

## Prevalence and Correlates of Child Labour in Tribal District, Mohmand, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

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### Abstract

This study investigates the prevalence and correlates of child labour in the tribal districts. The tribal districts that now encompass the FATA region share many socio-economic characteristics. Moreover, the FATA region was recently affected by a large scale conflict that resulted in large numbers of its inhabitants getting killed, as well as destruction of public and private infrastructure and loss of livelihoods. This also resulted in limiting access to the region. Keeping this in consideration a sample size of 427 children was selected in tribal district Mohmand, which was generalized for the whole of FATA region. Results showed that combining school with work is the most preferred activity for children. Similarly, Child schooling was second-most and full-time child labour was the third-most preferred activity for children in the study area. It was found that an increase in child age increases the child's chances of getting engaged in labour activities. Gender of children also determines their labor status. Results indicate that households prefer schooling alongside child labour for their male children and idle status for their female children. The government can address issue of child labour through transfer payment schemes, providing job opportunities and financing business programs.

**Keywords:** Child Labour, Child Schooling, Tribal districts, District Mohmand.

### 1 Introduction

Child labour leads to several bad consequences, for instance, it hinders a child's education, and it adversely affects a child's health. Out of several socioeconomic cost of school dropout, child labour is one and worst of them. There are several socioeconomic causes of school dropout and alternatively child labour. However, child labour not only includes the dropped out children but also never enrolled kids.

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The decision of not enrolling children in school deprives a household, its children, and its society from the benefits of education in terms of higher earnings in future. Thus, the household decision of not investing in child schooling reduces its chances of escaping the vicious circle of Poverty. Generally, Poverty affects the incidence of child labour via a number of channels. First, children from poor households can contribute to their families' consumption through income earned from labour activities. Second, the marginal utility of income is very high in poor households. Therefore, the opportunity cost of children's education exceeds benefits of education, and hence child labour is substituted for child schooling. Poor households spend 60-70% of their income on food, and their income mainly depends upon household's labour income (World Food Program, 2004).

Besides depriving of the benefits of schooling, the household decision of child involvement in labour activities may expose its child to sexual abuse, physical injury and other social and health problems. Consequently, the household's decision to engage its children in hazardous labour activities eventually deprives society of healthy and productive citizens. However, many poor households in the developing world send their children to work for meeting their subsistence consumptions (Rafique et al., 2020; Eric, 2007).

The economic status of household and other socioeconomic characteristics of children, parents, and households may cause the incidence of child labour. For instance, an increase in child age increases the chances of child involvement in labour work. Similarly, Child gender also determines child schooling or child labour. Households prefer schooling or labour activity for their children on a gender basis (Johnson U. Nwagugo and Adesoji A. Oni, 2017; Qaiser et al., 2021). Further, parents' characteristics, such as parents' education and employment status, also determine child schooling and child labour (Asif and Pervaiz, 2019; Pamela E and Davis-Kean, 2005). Other significant determinants of child labour are that several dependent members in a household and family system are key determinants of child schooling and child labour (Zafar et al., 2021; Latif et al, 2016).

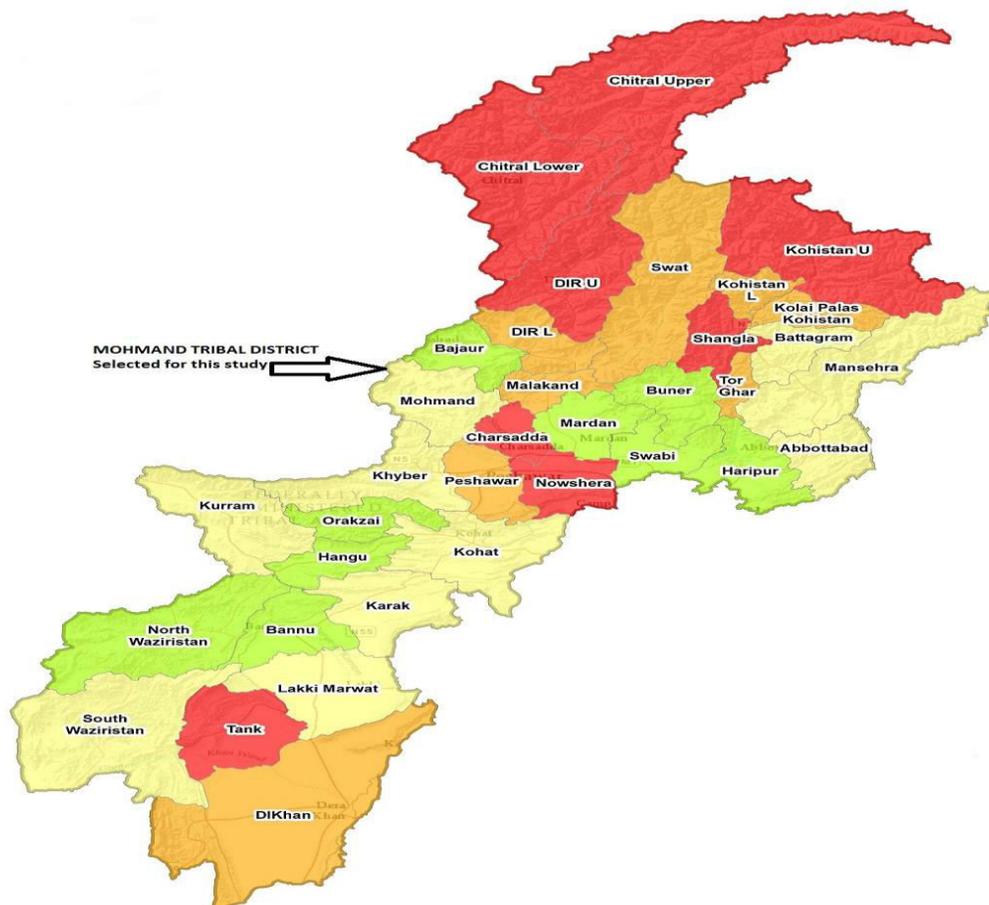
Tribal Regions of Pakistan have the highest absolute number of child labour in the country. The overall literacy rate in tribal districts is 33.3%, far less than the national average of 58%. The survey conducted in tribal districts shows that overall dropout rate and never enrolled rate among children of 6-15 years is 3.7% and 42.4% respectively. Similarly, gender discrimination is also highest among kids, for example, dropout rate (3.4%) and never enrolled rate (61.7%) of female children is higher than dropout rate (3.3%) and never enrolled rate (31.2%) of male children (FATA Secretariat, 2015). War on terror and conflicts and lack of government intervention further fuelled the issue of child labour in tribal districts. Blasting of female schools by terrorists adversely affected female children school enrolment, low investment on education and lack of proper monitoring of

schools by the government has resulted in a higher prevalence of child labour in the tribal belt (Asif et al., 2021; Naqwi A.A., et al, 2012).

## 2 Methods, Procedures and Study Area

Firstly, collecting data from entire tribal districts was impossible due to the constraint resources and security risks. Secondly, all tribal districts share similar geographical, political, cultural and socioeconomic characteristics. Thus, due to these reasons, the District Mohmand Tribal was selected for sampling in this study. Purposive sampling (non-probability sampling) technique was used for data collection. Therefore, only those households were surveyed which had at least one child 5-16 years of age. The estimated sample size of 427 children was obtained from 136 households in the study area in tribal district Mohmand (refer to Map 1).

**Map 1. Mohmand Tribal district, KP, Pakistan**



The existing literature on child labour classifies children activities broadly into six categories to examine the prevalence of partial and full-time child labour. Households either prefer schooling or work for their children; however, combining with work has also been examined in this study. Further, there may also cases when children are found in idle

(neither schooling nor work) status, and this is the least desirable choice of households for their children (Garootaer Chsitiann,1999, Asif et al., 2017).

The present study has also analyzed the correlates of child labour from existing recent literature. These correlates includes children characteristics; age, the gender of children, parents' characteristics; the educational level of father and mother, and the father's employment status. Other household characteristics include; the number of dependent family members and economic status of the household. Empirical evidence shows that households determine schooling more for their younger children than those of elder ones. Since, to better understand the households' preferences for their children schooling or child labour in the study area, we classified children into two age groups, i.e., 5-10 years and 11-16 years (Rasheda Khanam, 2008). The economic status of the household has been defined in the context of the International Poverty Line definition of the (Afridi et al., 2021; World Bank, 2019).

The data in hand was classified using frequency distribution for examining the prevalence of children into schooling or labour activities. Similarly, cross-tabulation has produced to present correlates of child schooling and child labour.

### 3 Results& Discussion

#### 3.1 Prevalence of Child Labour and Schooling

It was found that, out of the total children population, 30.4% of children have engaged in school only activity. 22.5% of children were reported to be engaged in full-time work. `Children who combine work with schooling were reported to be 45.4%, which is the highest among all other children activities. Households prefer partial child labour status for their children. Children work in their family farms, contribute part-time to their families' businesses, and even engaged as a part-time paid child labour in the study area. The undesirable choice of households for their children is the idle category; children found in this category were 1.6%.

**Table 1**Prevalence of Children into Schooling and Labour Activities (Percent)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Children Activities of 5-16 years of age</b>		
School only	130	30.4
Work only	96	22.5
School with work	194	45.4
Idle (neither goes to school nor work)	7	1.6

Source: author's calculation

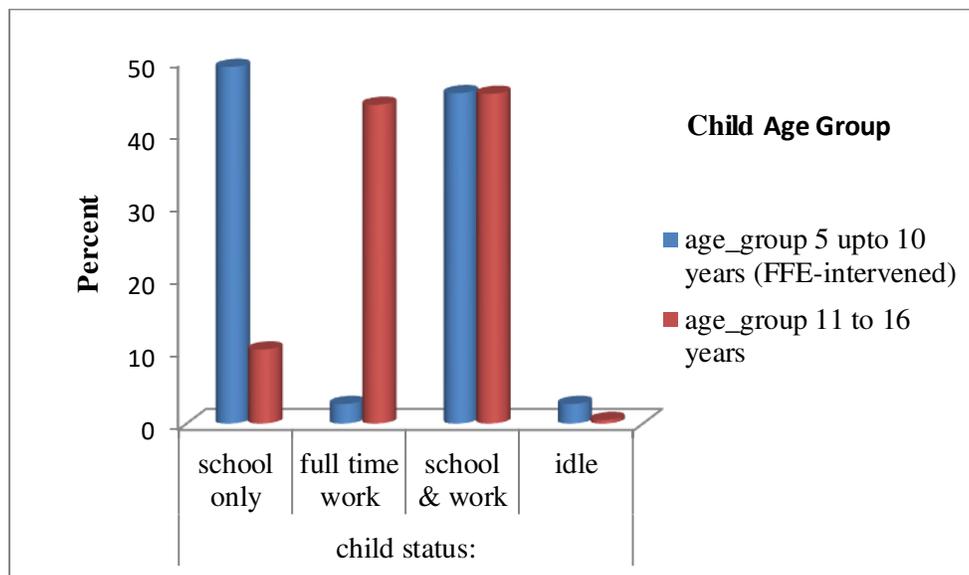
### 3.2 Correlates of Child Labour and Schooling

#### 3.2.1 Child Characteristics

Child age has a crucial role in determining school or work for children. Figure 1 shows that households prefer schooling more for their children between 5-10 years of age. While Full-time work and schooling with work (part-time work) are preferred more for children between 11-15 years of age in the study area. These results suggest that parents are aware of child labour consequences. Therefore, they do not prefer child labour for their younger children.

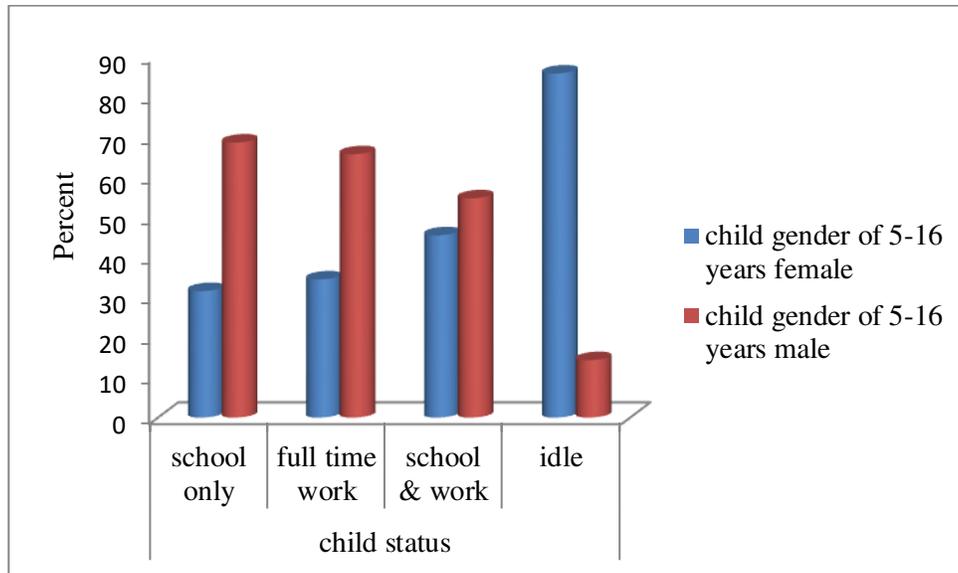
Child gender also determines the prevalence of child in different activities. Figure 2 shows that households prefer schooling, Work only and school with work categories more for their male children. Results show that households discriminate among their children based on child gender. Female children exceed male children in idle status only, indicate that the female child is preferred to stay within homes. The ratio of never enrolment and drop out is high among female children in the study area. However, Male children have a higher risk of prevalence into child labour than those of female children.

**Figure 1 Association between Child Status and Child Age Group**



Source: Author's calculation

**Figure 2 Association between Child Gender and Child Status**



Source: Author's calculation

### 3.2.2 Parents' Characteristics

Parents' education plays a vital role in child schooling and child labour. Illiterate parents usually send their children to work not only because of Poverty but due to the lack of awareness about the return from education. Generally, educated parents are more knowledgeable about the social and economic importance of education and keep children in school by creating an environment conducive for learning (such as directly helping in studies).

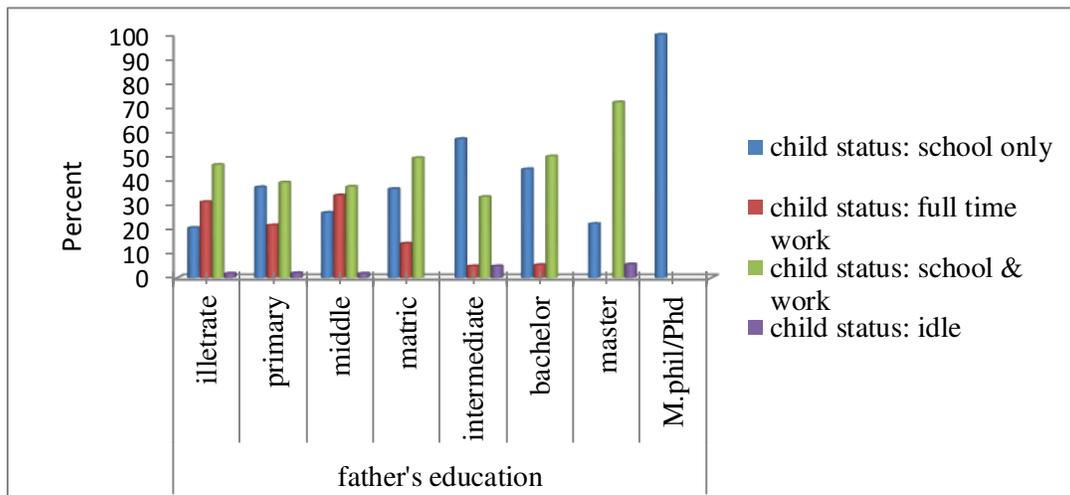
Linking child status with father's education also gives interesting results. Father's education is directly associated with his children schooling and inversely associated with child labour. For example, figure 3 shows that fathers with the highest qualification (M.Phil. and PhD) prefer schooling more than those with a low level of education (primary education) or illiterate.

Similarly, the father's employment status also determines child engagement in schooling or child labour. Figure 5 shows that children of the unemployed fathers are mostly engaged in full-time child labour, while children of the self-employed (running their own business) fathers continue schooling with work. Effect of mothers' education on child schooling and child labour is not clear because the majority of mothers are illiterate in the study area.

Similarly, the father's profession has a key role in child schooling and child labour. For instance, schooling for their children is preferred among wage workers more than

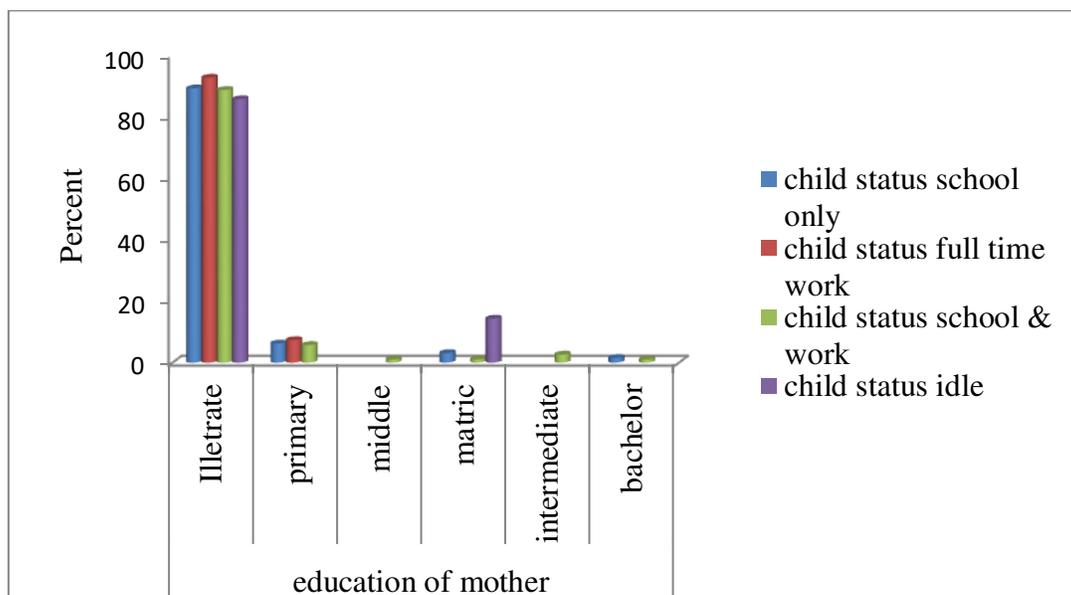
those of self-employed. In contrast, self-employed fathers prefer a school with work activity more for their children. Children are engaged in full-time labour activities to support their families in meeting their consumptions, in case adult members of the household are unemployed. It is therefore evident that whatever the cause of household poverty is, decreases demand for child schooling. It is because the opportunity cost of education is high for poor households. Furthermore, those running their businesses, engage their children in work along with schooling to contribute to the family business.

**Figure 3 Association between Child Status and Father's Education**



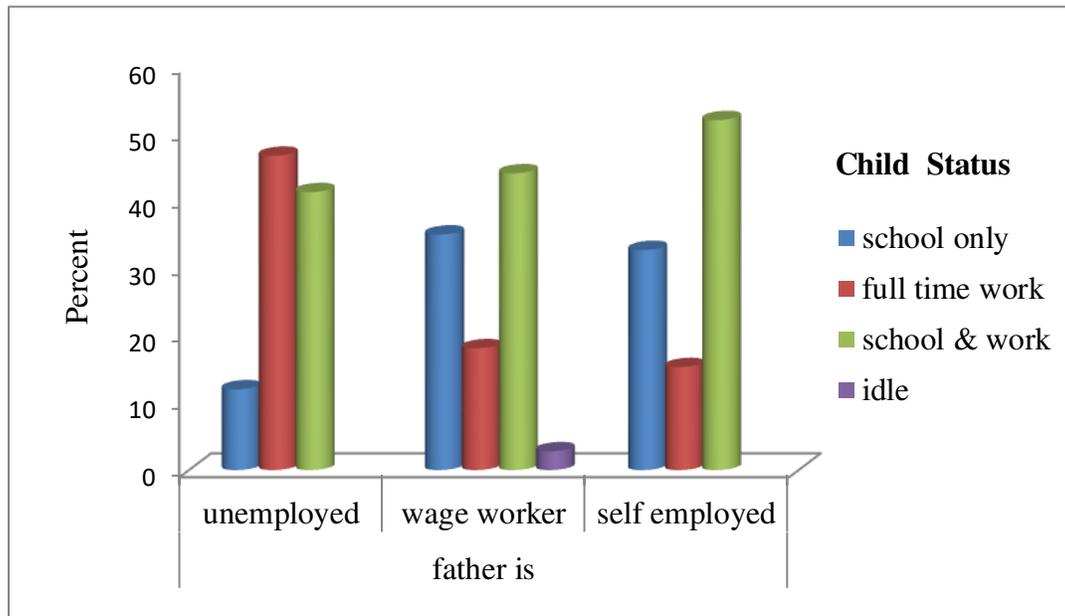
Source: author's calculation

**Figure 4 Association between Child Status and Mother's Education**



Source: author's calculation

**Figure 5 Association between Child Status and Father's Employment Status**



Source: author's calculation

### 3.2.3 Household's Characteristics

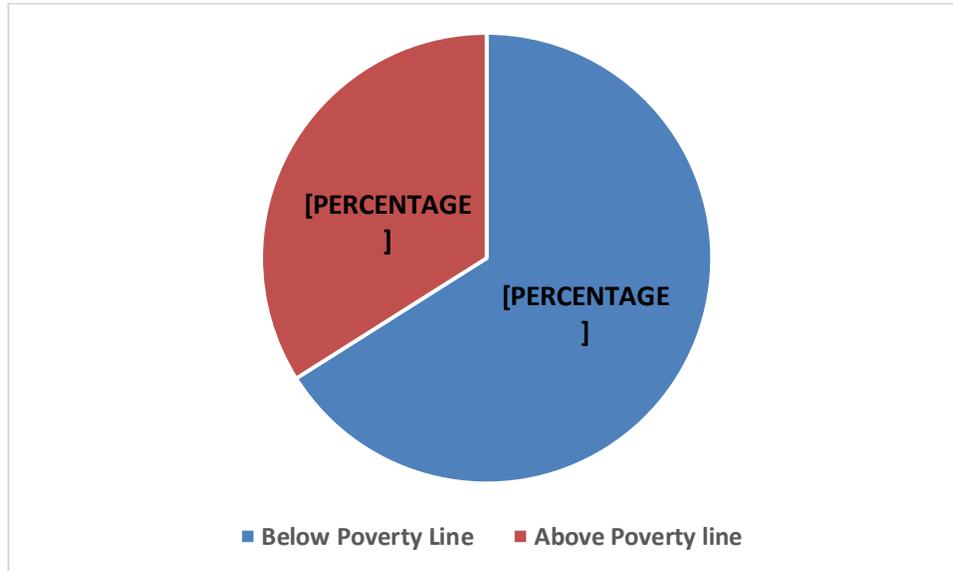
Tribal districts are economically backward areas of Pakistan, where Poverty, high unemployment rate, low local employment opportunities are major determinants of Poverty in the study area. Poverty plays a leading role in the prevalence of child labour because Poverty affects the pattern of households and hence compel them to determine labour activity for their children. Survey results show that out of the total, 66% of respondents are poor (below the poverty line) as shown in figure 6.

Figure 7 shows that labour activity is preferred more for their children by households living below the poverty line. On the other hand, economically well-off (above poverty line) households prefer schooling more for their children. However, part-time child labour (school with work) is also more common among these households.

Several dependent members in a household also determine child status. For instance, to feed a large number of dependents, households send their children of 5-16 years of age to work. However, the results are somehow confusing; for instance, a household with the highest number of dependents prefer schooling more for their children than other activities. Similarly, the incidence of full-time child labour increases with the increase in a number of dependent members up to 4, but gradually declines and then disappears in households with seven dependent members. Figure 8 shows that, due to many earning adults, the maximum number of dependent members in a joint family system is not a serious issue compared to the number of dependents in a nuclear family. Furthermore, child schooling chances are inversely related, and the incidence of part-time

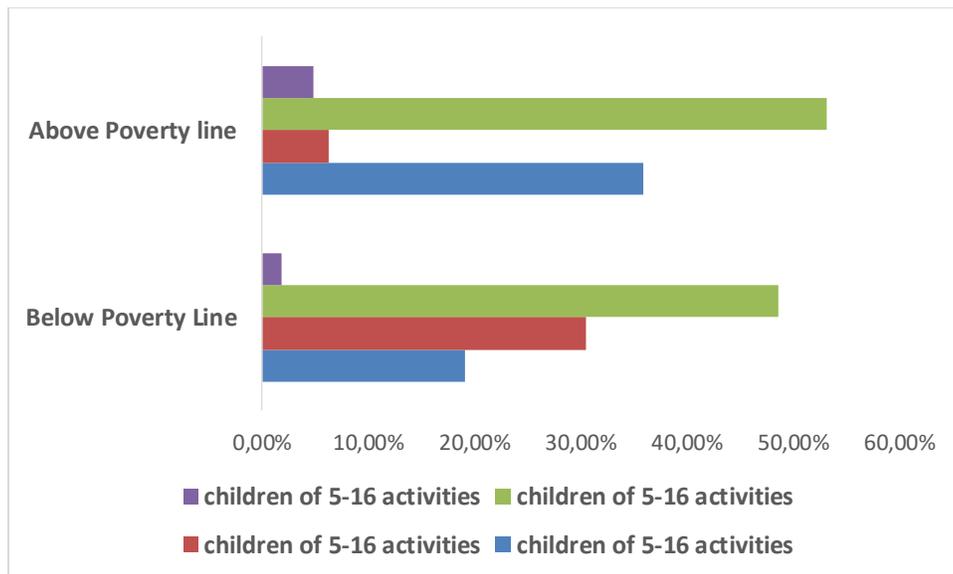
child labour (combining school with work) is directly related to several dependent members in a household.

**Figure 6 Economic Status Households**



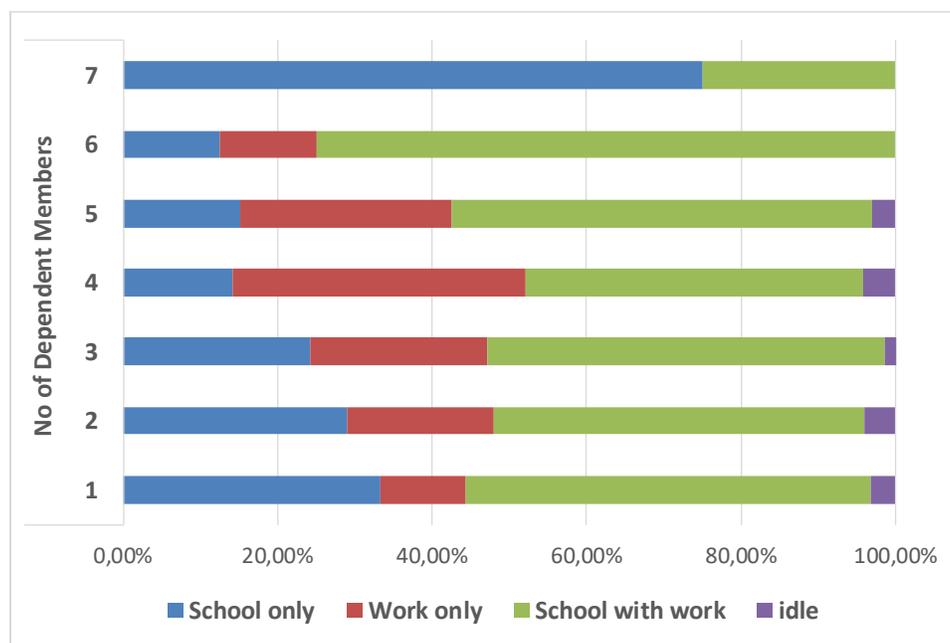
Source: author's calculation

**Figure 7 Association between Economic Status of Household and Child Activities**



Source: author's calculation

**Figure 8 Association between Number of Dependent Members of Household and Children Activities**



Source: author's calculation

#### 4 Conclusion

This study investigates the prevalence of child labour and its socioeconomic correlates in tribal districts. Due to their economic backwardness, tribal districts have the highest dropout rate and never enrolment among children of age 5-16 years. Results show that some children, parental and household characteristics, have a significant role in determining child schooling and child labour. For example, a child age is directly related to the incidence of child labour (full time and part-time). Households prefer schooling more for their younger children (5-10 years age) and child labour for their elder ones (11-16 years). Households in tribal districts are gender-biased; for example, they prefer schooling and child labour activities more for their male children than female children. Female children are preferred to remain at home and help elderly members in household chores. Similarly, fathers' education with high education prefers schooling more for their children than those of illiterate fathers. For example, fathers having M.Phil. or PhD qualification prefer schooling more for their children than those of primary-level education. Majority of mothers are illiterate in the study area. Therefore, their role in determining child schooling or child labour is not evident.

Furthermore, the father's employment status also determines child engagement in schooling or child labour. For instance, most unemployed fathers prefer to work the only status for their children, wage-worker fathers prefer schooling, and self-employed fathers prefer a school with work for their children the most. Survey results show that most of the

total households are poor, and thus Poverty is a strong correlate of child labour in tribal districts. Several dependent members in a household also determine the prevalence of child labour and child schooling. To feed many dependents, households send their children of 5-16 years of age to work. Government and non-government organizations' intervention is needed to address child labor's serious issue in tribal districts. The government can reduce child labour and increase school enrolment by providing scholarships to both sexes of children, increasing employment opportunities, and providing business loans on small-medium terms. Similarly, International and National NGOs should provide incentives (food transfers or cash transfers) on children school enrolment. Public awareness about the benefits of education is also the need of the day.

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