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Pakistan, Factor 15: Human Rights

Lost Childhoods: Child labor, human trafficking, and bondage in Pakistan

Introduction

Pakistan is a country located in south Asia and is commonly referred to as the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. It is well known for its' beautiful landscape, agricultural wonders, and amazing history. There are four provinces of Pakistan; the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province (KPK), Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan. The average family size within Pakistan is usually six to seven people. Due to this country being predominantly Muslim, pork is strictly forbidden and only the wealthy can afford to eat meat, while those in the lower caste system dine predominantly on the staple food such as rice, yogurt and a type of bread known as chapati or roti.

Pakistan is also one of the most densely populated countries of the world with a population of 192,632,722 million and growing. With a heavy population, the availability of resources is limited. Clean water, food and adequate healthcare is limited due to financial or other constraints, it can create poverty and desperation. In Pakistan, children are the most affected when dealing with poverty and with no steady income they are often sent to work for the family by force and sacrifice a formal education. Most of these children work in the worst of forced labor industries, including agriculture, carpet-weaving, brick-making, manufacturing glass, coal mining and the commercial sex trade. Certain provinces have laws and others do not, making it very difficult to regulate forced labor. What one country sees as okay the other one may see as taboo. Most of the organizations in place to help eliminate or resolve child labor are controlled by the federal government which in itself can have loopholes that people will use and exploit. This is partially due to cultural standards and religion.

In Pakistan the main religion is Islam, which plays a major role in cultural influences and society. Muslims have social standards based off gender and social economic status. Meanwhile, several organizations clash with this dominant religion because there help is based off of equality. In this essay we will explore the situation with Pakistan and its child laborers by the provinces hit with the worst and some province with some advancement and see if there is a possible solution to guarantee happier and long lasting childhoods to those who deserve them the most.

Pakistan and the debt bondage system

According to Fawad Hason (2015), there are an estimated 2,058,200 people in modern slavery or debt bondage in Pakistan. Debt bondage is mostly found in the brick making, agriculture, and carpet weaving industries. The frequency of child slavery and child labor is high because children are easier to exploit and are very easy to break. Most families fall into the debt system after taking out large loans on basic necessities such as food, water and medicine along with weddings, funerals, and marriage dowries. With the interest rates of these loans being up to 60%, they are almost impossible to pay off and when the elderly can no longer work, largely due to old age. The debt is often given off to the child who will give it onto their child until it is finally paid off. Within the four province of Pakistan, bonded labor is found in all overdue widespread poverty being a huge factor.

According to Ismran Khan (2011), even the capital city of Balochistan, Chaghi with the highest percentage of people below the poverty line were predicted at 76.1%. These provinces do have laws and

regulations in place to help but there are also many ways to manipulate the laws in place. The most common way to manipulate these laws is to pay off the ones in charge of the laws and the ones who are supposed to enforce them.

Money can change anyone's perspective and can twist the toughest individuals. Most people refuse to discuss this, as it is mostly known as blackmailing which can come with its own problems. That wouldn't be a problem with the child working to help their family if the child wasn't working in harmful and potentially dangerous conditions from sun up to sundown. In the bricklaying industry, young children are exposed to dangerous fumes, deadly heat, lack of proper sanitation, and lack of other basic human needs.

The bricklaying industry is not the only one with issues regarding child labor, the mining, agriculture, carpet weaving, and the fishing industries of Pakistan have had long run-ins with the issues of child bondage and child labor. For the children employed in the debt bondage system and in child labor their days are filled with working from sun up to sundown, backbreaking labor and constant physical and emotional abuse. To the children employed in the domestic work trade, sexual abuse is common. Within the agricultural sector, the lack of institutional credit and the contract system of employment is a huge factor in why this practice still exists. Very few people within the debt bondage system have exposure to human rights or even know what their rights are.

The commercial sex trade and human trafficking

Within Pakistan, child laborers are victim to human trafficking and loss of a childhood. Human trafficking is a cycle. The child who usually was either sold, kidnapped or forced into human trafficking usually have children who will continue on the same path. In some cases, young women and the women in the brothels will give birth to children in the cycle of human bondage. Human trafficking will continue until the debt is paid off, which is usually never. Most families find it extremely hard to sell their children or to give them away but at the time when there's no food on the table, your crops aren't managing well, there are family issues and that all mixed up with widespread poverty and desperation in the poor areas makes people willing to give up or sell anything, even those with the highest morals and standards regarding humans and human behavior.

According to the U.S. Department of State, "Pakistan is a source, transit, and destination country for men, women, and children subjected to forced labor and sex trafficking. A large percentage of trafficking that occurs within the country, particularly of children, is due in part to Pakistan's deteriorating security situation and weak economy. Counterterrorism and counterinsurgency efforts further these problems." Children as young as 5-years-old are bought, sold, rented, or kidnapped and placed in organized begging rings, domestic servitude, small shops, brick kilns, and prostitution. Young boys and girls within Pakistan that are mainly living below the poverty line and also part of low income families are frequently subjected to and victimized by sexual abuse, prostitution and being trafficked at a young age. This problem arises most within the domestic servitude of child labor in which the child will perform housework.

As a child matures the common case is that people see their value for more than just housework. It is from there that the children are often sold, kidnapped or in some cases willingly go without knowing their sellers intentions. The parents are involved because labor recruiters often fill their head with false promises about the greatness of the child when they're working in the city, but in reality they are just looking for another strong back or another form of entertainment. Due to the low literacy rate and a lack of education in the poor sectors of Pakistan parents often go with it. It's simply because they don't know, they don't understand lies from truth, and at the time they're desperate.

The most common scenario is that you take a poor poverty-stricken family often with no steady income, food insecurity and have a few children. Then brainwash the mother and father of the child about how

much money they can earn from their child working in the city often as a maid, house hand, or in domestic work. In all reality, the moment they get your child over country or province lines, the child will be sold to another person who then sells them into a brothel or rarely, sold to be an actual maid which still has its disadvantages. Most of the time children as young as 12 will be brought into brothels and have their mind, body, and soul broken in order to fully prepare them for being an escort. The debt keeps piling on with the head of the brothels creating little fines for practically everything such as food, birth control pills and shots, make up, clothing, lodging, and the list goes on. After all of that, the child usually has little to no money left and what is left is usually taken so the family never sees any money the child makes. The family still in debt and another child has fallen victim of human trafficking.

The US Department of State released the following statement regarding Pakistani labor laws, "In the 22 years since the Bonded Labor System Abolition Act, or BLSA, was enacted, Pakistani officials have yet to secure a conviction under the law. The Pakistani government's efforts to fight trafficking IS impaired by systemic corruption and the absence of federal laws to address internal human trafficking and the poor implementation of existing laws also hampered Pakistan's anti-trafficking efforts."

Proposed solution plan

These issues within Pakistan will not be able to be solved by treaties, laws, and acts. An affirmative action plan will yield the best results. The reason why laws, treaties, and acts are ineffective, and have been incredibly ineffective in the past is due to the many loopholes of these forms of legislation, and the way people exploit and use them for their own benefit. That's why I propose Operation S. SR. RR. RT.

The first phase (**S**) is for shut down, as in shut down each of the 4 provinces of Pakistan one by one starting with those with worst problems dealing with children within the debt bondage system, human trafficking and child labor. As stated earlier in my essay, a great place to start would be the capital city of Balochistan, Chaghi. 76.1% of people live below the poverty line (Khan, 2011). This will require the Pakistani government to put aside their differences and unite against a real problem that destroys families daily. By doing so we will make a firm statement to the other three provinces that this type of cruelty will not be tolerated and there will be severe consequences to those who do not comply or attempt to hinder. Another way to make sure that the first phase of this operation is successful is to have Central Intelligence Officers who are allies to the Pakistani government who can perform reconnaissance operations in different regions to provide reliable information which can be used in the recovery efforts.

Phase II (SR) in the operation includes search and rescue. This includes elite missions during dusk hours. This is to ensure the brothels are in the early hours of operations and the young children are being positioned for selling. This is also the optimum time for which the young children are placed in the underground slave trades. The goal of the mission is the extraction of as many children as possible without being detected.

After the children have been safely removed from the dangers, they are relocated to a secure undisclosed facility. This is Phase III (RRR), Recover, Relocate, Rehabilitate. As you can imagine, the children in these situations will be frightened from the traumatic experience of the trade as well as the rescue operation. Much care and patience is needed in approaching and addressing their needs. Basic medical services are first priority in the needs of the children. Long term mental and psychological care is also essential to establishing a feeling of safety and assurance for the majority of the children. It is also important to create an environment in which the children share some familiarity. To reduce the level of fear and anxiety during rehabilitation, I suggest incorporating recreational distraction with cooking, arts and crafts, needlework for fun. Activities like this have proven to keep their minds and bodies occupied and give the children hope for the future.

The final phase is Reteach the Children. The children generally have very little education; therefore their literacy level is very low. To reintroduce the kids back into a normal society, it is crucial they learn basic education skills like reading, writing, and math. This will help them make sound decisions and eventually learn to care for themselves, becoming productive members of their villages or communities. Re-teaching can also provide mentors for the younger children affected by human trafficking and child labor. Adolescents and teens can offer valuable insight to the younger kids from someone of their own race, culture, and experience. Finally, re-teaching the children can produce ambassadors to expose this cultural issue and potentially bring aid to the situation.

To bring awareness to this situation, it is important to use reputable agencies that are impartial to cultural ties. Organizations such as WADI, Oxfam International, Human Rights Watch, and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees along with Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights will be essential sponsors and contributors in this operation. I propose starting a humanitarian aid relief organization that will collaborate with other major organizations. WADI and Oxfam International will play a crucial role in financial help and literacy training. The Pakistani government will also play a crucial role as the foundation. Without them this operation will never be possible, so it is extremely important that they are on board and ready to fully help in every way possible.

Conclusion

The situation in Pakistan regarding forced, child and bondage labor has reached an all-time high. A child should be enjoying every day of his or her life to the fullest and making their parents proud through their educational and life milestones, not by spending their day toiling in harsh and explicit labor with the constant threat of an early death on their back. A twelve-year-old girl should be at home knowing and learning what love is and how great it is to be loved, instead selling her body to someone she knows not. It has to stop.

It is cruel and inhumane for these children and their families to endure uncivil treatment for some of the basic human needs and rights that we take advantage of. While there are many organizations and groups dedicated to helping these groups of people, a lot of things stand in the way of aid getting to the people who need the most. The most common obstacle is fear usually those who have been kidnapped & employed in the bondage system have been threatened with death or harm to their family members. Therefore, even for the many groups and organizations in place, they must find a way to contact and help victims.

Another obstacle that mostly comes with the aftermath is a cultural standpoint on the sensitive topic in Pakistan. Many children work within the debt bondage system and many are employed within human trafficking so on the blessed occasions that they do escape. Going home to the safety and comfort of family is their first priority. However, many of these children were sold to make money for the family and returning home with no money usually does not always yield the best results oftentimes they are rejected. The vicious cycle of children within the debt bondage system, human trafficking and child labor has firm roots all tracing back to poverty and many this problem should have a plausible realistic solution.

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