



## **Social and Economic Determinants of Human Trafficking: A Role of Forced Labour in Punjab, Pakistan**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper analyses the relationship between human trafficking and the socio-demographic and economic variables that impact it. A total of 200 respondents from five regions of Punjab, Pakistan was interviewed, and the responses were recorded on a structured questionnaire. This study has conducted a descriptive and logistic regression analysis to measure the impact of independent variables on the dependent ones. The results show that gender, living area, marital status, family size, and education up to the primary level has a significant impact on human trafficking. All economic determinants used in the analysis show significant results. The income level and outstanding debt have a negative significant impact on human trafficking; whereas, financial stress increases it with significant results. In order to eliminate human trafficking, the study is concluded by recommending the influential and increased role of law enforcement agencies and revitalising the socio-economic and demographic structure of the country by creating economic opportunities.



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## **1. Introduction**

Every country in the world is affected by the issue of human trafficking as an economic and social problem. The movement of people is from a low-developed economic structure to a developed one. This movement in and outside the country can result in human trafficking. The trafficking in the case of Pakistan is internal where people are exploited for forced labour, bonded labour, and sex trafficking. The definition of human trafficking is as follows:

The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, or deception, of the abuse of power or a position of vulnerability or the giving or receiving of payments or benefits

to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs" (U.N., 2000).

An increase in human trafficking is because of certain reasons. These reasons may be related to the business of the traffickers, poor economic conditions of the country, government policy negligence, unemployment, and so on. People become part of trafficking when they are forced to move from one geographical location to another. The structure of organized criminal activities has an advantage because of the free flow of people from one area to another for economic opportunities which leads to international business for them (Miko & Park, 2001). The basic intent behind the movement from one place to another either forcibly or willingness is the result of attraction towards a better lifestyle. This very nature of human beings has a constant nature. The basic instinct of having better lifestyles urges people to aspire for vertical mobility. The movement from less developed to more developed regions leads to a journey full of problems for poor people (Mortaza, Hanif, Ahmad Waraich, & Aziz Bukhari, 2012; Wallerstein, 1974). The global society is facing grave issues and it can be seen in the form of human trafficking (Huda, 2006).

The horizon is trafficking in persons is broad as it is not only limited to people of high ages, but children are also part of this issue. There are 80 countries in the world where children are forced to beg and become a part of forced labour. The recruitment of children as forced labour is present in nineteen (19) countries of the world, and they are also used for military purposes. The domestic servitude portion of human trafficking is present in 81 countries of the world; whereas, overall the trafficking of children is present in 108 countries (TIP, 2011). Trafficking either in the case of children of young and old people is said to be present in 154 countries where they are used for labour and other different forms of labour trafficking. The sexual exploitation case of trafficking is present in 168 countries. The estimates show that economic exploitation based upon the forced nature of 1.1 million victims of human trafficking accounts of almost US\$ 3.8 billion (Arhin, 2012; Belser, 2005). There are around nine hundred and eighty thousand boys and twelve hundred and twenty-five thousand girls exploited and forced to work in different forms of trafficking. Children aged from 15-17 are mostly used for sexual and economic exploitation with the presence of forced labour (Sørensen & Nuyts, 2007).

## **2. Literature Review**

The link between human trafficking and the victims is identified to be a part of trafficking. The data of 768 potential cases of trafficking were collected to identify this link Kragten-Heerdink, Dettmeijer-Vermeulen, and Korf (2018). Trafficking can take many forms and the different forms of trafficking include sexual and non-sexual exploitation, trafficking for organ selling business, and the use of different routes to take benefit from the people being trafficked. Kragten-Heerdink et al. (2018) have found no reported case of organ transplantation; whereas, all of them were related to sexual and non-sexual exploitation in which labour trafficking holds a prominent value. The issues of trafficking are researched by Munir (2017) who has found that human trafficking is present in several forms such as begging, debt labour, bonded labour, forced labour, sex trafficking and transplantation of organs. Poor people living below the poverty line are a part of the transplantation of organs.

Analysis and decision-making in child trafficking is not an easy task as it is a complex and widespread aspect of trafficking. There are different problems related to child trafficking that vary from region to region and country to country. There is a lack of education and health facilities, along with security issues and societal problems. In this regard, the need, security and rights of the minors are not safeguarded on economic, political and social fronts (Sadruddin, 2011).

The internal and external issues related to trafficking have different dimensions as discussed by Cockbain and Olver (2019). There is a wide range of issues on the basis of which people are exploited due to the issues of trafficking. There is an imposition of the decisions taken by the rich countries on the poorer ones; whereas, they may not be the right decisions to make according to the ground realities prevailing in the poorer economies. This approach of imposing the decision(s) doesn't seem to be the right approach because it may be expensive at the same time and may not work for the elimination of the issue (Dessy, Mbiekop, & Pallage, 2005). The worth of children has taken a boost by the actions taken by economically developed countries. An increase in the population, unemployment levels, and non-cooperation by the economically well-settled people of the society causes the issues of human trafficking to become a grave one and ultimately impact poor families (Ali & Muhammad, 2014).

Research conducted by Arhin (2012) on the exploitation of minors in Roma has particularly focused on the begging aspect of trafficking. The minors are forced to beg for the people to earn money which actually is beyond their consent. When the children are not registered with the local municipalities at their birth, they are easily fallen into prey to this type of trafficking in society. They are also exploited for sex trafficking, drug abuse, domestic servitude along with forced labour in those societies (Cockbain & Olver, 2019; Ray, 2007). There has been violation on multiple levels in terms of rights related to minors in Pakistan. These types of problems are overshadowed in Pakistan due to the absence of proper rights provided to them by the government (Sadruddin, 2011).

There is a key role played by the traffickers themselves which leads to an increase in the number of human trafficking cases. The matter of the network of traffickers is of supreme importance in this regard. These traffickers then use their criminal network to exploit, recruit and transport the victims from one place to another (Arhin, 2016). The ethnicity of the traffickers and victims presents a close correlation. The victims who are recruited from multiple countries are used for exploitation in a few countries. The probability to use multiple routes to traffic people remained at 13.78 percent (Kragten-Heerdink et al., 2018). Trafficking is one of the severest issues in Pakistan. The issue prevails as the legal system has not been able to cope up with the issues of trafficking. The measures taken are not enough to eliminate the problem. An interesting fact is that security officials from different law enforcement agencies are found to be involved in these issues (Munir, 2017). A content analysis with the help of interview technique has been employed to study the trafficking aspect prevailing in children and women in Ukraine (Denisova, 2001).

There are multiple techniques used by traffickers to recruit people for trafficking. The potential victims are identified before targeting them. The victims are then moved to the rest of the world where they are exploited according to the local demands and needs of the traffickers. The traffickers earn revenue by transporting the victims and by fulfilling the needs and demands of the place where they are trafficked (Arhin, 2016). In this regard, the government design to cope up with such transportation issues related to trafficking. They will not only reach out to stop people from being used for sex trafficking, but also put a restraint on the recruitment and exploitation of the people (Kragten-Heerdink et al., 2018). A microeconomic model has been developed by Dessy et al. (2005) which focuses on the entrepreneurial mind-set of the traffickers which actually helps them to recruit people. The demand side is an important aspect related to the trafficking of children and women. This will lead to the decision-making analysis related to the price and the quantities being supplied.

An analysis by Mahmoud, Rapoport, Steinmayr, and Trebesch (2011) has been conducted on the economic structure of human trafficking in Belarus, Bulgaria, Moldova, Romania, and Ukraine. Two data sets of micro level have been used in order taken from the above-mentioned countries to determine the factor affecting human trafficking. Mahmoud et al. (2011) have used demand and supply model methods to determine the correlation between trafficking and the level of exploitation. The wish to have better life leads to an exploitation of people which leads

to human trafficking. The higher level of inward migration results in the reduction of costs for the traffickers which makes it easier for them to identify and recruit potential victims. On the contrary, the risks related to humans escalate with a rise in migration rates. There exists a weak relationship based upon the supply factors as compared to the demand ones.

### **3. Methods and Materials**

The current study has used primary data for the analysis of determinants of human trafficking. The data was collected from the victims living in the province of Punjab of Pakistan. There are a total of 200 victims who were interviewed to fill in the designed structured questionnaire. The data was collected from the five main regions of human trafficking and migrant smuggling circles designed by the Federal Investigation Agency of Pakistan<sup>1</sup>. After scrutinizing the data, there are a total of 70 percent male and 30 percent female victims. The data for the said study was collected from March to July 2022. The questionnaire contains questions related to social, economic and demographic profiles of the respondents which are related to the forced labour aspect of human trafficking. The questions related to the social and demographic profile were on the living area, gender, marital status, education and family size. On the contrary, the economic profile contained the question related to the income level and debt structure of the households being victimized by the forced labour aspect of trafficking. In the end, some questions related to the policy implications were also added.

#### **3.1 Empirical Model**

The model used to analyse the determinants of forced labour contains the categorical dependent variables. The best technique used to analyse such types of the dependent variables is logistic regression analysis (Cameron & Trivedi, 2005). The dependent variable which is forced labour contains the response in only two categories which are "0" for no and "1" for yes. The logistics regression analysis is used to analyse the determinants of trafficking (Mahmoud & Trebesch, 2010). The bootstraps standard errors were used for analyses with 100 replications at maximum to get the cluster-robust standard errors, which leads to correlation with that cluster, but it doesn't affect the consistency of the estimator (Cameron & Trivedi, 2005).

#### **3.2 Variables and Measures**

##### **3.2.1 Forced Labour Aspect of Human Trafficking (Dependent Variable)**

The United Nations Office of Drug and Crime defines human trafficking as "The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of people through force, fraud or deception, intending to exploit them for profit. Men, women and children of all ages and from all backgrounds can become victims of this crime which occurs in every region of the world. The traffickers often use violence or fraudulent employment agencies and fake promises of education and job opportunities to trick and coerce their victims" (UNODC, 2018). There are different arguments and measuring methods of human trafficking.

The current study measures real human trafficking by using forced labour. Forced labour is used as a dummy variable by using the question "Were you used for forced Labour?" The options used to record the responses are "0" for no and "1" for yes. The same definition to measure human trafficking was used by LeBaron and Gore (2020).

##### **3.2.2 Economic Variables**

The income of the household is a key variable, which impacts the level of human trafficking of the victims. The responses were recorded in different categories which are "1" for

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<sup>1</sup> (FIA, 2020)

the income less than 25,000 Pakistani rupees, "2" for the income range 25,001-50,000 Pakistani rupees, "3" for the income range 50,001-75,000 Pakistani rupees. (Buckler, 2008) has used income as a measure that impacts human trafficking, and has used a huge range of income levels of the household which is based on 23 categories. Another economic variable used is the level of outstanding debt. The more the outstanding debt of the people there are more chances that they will be victimized for forced labour. The outstanding debt is also used as a categorical dummy variable, and the response is in the form of "0" for no and "1" for yes. The same definition to measure the level of outstanding is used by Lainez (2020) & IOM (2019).

### 3.2.3 Social and Demographic Variables

Human trafficking is also a function of socio-demographic variables along with economic variables. These include living area, gender, marital status, education and family size. The responses of the living area are recorded as "0" for the rural areas and "1" for the urban areas where the victims of forced labour are living. Naik (2014) has used living areas as a variable to measure human trafficking. The responses of the marital status are recorded as "0" for married and "1" for the victims who are not married (Bishop, Morgan, & Erickson, 2013; Naik, 2014; Park, 2018). The study has used two categories of gender, which are male and female corresponding to "0" used for males and "1" for the victims who are female. The gender of victims of the human trafficking is used for the analysis by Naik (2014). The second last variable which is social is the level of education of the victims. Since the victims have no or very less education so only three categories are used in our case. The responses are "1" for no formal education, "2" for up to primary level, and "3" for up to secondary level. Education is used as an important variable that impacts the level of trafficking (Mortaza et al., 2012; Naik, 2014). The last variable used in the current study is the family size of the victims. The family size has three categories which are "1" for up to 5 family members, "2" for 6-10 family members, and "3" for more than 10 family members. Wakgari (2014) has used the number of family members for the analysis of trafficking victims.

## 4. Results and Discussion

In this section, we have discussed the results of the study. The results are in the form of descriptive (Table 1) and regression analysis (Table 3). In the descriptive analysis, the victims who were interviewed to fill in the response contains seventy (70) percent male victims and thirty (30) percent female victims. The living areas of the victims are rural and urban. There are sixty-eight (68) percent of victims whose background is rural and thirty-two (32) percent belong to urban areas. A major chunk of the victims is married, a total of seventy-eight (78) percent of victims are married and twenty-two (22) percent are single. There are three categories of the educational level of the respondents. The highest number of victims have no formal education which is eight six (86) percent.

In addition, this only ten (10) and three (3) percent of victims have up to primary level and up to a secondary level of education respectively. There are fifty (50) percent of the victims whose family size is up to five (5) family members and forty-eight (48) percent with family size 6-10 members. It is observed that the family size of the victims is large. In the three categories of the income, level of the household, thirty (30) percent of the victims have less than Rs/- 25,000 household monthly income, fifty-three (53) percent have 25001-50,000 household monthly income and seventeen (17) percent of the victims 50,001-75,000 household monthly income. The last variable is the level of outstanding debt. Of the total of 200 victims, 147 victims have some form of outstanding debt which is seventy-three (73) percent and 53 don't have outstanding debt which makes a total of twenty-seven (27) percent.

**Table 1**  
**Descriptive Analysis**

Variables		Frequency	Proportion (%)
Gender (n=200)	Male	139	69.5
	Female	61	30.5
Living Area (n=200)	Rural	136	68.0
	Urban	64	32.0
Marital Status (n=200)	Married	156	78.0
	Single	44	22.0
Forced Labor (n=200)	No	93	46.5
	Yes	107	53.5
Education (n=200)	No formal Education	173	86.5
	Up to Primary education	21	10.5
	Up to secondary education	6	3.0
	Up to 5	99	49.5
Family Size (n=200)	6-10	96	48.0
	More than 10	5	2.5
	Less than 25000	60	30.0
Income (n=200)	25001-50000	107	53.5
	50001-75000	33	16.5
Outstanding Debts (n=200)	No	53	26.5
	Yes	147	73.5

Authors own calculation

The following model is used to analyse the results:

$$FL * i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 Inc * i + \beta_2 Fstress * i + \beta_3 i. OD * i + \beta_4 El * i + \beta_5 i. FamS * i + \beta_6 i. La * i + \beta_7 i. Ms * i + \beta_8 i. Gen * i + \mu_i \tag{1}$$

Whereas the detailed explanation of the equation is mention in the table 2.

**Table 2**  
**Variables, Description and Sources**

Variable	Description	Source
FL	Forced Labour	(Khan & Nawaz, 2011); (LeBaron & Gore, 2020); (Skrivankova, 2010)
Inc	Income Level	(Bogdan, 2020); (Hulse, 2018; Mortaza et al., 2012); (Schyns, 2001)
Fstress	Financial Stress	Self
OD	Outstanding Debt	(IOM, 2019); (Lainez, 2020)
El	Educational Level	(Mortaza et al., 2012); (Naik, 2014); (IOM, 2019)
FamS	Family Size	(Joarder, 2014)
La	Living Area	(Naik, 2014); (Bishop et al., 2013)
Ms	Marital Status	(Bishop et al., 2013); (Park, 2018)
Gen	Gender	(Naik, 2014); (Williams, 2020)

**4.1 Results of Logistic Regression (Forced Labour) Model with Socio-demographic Variables**

This section shows the interpretation of the results shown in Table 3. Forced labour is used as a dependent variable in the model. The independent socio-demographic independent variables are education, family size, living area, marital status and gender of the respondents.

There is only one variable that shows the insignificant impact in forced labour; whereas, rest of the socio-demographic variables show significant impact. The victims who have attained up to a secondary level of education represent a positive and significant impact by odds of 5.72 which means an increase in this level of education increases forced labour. People are exploited for a different form of human trafficking when they have a low level of education due to which they don't have understanding and opportunities for better earnings (Naik, 2014). There exists a positive significant impact of family size (total no of family members) on forced labour. An increase in family size increases the number of victims who are used for forced labour which is shown by the odd ratio of 1.15. The needs of the people in a household are not fulfilled when there is a higher number of family members resulting in lesser resources available for everyone. Hence, it creates an obligation which leads to exploitation of the labour class (Wakgari, 2014). The victims living in the urban areas are less prone to force to work. The odd ratio (0.44,  $p < 0.01$ ) shows that the more people live in the urban areas, there are lessen the chances that they will be forced to work. Naik (2014) has found similar results in which people from the urban backgrounds are exploited less as compared to the ones from rural backgrounds. This might be because of the active law enforcement in urban areas. The victims who are not married do not become part of human trafficking in our forced labour analysis. The results of the people who are not married show a negative significant impact by odds of 0.44. The last socio-demographic variable is gender. The results of the logit regressions show negative and significant relationship between women and forced labour which means women are less used and forced to work.

**Table 3**  
**Logit Regression (Forced Labour Model of Human Trafficking)**

Variables	(1) Socio-Economic	(2) Demographic	(3) Overall
Forced Labour	.	.	.
Income Level			
25,001-50,000	0.4700** (0.1744)		0.4053** (0.1728)
50,001-75,000	1.0561 (0.5447)		0.4031 (0.2713)
Financial Stress	2.7678*** (0.5391)		2.8602*** (0.6083)
Outstanding Debt	3.3135*** (1.2407)		2.4238** (0.9696)
Education Level			
Primary or below	0.7425 (0.3502)	1.0756 (0.4790)	0.6582 (0.3345)
Secondary or below	1.4381 (1.3155)	5.7223** (5.0031)	4.9791 (5.3785)
Family Size		1.1521* (0.0921)	1.2441* (0.1393)
Living area: Urban		0.2896*** (0.1010)	0.2782*** (0.1086)
Marital Status: Single		0.4480** (0.1791)	0.5300 (0.2359)
Gender: Female		0.4620** (0.1595)	0.4337** (0.1783)
Constant	0.8896 (0.4926)	0.9963 (0.6427)	0.9516 (0.7202)
LR chi2(10)	49.88	30.19	73.96
Prob > chi2	0.0000	0.0000	0.0000
Pseudo R2	0.1805	0.1093	0.2677
Log likelihood	-113.20066	-123.04495	-101.15696
Observations	200	200	200

Std. Err. Form in parentheses, \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$   
Authors own calculations

## **4.2 Results of Logit Regression Analysis (Economic Variables)**

This section shows the interpretation of the results of economic variables shown in Table 3. Forced labour is used as a dependent variable in the model. The independent economic variables used in the analysis are the monthly income level of the household, financial stress and outstanding debt of the household. The results in Table 3 shows that an increase in the number of victims in households whose income level ranges from 25,001-50,000 Pakistani rupees don't become part of the forced labour. There exists a negative significant relationship which is shown by an odd ratio of 0.47. Human trafficking and forced labour exploitation go down in case of an increase in the income level of the households (Cho, 2015). Financial stress forced people to work in conditions where they are not comfortable.

An increase in the financial stress of the victims leads to an increase in human trafficking which shows a positive significant impact. The financial burden leads to the financial stress which increases the level of poverty and therefore results in more chances of exploitation and trafficking (Mortaza et al., 2012). The last economic variable is an outstanding debt of the household. The victim's household which has some debt to pay increases the chances of those people being used for forced labour. The odd ratio of outstanding debt (3.31) shows a highly significant impact. The debt pressure means that the workers become part of the debt bondage where they cannot leave and refuse to work. So, the debt burden on the people increases both legal and illegal migration (Lainez, 2020).

## **5. Conclusion**

The socio-economic and demographic determinants are of supreme importance to learn about the human trafficking issue in Pakistan. The problems of the society in Pakistan are multidimensional, but the problem of human trafficking with special reference to forced labour is one of the key problems. The socio-demographic and social profile of society is the causes behind human trafficking. Human trafficking in Pakistan is also multifaceted, but forced labour is prevalent in the province Punjab of Pakistan. People are forced to work due to unavailability of jobs, illiteracy, poverty, debt pressure, large family size and inability to meet basic needs of life. The more the family size the more they are forced to work because they do not have opportunities of earnings to feed their family. This leads to financial pressure and stress. Females in the province of Punjab are less forced to work as compared to men, and people from rural areas are more prone to this issue because of fewer economic opportunities available in those areas. Another cause of trafficking is a low-income profile of the victims and the pressure of debt which leads to debt bondage and creates restrictions for them to move to another place with independence for work.

The strength of the data explains the education level of the people, large family size, financial stress and outstanding debt of the household increase the level of human trafficking. On the other side, due to the income level of the household and people residing in urban areas, females are forced less to work so are less victimized by human trafficking. In this scenario, there is a need to improve literacy rates by increasing the opportunities for free education. In a family structure, people should be made aware of controlling the population size so that they may manage the expenses of their families within their incomes. In this context, the role of government and civil society plays a key role. There is a need to hold sessions on human rights and make people learn about them. The effectiveness of non-governmental organizations, the federal investigation agency of Pakistan, and the ministry of labour and coordinated actions taken by the provincial and federal governments of Pakistan are needed. Replicating the current study on other provinces of Pakistan will help the policy makers learn about the national-level prevalence of human trafficking in Pakistan. In the last, the same model and variables can be used for cross-country and longitudinal studies.



### Authors Contribution

Salman Azam Joiya: literature search, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, drafting  
 Muhammad Abdul Quddus: study design, critical revision, incorporation of intellectual content

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