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## Sindh Survey Reveals Over 1.6 Million Child Labourers

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A recently released government-backed survey has revealed that more than 1.6 million children between the ages of 10 and 17 in Sindh are engaged in various forms of labour, with many exposed to hazardous and exploitative working conditions. The findings shed light on a deep-rooted and ongoing challenge in the province's efforts to protect child rights and promote access to education.

The Sindh Child Labour Survey 2022–2024, the first comprehensive survey of its kind in nearly three decades, was conducted by the Sindh Labour Department in collaboration with

UNICEF and the Bureau of Statistics Sindh. The report reveals that 50.4% of working children are exposed to unsafe environments, including extreme weather conditions, long working hours, and the use of dangerous tools or machinery.

Director General Labour Muhammad Ali Shah stated that while the total number of child labourers has decreased by nearly 50% compared to the 1996 national baseline, the current figures remain deeply concerning. The findings have been forwarded to the provincial government for review and policy response.

The report highlights the significant impact of child labour on education outcomes. Only 40.6% of children engaged in labour are currently attending school, in stark contrast to 70.5% of children who are not involved in work. The educational gap is especially pronounced among older girls, particularly those aged 14 to 17, who are burdened with substantial domestic responsibilities. These girls average nearly 14 hours of unpaid household work per week, limiting their ability to attend school or pursue personal development.

At the district level, Qambar Shahdadkot reported the highest rate of child labour at 30.8%, followed by Tharparkar at 29%, Tando Muhammad Khan at 20.3%, and Shikarpur at 20.2%. By contrast, Karachi reported the lowest prevalence of child labour at just 2.38%.

The data also underscores a strong correlation between child labour and household poverty. Among the poorest households surveyed, 33.7% reported having at least one child involved in work, often out of financial necessity.

The survey's findings present an urgent call to action for Sindh's provincial government and child welfare stakeholders. Experts and child rights advocates are urging for immediate, targeted interventions, including expanded access to education, stronger enforcement of child labour laws, financial support to low-income families, and public awareness campaigns.

The Sindh Child Labour Survey marks a critical step forward in understanding the scope and nature of child labour in the province. However, translating its insights into effective policy and protective mechanisms remains an essential next step to ensuring that every child in Sindh has the opportunity to grow, learn, and thrive in a safe environment.