Chapter 7

Childhood Construction: Intergenerational Relations in the Afghan Refugee Community Living in Pakistan

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Abstract

This research aims to explore childhood construction in the Afghan refugee community living in Pakistan. Young Afghan people aged 12–18 who were working on the streets participated in the generation of data for this study in 2019. Ethnographic research approaches with semi-structured in-depth interviews and field observations were used to obtain real insights. Young Afghan refugees have been a constant phenomenon on the streets for decades in the twin cities of Pakistan – Rawalpindi and Islamabad – where this research was conducted and are involved in different street-based casual activities. The findings show that young people face discrimination and exclusion from the mainstream of society due to their undefined citizenship status and poverty. Parents see their children as dependents and as assets for their old age, and children and young people need to work to support their families who live in poverty. In fulfilling their filial responsibilities, young people sacrifice their schooling and have limited opportunities to learn new skills. It is concluded that the government and other international institutions with responsibility for setting policies and creating programs for young Afghan refugees need to understand the dynamics of the families in which the young people live and how these families inculcate them with their generational values.

Keywords: Afghan refugees; young people; working on the streets; ethnography; childhood construction; filial responsibility; Pakhtoonwali

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Introduction

Children are integral to any society, yet each society treats children and childhood differently (Corsaro, 2005, p. 3). In Pakistan, as in other societies, children working on the streets is a constant phenomenon. They can be seen hard at work in what is known as the rag-picking trade, that is, searching through the cities' dump sites to find the recyclable items, sorting and sifting through plastic material, glass, iron, steel, as well as bread and the like, selling goods and involved in many other activities in the informal sector. Among them, many are refugees from Afghanistan who have fled their homeland due to war at various times. In Pakistan, these children are regarded by society and the state as a burden on resources. As time has passed, cross-border migration from Afghanistan to Pakistan has continued at various periods, including recently in 2021 after the Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan (EUAA, 2022). The Afghan refugees (who are the focus of this study) living in the slum areas of Rawalpindi and Islamabad (2% of the number of total Afghan refugees, Ansari, 2019) have no clear citizenship status in Pakistan contrary to a right specifically guaranteed in Article 30 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC hereinafter) and Article 4 of the Pakistan Citizenship Act from 1951 (see for details, EUAA, 2022).

Afghan refugees in Pakistan and their children are thinly researched (Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children, 2002). Most of the studies focus on those Afghans who live in refugee camps, on their refugee status, nutritional and health status, low levels of education and skills, their difficulties in everyday living and their repatriation overall (EUAA, 2022; Gopalakrishnan, 2022). Accordingly, a detailed review of the literature on the lives of marginalized children and young people showed that there was also a dearth of research on street children and young people in Pakistan. Until now only a very few studies have been conducted in Pakistan on street children (Ali et al., 2004; Iqbal, 2008; Jabeen, 2009; Khalid & Haider, 2022). In particular there have been very few studies on those children who work on the streets and live with their parents and families (Khalid & Haider, 2022). There has been no study from a sociological perspective in which the construction of young people's childhood is the focus, and to the best of my knowledge, there has been no study from the perspective of sociology of childhood in the Afghan community in Rawalpindi and Islamabad. This current research, therefore, seeks to add to the existing literature.

Keeping UNCRC and the sociology of childhood in mind, it is important to understand the roles of Afghan young people in their own families in Pakistan where sociocultural, geopolitical, legal and leadership situations have features that are likely to be unique in the world; this is especially the case for Afghan young people who face cross-border migration. The absence of a comprehensive social protection system or policies for children, young people and their families in Pakistan in general and for Afghan refugees in particular further reinforces poverty and exploitation and pushes the poor to live in vulnerable and risky situations whilst excluding them from mainstream society. Young Afghans work

in the informal economy to help their families financially due to poverty and their lack of learning and working opportunities.

In this research, young Afghans living and working in Rawalpindi and Islamabad are considered to be Afghan nationals, even though they may have been born in Pakistan. The Government of Pakistan has declared that those Afghan refugees who have Proof of Registration (PoR) in Pakistan can legally reside in Pakistan and are Afghan citizens (EUAA, 2022). Those Afghans born in Pakistan also have refugee status. Pakistani laws do not allow for citizenship by birth or naturalization for refugees. As of January 2022, there were approximately 3 million Afghans living in Pakistan, around 1.4 million of them are Proof of Registration (PoR) cardholders, approximately 840,000 hold an Afghan Citizen Card (ACC), and an estimated 775,000 are undocumented. While PoR and ACC cardholders are offered limited protection, mainly from refoulement, undocumented Afghans are exposed to arrest, detention and deportation.

Against this background, the study presented here started with the following questions: what is life like for Afghan refugee children in Pakistan, what significance does work have in their lives, and what does education mean to them? What obligations do children assume for the family, and what perspective do they develop on themselves, their work and their future? To what extent do they meet the needs and expectations of their families? These are the questions this qualitative study explores, and it answers them against the broader background described above of the sociopolitical situation of these children. The study also considers the hierarchical family structures as they are reinforced under the moral code of *Pakhtoonwali*. The Afghan community lives within the code of Pakhtoonwali as part of their cultural traditions and norms. Pakhtoonwali is an unwritten guiding principle of life for Afghans and the Pukhtoon tribes. This code includes notions of honour and shame, dignity, courage and bravery within families, as well as usually a great deal of mutual support (Rzehak, 2011). Jirga is also an important part of Pakhtoonwali. A Jirga is a meeting of a group of tribal men which has the authority to settle a dispute in a way that is acceptable to all sides (Otfinoski, 2004, p. 45). There is seldom any formal selection of representatives in the Jirga and decisions are unanimous and unchallenged, with women's representation being wholly absent in such arrangements. Islam is the dominant religion in this community, but the cultural traditions and norms are even more important than religious beliefs and concepts and guide the lives of people.

It is thus a study of the social construction of childhood which is taking place under conditions of social insecurity and poverty while, at the same time, being subject to exceedingly tight moral guidelines that, although they grant children a certain amount of support from extended kin if need be, place them on the lowest rung of the social hierarchy and expect them to make a considerable contribution to the family.

Literature Review – Street Children and Their Families

The phenomenon of street children faces many conceptual difficulties across the globe (Bhukuth & Ballet, 2015). First of all, there is no exact figure for the

number of street children worldwide, although it is a phenomenon that has been reported and studied for over 20 years across the globe. However, globally it is estimated that the number of street children may be 150 million (Theirworld, 2022) and such estimates are generally used to propose interventions, policies and programs. Second, there is no clear definition of street children. Literature from the 1980s used categorizing terms such as "ON" the street (working on the street but returning to their homes at night) and "OF" the street (children both working and living on the street). But according to leading researchers (Thomas de Benitez, 2011), this too is a misleading division because it does not encompass different categories within street children.

Due to a dearth of research on street children in Pakistan, as mentioned above, there are no clear definition(s) and categories to be found in the literature on Pakistan's street children (Jabeen, 2009, p. 409). Some scholars, such as Ali et al. (2004), Iqbal (2008) and Jabeen (2009), borrowed the definition and categories of street children from the existing literature in their research in Pakistan. In this research, my key informants (sample) correspond to the definition of the first category defined by Mark Lusk (Lusk, 1989): children who work in the daytime but return to their homes at night.

There is no exact official estimate of the number of street children in Pakistan. According to CSC (2019), there are 1.5 million street children in Pakistan who are living and working on the streets. However, these data are not further disaggregated to show the details of the young people working on the streets, although different individual researchers have established some details of the street children in different cities (see for example, Ali et al., 2004; Iqbal, 2008). Moreover, the available information on street children in Pakistan gives us little understanding of their specific cultural traditions and how these impact on their daily lives.

Researchers across the world have found that the childhood of street children is not only a consequence of disastrous social conditions but also that parents who raise their children according to their culture and traditions play a part (Aptekar, 1994; Birhanu, 2019). For example, Montgomery (2007) found in Thailand with child prostitutes that child prostitution is considered acceptable in the area she studied. In her study, the main feelings of children were of duty and obligation to help their families. Obligation to the family is found to be a strong imperative in several studies on street children: according to Aptekar and Heinonen (2003), the culture of Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) stresses dependence as well as blind obedience, rather than independence in children. Thus, in that environment, total respect for parents and all other adults was the objective in the socialization of an ideal child and childhood. Such ideas are quite similar to those found for street children in Pakistan by a study conducted by Abdullah et al. (2014). The family structure and dynamics determine the extent to which they work to help parents as their filial responsibility. Such work may include paid work, even though it may be considered exploitative by outsiders, as well as household work, which is often accepted as part of nurturing and socialisation by parents and outsiders, too (Abdullah et al., 2014).

Furthermore, the studies also show an interconnection between such functionalization and strict hierarchical subordination of street children by their parents on the one hand and the precarious social conditions of the parents themselves on the other hand. Several studies from different national contexts state that the parents have little education (Bhukuth & Ballet, 2015; Nasir et al., 2021), and that there is poverty (Beazley, 2003; Luiz de Moura, 2002; Ward & Seager, 2010), child abuse and neglect at home (Ward & Seager, 2010). Parents of street children are often employed in the informal labor market. Nasir et al. (2021) and Yokying and Floro (2020) show that parents' participation in the informal labor market has a positive correlation with their children working in this labor market too. This means that if parents live in poor social conditions, they will force their children to work to fulfill their filial responsibility.

In conclusion, we can state that the childhood construction of street children can be seen to be a result of: (1) the poor social conditions of their families and (2) a cultural tradition of children's subordination in poor social conditions where children are required to work to support the family financially.

Methodology

In this research, I used an ethnographic research approach in which I worked closely with the children of the Afghan community, relying particularly on in-depth interviews and participant observation (James & Prout, 1997; Wolcott, 2008). The researched group consisted of 15 boys aged 12–18 living and working in the twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad, Pakistan. This research is an extension of my previous research which was completed in 2012. The purpose of repeating this research in 2019 was to explore the living and working conditions of Afghan refugees in the twin cities – whether they had maintained the same status that they had in 2012 (Khalid et al., 2020; Khalid & Haider, 2022) or if their situation had improved. My current research again focused on young Afghan boys and their families living as refugees in Pakistan. This research was completed in 2019 over a period of 3 months (March to May). The data were collected in Dhok Hassu (Rawalpindi), fruit and vegetable market and Sunday market (H-8) in Islamabad. These are the areas where there is a concentration of young Afghans working on the streets. These young boys are involved in different street-based casual activities such as selling plastic bags, carrying fruit and vegetables for customers in the markets, selling corn from a cart, selling flowers, car washing, rag picking and working in small hotels as dish washers or waiters. As the study group comprised young boys, semistructured in-depth interviews with broad questions and a loosely structured guideline were embedded into field observations. This procedure was intended to make the children feel comfortable and relaxed and lead to in-depth insights. Purposive and snowball sampling were used as these two sampling techniques provided the required and comprehensive information to achieve the objectives of this research.

In the absence of national and organisational ethics committees, Alderson's (2005) ethical framework was used and followed throughout the research process

and data generation. Thus, particular attention was paid to the following points: harm to children during research should be avoided, and confidentiality and privacy should be maintained. I obtained the consent of young people by giving them full details of the aims of the research. They were very clearly told that they could opt out of the research at any time and would not have to give a reason for withdrawing their participation. While they were assured of confidentiality and secrecy, they were also promised that pseudonyms would be used to hide their identities (Morrow, 2008).

One of the basics of qualitative research processes and ethics with children is rapport building. In this process, gaining access to children was a challenge. I spent a lot of time in the studied areas and tried to talk to children in my national language, which they had learned in the course of their work. After a little chit chat, I talked about the research, the purpose of the research, their role in it and the above-mentioned ethics. I also expressed a wish to meet their family. However, this was not possible at the beginning of the research. My continuous presence, long discussions about their lives and activities and roaming around with them made me trustworthy, and ultimately seven children invited me to their homes to talk to their families. I visited their homes where they were living with nuclear or joint families. Talking to their mothers and sisters (elder or younger) was a challenge because they were not very familiar with the national language that I was speaking with the boys. Fathers and other male relatives, however, could speak the national language well because of their exposure to the outside world. For women, it was different because they only go out of the house in urgent cases such as visiting hospitals. In this situation, the boys became my helpers and assisted me in having discussions with mothers and girls/women in the homes. Getting access to their homes was extremely useful for gaining an insight into their lives as refugees.

Participant observation, as used throughout the course of the fieldwork research, is also part and parcel of good qualitative research (Wolcott, 2008). Through observation of my key informants in different contexts – workplaces and streets, drop-in centres (DICs), visits to the homes of the boys who allowed me to visit their families and through discussion with family members – I was able to explore their diverse behaviors and attitudes to different things. It provided me with a good understanding of the boys' capacity to survive in a new working and living environment through adaptability, cleverness and sharpness (their personal characteristics). It also enabled me to involve them in a more relaxed and friendly way, which provided insights that might not have been possible in more formal processes.

Erickson (1986) writes that for qualitative research, "evidentiary adequacy" is needed, by which he means sufficient time in the field to gather and generate data extensively to understand the studied phenomenon. The recorded data in this research consisted of over 25 hours of audio tapes which included semistructured interviews with children and their families over a period of 3 months. All the audiotapes were transcribed verbatim by the researcher. The data also included field notes, written observation and self-reflective memos (Charmaz & Mitchell, 2001, p. 160). The analysis of data involved immersion in the material. I read the

material repeatedly and scrutinised all the data. Through this process, I found patterns of ideas in what the participants were saying and what the tone of their ideas was, among other things. This process generated descriptions of the setting and experiences of the young Afghans' lived experiences. Codes and categories were sorted, compared and contrasted until the analysis was saturated (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Besides this, newspaper clippings, articles and documents and reports from GOs and NGOs were also studied to gain a broader understanding of the situation of Afghan refugees in the twin cities of Pakistan.

Results

A Boy's Perspective on His Situation

The report on the results begins with a more detailed description of one of the boys and my contact with him and his family. His details will be discussed in relation to other boys studied in this research. I met Zaryab Khan (a pseudonym) – like other key respondents – while shopping and looking for Afghan refugee boys in the Sunday market. I asked him to give me his time, since I, as a teacher working with Afghan refugees, would like to talk to him about his migration experiences. Initially, he was reluctant because he and the other boys were suspicious that I might belong to some government agency seeking to obtain their data. However, after providing them with all the details of the research and ethics, he decided to talk to me – not on the first day but on another date and time. On the day of the interview, at the Sunday market in H-8, we sat in a corner during his free time and he shared his story as follows:

> I am from Tagab, a district around 117 kilometres from Kabul. I came here in January 2019 with my family to live in my uncle's home. My uncle has been living here in Islamabad for many years, and he suggested that we come here. We came to Pakistan because there were Talibs (Taliban) who were surrounding our area. We had land to cultivate but there is no other income-generating activity and that has made our lives difficult. We do not have enough cash to meet our needs because of high inflation and political situations. Our region is a mountainous area and there is no business activity either. So, what could we do there? We came to Pakistan by bus, and at first, we lived with our uncle and his family, but now we are renting a small house. There are seven of us altogether, my parents and my 4 siblings. I am the oldest (aged 14). I was attending school in my hometown, but now, as our economic situation is poor and my father is the only person able to earn, I began working in this Sunday bazar (market) as a porter. My father works in the fruit and vegetable market (where most of the Afghan and Pushtun men and children work) and I started in this market. I will move to the fruit and vegetable market where my father works but right now this market is where I can earn money.

> I came here at around 7 a.m. and work till 8 p.m. I like working here because I can work and earn at the same time. I like the environment here because there are other children like me. Sometimes, there is too much work and heavy things to carry for customers, but some days are relaxing. During the day, we get some time to rest and chat with each other and enjoy eating or drinking together. I can save money – around Rs. 500–600 ($ 4–5) in a day. We use this money to pay the rent for the house, the electricity and gas bills and for daily groceries. You know how much inflation is here in Pakistan too and everything is so expensive. It is very difficult for my father and me to meet our expenses because all my siblings are younger than me. They are going to the Madrassa (religious school), and I am working. If I compare my life in my hometown and in Pakistan, I do see a lot of differences, however we are still better off than many other families who migrated from Afghanistan. The big difference is that I was studying there, and I am working here. I am happy that I am earning some money for my family to support them and to fulfill my filial responsibilities. As you know, this market only operates three days a week, so the rest of the time I sometimes go to the fruit and vegetable market with my father or play cricket all day with other children from my street who do not attend school. My mother does household chores and sometimes I help her too. I am happy here, but I want to study as I was doing in my own town, but I also realize that I cannot continue because I have to support my family. I guess someday we will go back, but when and under what conditions, I do not know because this is my father's and uncle's decision. Most of the decisions are taken by these men in my household because they think that we children are young, irrational and do not know anything. Sometimes, I remember my hometown and miss it.

This is the daily routine of an Afghan refugee child who belongs to a poor family and who started work after migrating to Pakistan. Whether the boys work in the above-mentioned market or the fruit and vegetable market, or any other work on the streets, their lives are almost the same with variations due to their household dynamics and social capital and support in Pakistan.

The Social Situation of Afghan Refugee Families

This subsection of current research is about the boys and the families I studied with information from documents and statistics from other researchers and international organizations. Pakhtoonwali – the code of life (as discussed in the introduction to this chapter) – governs the structure of the Afghan refugee families who were studied in this research. In the Afghan community, there is strict

segregation of sexes (Bezhan, 2021; Gopalakrishnan, 2022) and women are made part of the background only in their families. The presence of women in the house became visible only through their food and household chores. Only little girls can be found in the areas where they live because adult women are not allowed to be seen by outsiders. The girls and women are the "honour" of the family which all family members – boys and men, girls and women – must keep with them throughout their lives. When it comes to marriage, the roles of young men and women (or rather boys and girls still) are almost negligible. Therefore, this matter is entirely in the hands of parents, who decide both partners and age of marriage. In general, the abovementioned characteristics hold true for the Afghan community in this study.

Access was obtained to seven households, who allowed me to visit their homes and meet their families. The studied households are poor, with few/almost no assets. The adult males in the families are paid daily wages which are highly irregular in nature which leads to income insecurity. This economic situation has made it difficult to increase the assets in poor households because the erratic daily income of a parent or elder can range from PKRs. 300–1,000 ($US 3–$US 15), depending on the work in which they are involved. The average income of impoverished families is not enough to feed a typical family of 8–10 people (Kronenfeld, 2008, p. 44).

As far as education is concerned, only some of the key informants had the opportunity to go to Afghan designated schools, although they all attended the drop-in centres[1] (arranged by different NGOs in the studied areas). The children who participated in the study did not attend any public school in the twin cities. The average number of siblings was six or seven. It is claimed by researchers that large family size contributes to poverty (Abdullah et al., 2014; Fantahun & Taa, 2022).

Most of the parents and elders (70%) studied in this research were illiterate or less well-educated, which is usually the case for the families of street children. Some male members may have completed primary education in their villages or cities or towns in nearby schools. None of the parents and elders had completed high school education because most of them had lived in United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) camps set up in various areas of different cities. And in most of the camps, there were no organized permanent efforts at schooling, although schools operated in the area occasionally. The women lagged even further behind in obtaining an education. All parents and elders considered that their lack of general education and technical skills were the main reasons why they worked in the informal economy (Hassen & Mañusb, 2018), which keeps them in an intergenerational cycle of poverty (Bhukuth & Ballet, 2015).

[1]Drop-in centres are run by two to three NGOs in the studied areas. These centres provide services such as informal education, free breakfast and lunch, limited vocational training (sewing and painting) and psychological counselling to street children.

"Parents Know Best What Is Good for Their Children"

The parents and elders of the Afghan community consider children and young people to be their property (possessions) and believe that they are wholly dependent on them. Generally, in Pakistani society, but even more so in the Afghan community, the parents make decisions on behalf of their children. The patrilineal system is hierarchically organized in Afghanistan and Pakistan, with the male as the head of the household being bestowed with the primary responsibility for the economy of the household. As he controls the economy, he has the authority to make all the decisions including education, work and marriage (as mentioned above). This cultural aspect leads to other societal practices such as not sending children to school in case of emergencies (for boys) and as a rule (for girls) and sending the boys to work instead.

In the studied Afghan refugee community, parents believe that children and young people are helpless, irrational and need care and protection – that is, they take a *protectionist* rather than an *empowering* approach. It is also a well-established notion among young people that their parents will always do what is best for them. In this regard, children's opinions are sought in very few matters, and their opinions will not necessarily be taken seriously in decision-making. This applies even more strictly in the extended Afghan families where children's rights of expression and decision-making are rarely recognized or respected. For example, Darya Khan (12 years old, working on the streets, selling corn) shared:

> When I was in my hometown in Afghanistan, I went to the Madrassa (religious school) and now after migrating, I neither go to the Madrassa nor to school. This is wholly my father and my uncle's decision.

However, children and young people generally accept such norms and act accordingly. They did not complain about these decisions, but they have changed their lives following migration to a new country.

The irony regarding this prevailing notion of children's dependence is in striking contrast to the other side of the picture, in which parents think that their children are big enough to help them financially and force them to work, especially when their living and working situation changes, as in the case of Afghan refugees. It is widely accepted by poor Afghan refugee families that children need to work for the family and that they are obliged to their parents to fulfil their filial responsibility. The age at which children start working on the streets might be as young as 7 years old, but most of the young people studied in this research started work at between 8 and 9 years. In the course of my field work, however, I also found many young children (aged 3 or 4) at the different sites where this research was conducted, suggesting that through exposure and training, a sense of responsibility is inculcated in children toward their family as part of childhood construction.

Taking care of parents and families is a customary practice in the studied Afghan community. Gul Zaib was aged 16 and migrated in 2018. I met him in the fruit and vegetable market, and he shared his story:

> Family is the most important thing to me. It is not only the immediate family, but it includes a lot of people (extended family). If someone needs help, I have to help because this is our tradition, this is what I am taught. My cousins are orphans, as they lost their parents in the war and now they live with us. As I am working, it is my responsibility along with my father to support them. Taking care of family and fulfilling our filial responsibly is one of the codes of life that are taught to us from childhood.

There are many other stories, shared by young people, where a single person is taking care of many members of the family, and they do not leave another family member if they are struggling. This example shows that for children, working and supporting family is part of childhood construction where family and cultural norms and traditions are taught in a clear way and deviations are not allowed.

"Children's Perspective on Their Work"

This report reiterates that children are among that group which is neglected most in the migration process. The findings of this research reveal that young people from migrant families must survive in a new, to some extent bitter, and unfriendly environment, and also bear the cost of migration in the form of working on the streets. Social exclusion and unwelcoming treatment from institutions and the host society challenge their self-esteem and dignity. Some of the Afghan boys studied clearly felt they belonged to a stigmatized category of people because of several factors. Their work on the street, lack of status and poverty all led to a feeling of social exclusion and not being welcomed by institutions and the host society. This challenged their self-esteem and dignity. An Afghan boy (Arsalan Khan, aged 14), born in Pakistan and living in a rented house in Islamabad's slum area, who worked in the fruit and vegetable market, explained:

> I do not like my work because due to it, I do not have respect from society. I am part of this society and I need respect like any other human being. I face discrimination and disrespect while working on the streets, because I have a lower class status and also do not have legal status in this country even though I was born here. I feel powerless in this society which blames us for being on the streets and a burden on resources. This leads to me feeling hostile towards society.

However, some other key informants who migrated in 2018 and 2019 expressed different views and thought that Pakistani society did not treat them

badly; they felt accepted in Pakistan. This can be attributed to the fact that they had spent less time in Pakistan than other young people like Arsalan Khan. They also had some support from families who had already settled in Pakistan. Overall, the young Afghan people thought that the attitude of society toward them was unfair and that they deserved as much respect as other people in society. And in this situation, they were unable to understand the legalities relating to their citizenship. With both bad and good feelings about their situation, the children and young people show resilience in their daily lives. They do not see themselves nor present themselves as victims of poverty, exploitation and marginalization. They face the realities as they are and try to overcome the barriers to obtaining good things in life. For example, Gul Ghattak (aged 17) shared:

> Living in a peaceful country (as per his perception), gaining employment here, as there are few working opportunities in Afghanistan, a bit of acceptance from society and living with a family are the things that I have right now. I am looking forward to becoming a successful businessman here, as many other Afghanis are.

Some of the young people who participated in the study had begun working at the age of 8, 9, or 10 and had been involved in different economic activities. These experiences and increasing financial and other household responsibilities had taught them that they were adults. As they had been on the streets for many years, they had wide exposure to the public domain and the adults' worlds. Nevertheless, they thought that despite being aware that they were being exploited, for example, with long working hours, meagre earnings, no breaks during the working day, bullying and harassment and sometimes not being paid the money they had been promised, they had no power to stop it. The key informants stated that despite many years of work, they still did not have the opportunity to satisfy basic needs such as free formal schooling and the chance to learn skills, basic health facilities, safe and readily available water, the ability to work with dignity, employment with fair wages and less exploitation. Such insights and a breadth of concern demonstrate their thinking and analytical abilities toward life and its hardships.

The young people explicitly stated that they strongly believed it was their responsibility to take care of their families, as their parents were ageing, and their younger siblings needed their care and support. They asserted that this was part of their cultural values, expectations and orientation during childhood. They expressed clearly that they wanted to work for their families and did not consider that banning children from working would help any of their families. The importance of young people's work in and for the family cannot be neglected, whether forced or voluntary. In this connection, it is important to take account of young people's own perspectives regarding their work. It was observed in this study that every working child and young person placed value on the work they did to earn money to help their families. All the young people participating in the study thought that their contribution meant a lot to the family and despite mixed feelings at times, they expressed a positive attitude toward work precisely because

of its value to their families. The young people stated that they considered that working on the street is a core attribute of their identity. One boy (Rashid Khan, aged 13) expressed his views as follows:

> It is very important for me to work to support my family. Our financial situation is bad as we are living in the slum areas of Rawalpindi City. It is hard to survive in Rawalpindi as it is expensive to live here, the rents are high, and food is expensive too. Due to migration to Pakistan, my father cannot afford to send any of my six siblings to school. I started work when I was eight years old. I work eight to twelve hours as a shoe polisher and in the fruit and vegetable market. I am happy that I am helping my father to meet the expenses of my family and helping my siblings to have a better future through education.

Children and young people have accepted work as part of their lives, but they are unsure about their future. Upon investigation, they were not sure what they would do in their near and distant future. However, during the discussions in different research sites, they stated that they knew they would work for themselves and their families, but if they wanted to earn more, they would need skills. However, there were no institutions, except for a few operated by various NGOs, that would help them to develop the necessary skills, and the scope of skill development was very limited. As mentioned above, most of the Afghan children and young people were working on the streets where no skills are required, and they learned by doing. By obtaining employment, they are also in competition with the local population, which has grown resentful because young Afghan people work for less money than the locals. This is not only the case with young children but with adults as well.

Conclusion

This chapter concludes that Afghan refugee children from impoverished families live difficult and different lives after migrating to Pakistan. Their social and economic situation changes, and they must face the consequences in the shape of living in a new country, leaving school and the Madrassa and working in different settings including the streets, where they face exploitation and harassment.

It can also be concluded that the overall situation of working children and young people presents a paradox. On the one hand, they are happy to help their families and feel that they are contributing to the families' income, even though they are working in an exploitative and unsafe environment. On the other hand, children and young people feel bad that their education is being neglected or not completed. What I found for Afghan refugee children has been found in studies on street children in other countries too (see Gebretsadik, 2017; Woodhead, 2012). My study also aligns with research on street children in identifying not only economic hardship but also hierarchical family relationships as a condition

and part of the problematic situation of these children. This is something the children studied here complained about but also accepted. In a normal situation – if they were living in their homeland – they might negotiate, however after migrating, young people were not in a position to negotiate. They do what they are told to do, either by their father or another male relative.

Furthermore, the absence of a social security system in Pakistan for victims of the war in Afghanistan and the lack of affordable necessities of life including schooling and health puts unnecessary pressure on families, and thus ultimately on children. These households are powerless due to their defined noncitizen status in Pakistan, which excludes them from the mainstream of society (Fantahun & Taa, 2022). It should be mentioned here that the average income of young people is PKRs. 150–200 per day, and the average working hours are 5–6 hours, but these boys show resilience. This resilience is due to strong social capital built on their families, peers, their own personalities and a strong belief in God.

The children and young people recognized that education and technical skills were important for bringing positive change to their lives. This is because they have observed many Afghan nationals who have worked in the locations where the research was conducted for the whole of their lives and have been unable to improve their financial position. On the other hand, they have also seen many rich and settled Afghans in Pakistan. As far as the skills development of the young people who participated in the study is concerned, the opportunities are limited. In general, they all emphasized that they wanted to work with dignity and be respected by society. This is also a finding reproduced in studies on street children in other countries (see Hanson & Nieuwenhuys, 2013). It can also be concluded that Afghan refugee experiences are not isolated experiences and most of the refugees living in different parts of the world live in more or less the same conditions and face similar kinds of attitudes from, and treatment by, their various host societies (see Hoodfar, 2010; Mann, 2012).

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