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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Child labour; educational exclusion; school attendance; school dropout; qualitative research; Hyderabad; Sindh; Pakistan	Child labour and educational exclusion are mutually reinforcing challenges in low-income urban settings. This article revisits an anthropological study of working children in Hyderabad, Sindh, Pakistan, with a specific focus on school participation, attendance, educational continuity and children's aspirations. The source thesis documents seven child profiles and draws on participant observation, informal and in-depth interviews with children, parents and teachers, field diaries, and photographs, alongside a review of secondary literature. The cases describe children who combine work with primary schooling, children who left school in the early grades, and a child who had never enrolled. Reported work schedules commonly extended into the evening; several profiles describe work lasting approximately eight to twelve hours, although these case descriptions should not be interpreted as population estimates. The thesis links children's work to household poverty, limited adult earnings, large family responsibilities, family work practices, and school-related experiences, including reported punishment by a teacher. The thesis material is re-examined thematically to explore how long work schedules may restrict time for study and rest, how economic insecurity may make schooling difficult to sustain, and how school experiences may shape willingness to remain engaged. The article argues that enrolment alone is an inadequate indicator of educational inclusion when children lack time, safety, support and regular participation. It recommends coordinated school-based monitoring, non-punitive teaching, flexible support for at-risk learners, family social protection and stronger links between education and child-protection services. Because the original study is a small purposive qualitative case study, findings are context-specific and are not statistically generalizable.
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Introduction

Education is both a fundamental right and a potential route through which children can expand their future opportunities. Yet the formal availability of schooling does not guarantee that children can attend consistently, learn effectively or complete basic education. For children who work, the school day is only one part of a schedule that may also include long hours in shops, workshops, garages, small production sites or family-related work. Work can coexist with enrolment while still reducing time for homework, sleep, play and participation in school life. Consequently, educational exclusion should be understood as a continuum that includes non-enrolment and dropout, but also irregular attendance, exhaustion, reduced concentration and weakened engagement among children who remain enrolled.

The scale of child labour remains a global concern. The International Labour Organization (ILO) and UNICEF estimated that nearly 138 million children aged 5–17 were in child labour in 2024, including about 54 million in hazardous work (ILO & UNICEF, 2025). Their accompanying evidence indicates that approximately 31% of children aged 5–14 in child labour were not attending school, compared with about 8% of children of the same age who were not in child labour. Even among working children who attend school, long hours and hazardous conditions may undermine attendance, concentration and performance (ILO & UNICEF, 2025). These global estimates provide context; they do not describe the prevalence of child labour in Hyderabad specifically.

In Pakistan, UNICEF's synthesis of provincial child labour surveys identifies working conditions, household drivers and impacts on education and well-being as central dimensions of the problem (UNICEF Pakistan, n.d.). A South Asian evidence review by UNICEF Innocenti likewise emphasizes that education policy must address children's actual schooling experiences and the economic pressures surrounding work, rather than treating school access as a sufficient intervention on its own (UNICEF Innocenti, 2024). These findings make a locally grounded examination of urban schooling and child labour important.

This article draws on the thesis "An Anthropological Study of the Dynamics of Childhood, Child Labor and Schooling in Hyderabad, Sindh." Its contribution is not a new prevalence estimate. Instead, it offers a qualitative, education-focused interpretation of documented child cases and field observations. It asks how work schedules and household conditions intersect with school participation, how children's educational pathways differ, and what school and policy responses could reduce the risk of educational exclusion.

Research Questions and Contribution

The article addresses three questions: (1) How do children's work schedules and household economic circumstances shape their participation in schooling? (2) What school-related experiences and family decisions appear in the thesis as factors associated with continuation, disengagement or leaving school? (3) What practical education responses are suggested by the cases?

The study contributes a small-scale anthropological perspective to education research in urban Sindh. It foregrounds the lived tension between being enrolled and being able to participate meaningfully. It also treats children's educational trajectories as shaped by interacting conditions—household insecurity, work demands, school experiences and available support—rather than attributing dropout to a single cause.

Literature Review

Child labour and educational participation

Child labour is not equivalent to every task undertaken by a child. The relevant concern is work that is harmful, exploitative, hazardous, or incompatible with a child's development and education. The ILO–UNICEF global estimates show that child labour remains substantial despite recent progress, and that a considerable number of working children are also excluded from school (ILO & UNICEF, 2025). The gap in school attendance between children in and outside child labour reinforces the need to examine the relationship between work and education together, while avoiding the assumption that all working children have identical experiences.

Educational participation is multidimensional. Enrolment records whether a child is registered, but it cannot on its own show whether the child attends regularly, has time to complete assignments, arrives rested, participates in lessons or progresses through grades. For working children, school participation may be compromised before formal dropout occurs. This distinction is especially relevant to case studies in which children continue in primary grades while also working late into the day.

Household vulnerability and children's work

The thesis repeatedly associates children's work with low or uncertain adult earnings, large households, rent and other household expenses, and the need for children to contribute to family livelihoods. These observations are consistent with the broader policy emphasis on addressing the economic conditions that push children into work. The ILO and UNICEF identify social protection and decent work for adults as important elements of a sustainable response, alongside access to free, quality education (ILO & UNICEF, 2025). The analytical implication is that school retention initiatives are unlikely to be sufficient when families face severe income insecurity and depend on children's earnings.

However, poverty should not be treated as a complete explanation. The thesis also describes differences in family circumstances, children's educational histories and the forms of work they undertake. Family expectations, local work practices, the perceived value of schooling and the quality of school experiences may shape how economic pressure translates into decisions about attendance or leaving school. These influences are interconnected and should not be reduced to a claim that families do not value education.

School climate, quality and the meaning of inclusion

A school can be formally accessible yet experienced as discouraging or unsafe by some learners. The thesis includes a parent's account that a child became unwilling to return to school after physical punishment by a teacher. This is a reported case, not evidence that corporal punishment is widespread in the study area. Nevertheless, it highlights a plausible pathway through which negative school experiences may interact with work and economic pressure: when a child already faces fatigue and competing demands, a humiliating or punitive experience may further weaken the perceived benefits of attending school.

A supportive educational response therefore requires more than urging children to enrol. Teachers need approaches that respond to learning gaps without humiliation, and schools need ways to identify absence, fatigue and disengagement early. UNICEF Innocenti's review of evidence from India and Bangladesh stresses the importance of considering children's own accounts of work and schooling and designing education responses that address the circumstances shaping both (UNICEF Innocenti, 2024). Although those country cases cannot be directly generalized to Hyderabad, they provide a relevant regional framework for thinking about education as part of a wider prevention strategy.

Research gap and analytical framework

The thesis's distinctive value lies in its close-up accounts of children encountered in urban work settings and its attention to school, household and cultural dimensions together. The present article organizes these observations around educational exclusion, a concept broader than dropout alone. The proposed analytical pathway is: household economic vulnerability and family responsibilities can increase children's exposure to work; work schedules can reduce time for attendance, rest and study; accumulated difficulty may weaken engagement and contribute to interrupted schooling. School climate, family support and access to social protection may intensify or buffer these relationships. This is a conceptual interpretation of qualitative material, not a statistically tested causal model.

Methodology

Research design and setting

The source thesis uses an anthropological qualitative approach to examine childhood, child labour and schooling in Hyderabad, Sindh. The fieldwork setting includes Government Jan Muhammad Jameli School in the Sirray Ghat/Shahi Bazar area and Government Elementary College of Education for Men near Tilak Incline, as well as nearby work settings described in the thesis, including shops, mechanic workshops and small production workplaces in parts of Hyderabad. The article treats these sites as the context of the original fieldwork; it does not claim that they represent all schools or workplaces in the city.

Sampling and participants

The thesis states that purposive sampling was used to locate children involved in work and to explore their schooling experiences. It presents seven detailed child profiles, including children who were currently enrolled in primary grades, children who had left school after early primary education, and a child reported never to have attended school. The thesis also describes conversations or interviews with parents and teachers, but does not provide a clear total count for these adult participants. Accordingly, this article identifies seven documented child profiles as its core case material and does not invent a larger sample size or calculate percentages from the cases.

Data collection

The methods described in the thesis include participant observation in work and school-related settings; informal and in-depth, largely unstructured interviews with children, parents and teachers; field notes and a daily diary; and photographs. The researcher reports using Urdu, Sindhi and Marwari to build rapport and facilitate conversations. Audio recording was used where permission was obtained, although the thesis notes that at least one participant initially declined recording. These practices provide contextual detail and help explain how the original field material was gathered.

Analytical procedure

For this article, the existing thesis material was reorganized into an education-focused thematic synthesis; no new fieldwork or quantitative analysis was conducted. The case descriptions and narrative findings were read against the article's questions, then grouped into four connected themes: (a) household economic pressure and family responsibilities; (b) work schedules and the time available for schooling; (c) educational pathways, including continued enrolment, early school leaving and non-enrolment; and (d) school climate and learner engagement. The analysis is interpretive and case-based. No regression, inferential statistics or prevalence estimates are appropriate because the evidence is purposively selected, small in scale and not designed as a representative survey.

Trustworthiness and limitations

The thesis describes multiple qualitative sources—observation, interviews, field notes and case profiles—which permit a limited comparison of perspectives across children, caregivers and teachers. The article does not claim formal triangulation procedures that are not documented in the source. However, the source document does not clearly report a formal coding protocol, independent coding, participant validation or a complete audit trail. The exact fieldwork dates and the number of parent and teacher informants are also not clearly specified in the material reviewed. These omissions limit the level of methodological detail that can be claimed. Before submission, the authors should verify these details from original field notes and add them only where documentation supports them.

Ethics

The thesis reports explaining the research purpose to participants, seeking permission from workplace owners and obtaining permission for some recordings. It also expresses an intention to protect participants' privacy. Because the study involves minors and sensitive information about work and family circumstances, the journal manuscript should anonymize children and avoid identifiable photographs or unnecessary personal details. The thesis does not clearly document formal institutional ethics approval or a standardized procedure for guardian consent and child assent. The authors must verify and accurately report the ethics status and consent/assent process before submission; no approval should be claimed unless it was actually granted.

Findings

Household economic pressure and children's educational choices

Across the seven child profiles, the thesis describes households with constrained or uncertain resources, multiple dependants and limited adult earning capacity. One parent's account links a child's involvement in work to low income and the pressure of managing household expenses. Another case describes a child whose responsibilities increased after the death of both parents, shifting attention from schooling toward earning. These accounts suggest that educational decisions are made within household survival strategies, not in isolation from material circumstances.

The educational significance is twofold. First, the opportunity cost of schooling may be high when a child's work contributes to daily household needs. Second, school retention programmes that focus only on the child may overlook the economic conditions that make continued attendance difficult. These cases do not establish how common such circumstances are in Hyderabad, but they illustrate mechanisms that local education and child-protection services should be prepared to recognize.

Long work schedules and the shrinking time for learning

The profiles record work schedules that extend into the evening. Examples include a 10-year-old enrolled in Grade 5 whose reported schedule runs from approximately 2 p.m. to 11 p.m.; a 14-year-old who left school after Grade 3 and is described as working from about 11 a.m. to 9 p.m.; a 14-year-old who left after Grade 5 and works from approximately 2 p.m. to 10 p.m.; and a 15-year-old who had never attended school and is described as working from around 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. Other profiles also describe long afternoon-to-evening shifts. The reported schedules vary and should be understood as details from individual cases, not as a measured average.

These schedules expose a direct educational constraint: time spent working is time unavailable for homework, revision, rest and extracurricular participation. Evening work may also leave children tired when preparing for school or attending the following day. The thesis does not provide standardized attendance records, examination marks or learning assessments, so it cannot quantify the effect of work hours on achievement. Nevertheless, the documented schedules make a credible qualitative case for examining time poverty as a dimension of educational exclusion.

Different pathways: enrolled, left school and never enrolled

The seven cases show that work and education do not combine in one uniform way. Some children continue to attend government primary school while working; others reportedly left school in the early grades; one profile describes a child who never enrolled. This variation matters because an enrolment-only measure would classify some working children as included even when their available time and energy for learning may be severely constrained. Conversely, a child who has left school may still express a general hope for a better future, even when the route back into education is unclear.

The case material therefore supports a continuum model of educational risk. At one end are children who remain enrolled but may experience fatigue and reduced study time. Further along are children whose attendance and progression may be irregular or delayed. At the most excluded end are children who have left school or never entered it. This framework can help schools identify support needs before disengagement becomes permanent, while recognizing that the thesis does not provide longitudinal data to trace individual transitions over time.

School experiences and learner engagement

The thesis discusses perceived differences between government and private schooling and raises concerns about teaching quality and school discipline. It includes one account in which a parent associated a child's reluctance to return to school with physical punishment by a teacher. The evidence is not sufficient to judge the prevalence of such practices or to establish that punishment alone caused school leaving. Its importance is analytical: for children already balancing work and schooling, a negative interaction with school may compound existing barriers and make work appear more immediately necessary or acceptable.

A more inclusive school response would treat absence, fatigue and weak performance as signals for inquiry and support rather than grounds for shame. Teachers and school leaders can ask whether a learner is working, caring for siblings, facing transport or material costs, or experiencing unsafe treatment. Such conversations should be confidential and should not expose children to retaliation from employers or family members. The aim is to restore meaningful participation while ensuring that responsibility for preventing exploitative work does not fall on the child alone.

Children's aspirations and the limits of individual choice

The profiles include differing descriptions of children's interests and future plans: some have limited or uncertain aspirations, while others express an intention to continue education to a particular grade. These accounts should not be interpreted as fixed measures of motivation. Aspirations are formed within children's lived opportunities. When a child spends much of the day working, lacks reliable adult support or has experienced discouraging schooling, imagining a different future may be difficult. Education policy should therefore pair encouragement with practical conditions that make learning possible.

Discussion

The cases suggest that educational exclusion is produced through the interaction of household vulnerability, children's work schedules and school experiences. This interpretation aligns with the broader evidence that children in child labour face a substantially greater risk of being out of school and that attending school does not necessarily eliminate the adverse effects of work (ILO & UNICEF, 2025). The Hyderabad material adds a locally grounded account of how these pressures may be experienced in urban informal work settings.

First, the findings challenge the assumption that enrolment equals inclusion. A child who is registered at school but works late into the evening may have little time for rest and study. Schools need to consider attendance, punctuality, classroom participation, fatigue and progression together. Second, the cases highlight the need to address family economic insecurity. The source material repeatedly describes limited adult income and household responsibilities. Consistent with international recommendations, support for vulnerable families and decent work for adults should complement school-level interventions (ILO & UNICEF, 2025).

Third, school climate is a relevant part of prevention. The single account of punishment cannot support a broad prevalence claim, but it illustrates why safe and respectful teaching matters. A learner who already faces economic pressure may be especially vulnerable to disengagement after a humiliating school experience. Fourth, local evidence should be used cautiously. Seven purposively selected profiles cannot represent the city's working children, estimate dropout rates or prove a causal relationship. Their value is explanatory: they identify mechanisms and questions for larger, more systematic research.

The study also supports a partnership approach. Teachers may notice absence and learning difficulties; families understand household constraints; child-protection services can assess risk and connect families to support; and local authorities can monitor hazardous or exploitative work. Such coordination should protect confidentiality and avoid punitive responses that further marginalize children. The goal is not merely to move children from work to school on paper, but to secure the conditions in which they can learn safely and consistently.

Implications for Education Policy and Practice

1. Establish early-warning support for attendance and disengagement. Schools should track repeated absence, lateness, fatigue and stalled progression, then use confidential, supportive conversations to identify work-related or household barriers.
2. Promote non-violent, learner-centred discipline. School leaders should reinforce safe classroom practice and provide ways for children and caregivers to report harmful treatment without fear of retaliation.
3. Provide targeted learning recovery. Children who combine work and schooling may need remedial lessons, catch-up support, flexible consultation times and help with essential learning

materials. Flexibility should not normalize hazardous child labour; it should help children remain connected to education while protection concerns are addressed.

4. Link schools with social protection and child-protection services. Where household hardship is driving work, referral pathways should connect families with eligible assistance, livelihood support and child-protection assessment. Education measures alone cannot resolve income insecurity.

5. Strengthen local data and follow-up. District education authorities should distinguish enrolment from regular attendance and progression, and work with child-protection partners to document risk without publishing identifying information about minors.

6. Develop context-specific research. Future studies should include a larger and clearly described sample, transparent fieldwork dates, disaggregated information where ethically appropriate, school attendance records where permission is available, and follow-up over time. Researchers should document how children's assent and caregivers' consent were obtained and should use validated procedures for thematic analysis.

Limitations

This article is based on an existing thesis and does not introduce new fieldwork. Its core empirical material consists of seven purposively selected child profiles, supported by qualitative descriptions of interviews and observation. The thesis does not report a clear total for adult informants, a representative sampling frame, standardized school outcomes or a complete account of coding procedures. Some profile information is inconsistent or imprecise, including work-hour descriptions and income figures; the article therefore avoids calculating averages or percentages. The findings cannot estimate prevalence, establish causal effects or be generalized statistically to all children, schools or workplaces in Hyderabad. The source also needs verification of fieldwork dates and research ethics documentation before journal submission.

Conclusion

This education-focused analysis of an anthropological thesis from Hyderabad, Sindh, shows how child labour can restrict meaningful participation in schooling through long work schedules, household economic pressure and discouraging school experiences. The seven documented profiles reveal varied pathways: some children remain enrolled while working, some leave school in the early grades, and one profile describes a child who never enrolled. The evidence is qualitative and case-specific, but it draws attention to a key policy distinction: school enrolment does not guarantee that a child has the time, energy, safety and support needed to learn.

Reducing educational exclusion requires coordinated action. Schools should identify risk early, support learners without humiliation and provide routes back into learning. Education authorities and child-protection services should connect vulnerable families to appropriate social protection and enforce safeguards against hazardous work. Future research should build on these cases with transparent methods, stronger documentation and ethically protected participation by children. A

sustainable response must treat children not as the solution to household poverty, but as rights-holders whose education and development require protection.

Author Contributions

All four authors collaborated on the development of this article. Their contributions included discussion of the study focus, review and interpretation of the source material, literature review, manuscript drafting and revision. All authors should review and approve the final version and confirm that this statement accurately reflects their contributions before submission.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors should disclose any actual competing interests. If none exist, the corresponding author may state: "The authors declare no competing interests." Confirm before submission.

Ethics Statement

The thesis describes explaining the study purpose and seeking permissions for field access and some recordings, but formal institutional ethics approval and a standardized child assent/guardian-consent procedure are not clearly documented in the material reviewed. The authors must verify the original records and provide an accurate statement before submission. No ethics approval should be claimed unless it was granted.

Data Availability

The source material consists of the original thesis and associated field notes/data. Because the cases involve minors and sensitive family circumstances, raw data and identifying photographs should not be made publicly available. A suitable statement should be finalized by the authors according to what records exist and what permissions allow.

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