems in every kiln; their problems, work method, time, and standard of living are the same, but their wages differ. The wages of the laborers are different in each province,

Under the current situation, the provincial governments occasionally fix and change minimum wages to protect workers' rights, but these laws are not implemented properly. Therefore, it is recommended that strict and diligent measures be taken to implement the existing minimum wage policies of the government so that a peaceful environment is provided and the workers are free from any mental, financial and other pressures. The government must introduce a system that allows workers to get paid based on equality in which female and minority workers are equal to other workers, as the wages at the kilns are at least for women. Minority workers receive low wages on religious and gender-based grounds. Although female workers work harder than male workers, they are not paid directly because only their 'Munshi' or male representatives receive wages. However, workers close to kiln owners get early, while migrant workers and those against debt are paid less and later.

Children also work all day because they live in the kiln with their parents, and they help them. It falls into the child labor category, although all four provinces have banned it. The laws have been passed, but they are not being implemented. These children are out of school because they do not have a school. The kiln owners oppose sending them to school, and the government does not play its role in preventing child labor and establishing schools so that the children of laborers can read and write. It is recommended that all laws relating to workers' rights in the kiln industry in Pakistan need to be implemented. Special attention must be paid to enforcing laws banning forced labor in the brick kiln industry. Kiln workers do not have houses; they should be provided with homes on government land per government laws and policies.

Recommendations for Universalization

Proposed strategies for achieving fair and universal wages in the brick kiln industry must address identified challenges. Policy recommendations play a crucial role in shaping a framework that ensures equitable compensation for all workers.

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