

# A rapid assessment of bonded labour in the carpet industry of Pakistan

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Special Action Programme to  
Combat Forced Labour

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**Working Paper**

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in the carpet industry of Pakistan**

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**International Labour Office  
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## Foreword

In June 1998 the International Labour Conference adopted a Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work and its Follow-up that obligates member States to respect, promote and realize freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour, the effective abolition of child labour, and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.<sup>1</sup> The *InFocus Programme on Promoting the Declaration* is responsible for the reporting processes and technical cooperation activities associated with the Declaration; and it carries out awareness raising, advocacy and research – of which this Working Paper is an example. Working Papers are meant to stimulate discussion of the questions covered by the Declaration. They express the views of the author, which are not necessarily those of the ILO.

This Working Paper is one of a series of Rapid Assessments of bonded labour in Pakistan, each of which examines a different economic sector. The aim of these studies is to inform the implementation of the Government of Pakistan's National Policy and Plan of Action for the Abolition of Bonded Labour, adopted in 2001. The research was conducted under the guidance of the Bonded Labour Research Forum (BLRF), a distinguished group of Pakistani research and development specialists, convened by the Ministry of Labour, Manpower and Overseas Pakistanis with the support of the ILO. The Rapid Assessments were undertaken by independent Pakistani researchers, who were selected by the BLRF for their competence and experience in the different sectors. Dr Zafar Mueen Nasir, of the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics in Islamabad, is the author of this paper on bonded labour in Pakistan's carpet-weaving sector.<sup>2</sup>

The research programme was overseen by Caroline O'Reilly of the *Special Action Programme to combat Forced Labour (SAP-FL)* of the Declaration Programme in Geneva. Ali Khan worked as Research Coordinator for the duration of the research process, based at the ILO in Islamabad.

SAP-FL is providing on-going technical assistance to support the Ministry of Labour and its partners to implement the National Policy and Plan of Action, so as to bring about the effective eradication of bonded labour in Pakistan.

March 2004

Roger Plant  
Head, Special Action Programme  
to combat Forced Labour<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The text of the Declaration is available on the web site: <http://www.ilo.org/declaration>

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## Abbreviations and acronyms

BLLF	Bonded Labour Liberation Front
CLS	Child Labour Survey
CMI	Census of Manufacturing Industries
DCO	District Coordination Officer
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GOP	Government of Pakistan
ILO	International Labour Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organizations
NIPS	National Institute of Population Studies
NWFP	North West Frontier Province
PIDE	Pakistan Institute of Development Economics
SCF	Save the Children Foundation
SPARC	Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (an NGO)
TRDP	Thardeep Rural Development Program
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNICEF	United Nation Children Fund

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## Glossary

Agarbati	A chemically filled stick (approximately 12 inch) used for fragrance
Biharies	Migrated population from Bangladesh (former East Pakistan)
Brotherly	Groups of people with the same ancestry
Buniad	NGO working in Punjab for child protection
Chattai	Mat used for sitting
Harigans	Low caste Hindus
Kacha	Unpaved structure
Kachi abadies	Settlements where the structures are unpaved
Malik	Tribal heads
Mohajars	Migrated people
Munshi	Front man or representative
Nai Abadi	New settlement
Naqsha	Coded map
Pacca	Paved
Shiah	A sect in Islam
Sudhar	NGO working in Punjab for child protection
Talim	Simplified coded map
Thar	Name of the desert area

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## Chapter One: INTRODUCTION

This study is part of a series of studies commissioned by the International Labour Organization (ILO) to identify the incidence and nature of bonded labour in different sectors of the economy in Pakistan. This report focuses on bonded labour in the carpet sector. Its findings are based on information from primary and secondary sources using both qualitative and quantitative survey techniques.

The carpet sector is one of the most important industries in Pakistan, providing jobs to million of people. Due to the industry's great potential to absorb labour and the availability of an abundant labour supply, the risk of exploitation is high. Information about bonded labour in the carpet industry is limited. This study was designed to reveal the existing social and economic relationship between employers and employees and to identify issues pertaining to bonded labour in Pakistan. In the process, an attempt was made to gauge the magnitude of bonded labour in the carpet industry. The study covers four provinces of the country, i.e., Punjab, NWFP, Sindh and Balochistan, and the analysis drew on terms of reference and consultations with ILO representatives.

The report is organized in the following manner: Chapter Two reviews the carpet sector. Chapters Three, Four, Five, and Six present the objectives, methodology, sample coverage, and difficulties encountered, respectively. Chapters Seven to Eleven discuss the production process, hazards in carpet-weaving, the carpet-weavers themselves, labour arrangements and working conditions, respectively. Chapters Twelve to Fourteen discuss entry in the carpet industry, terms and conditions, and characteristics of the main players, respectively. Chapters Fifteen and Sixteen investigate the system of advance and prevalence of bondage in the carpet industry, respectively. The final chapter presents policy recommendations.

## Chapter Two: A BROAD OVERVIEW

Carpet weaving flourished during Moghal rule (16th to 19th century), after Emperor Akbar (1556 A.D. to 1605 A.D) brought Persian carpet weavers to India and settled them in Lahore. Under Moghal patronage, the carpet industry spread to other areas of India, including Agra and Delhi. The patterns and designs of carpets and rugs produced in Pakistan blend local and Persian and Turkish designs famous for their intricate and beautiful patterns<sup>4</sup>. This blend has given a unique look to Pakistani carpets which are today demanded all over the world.

Pakistani carpets were introduced to the West in the 1950s via the United Kingdom. In the last 20 years, Pakistan has emerged as one of the leading exporters of hand-knotted carpets to Western markets due to the dedication and hard work of its craftsmen. In 2002, Pakistan exported an estimated 5.1 million square meters of carpets and rugs worth Rs.15, 275 million<sup>5</sup>. The hand-knotted carpet industry accounts for 0.64 percent share of total GDP, 3.66 percent of manufacturing sector GDP and approximately 14 percent of small-scale manufacturing sector GDP. The available evidence indicates that Pakistan's carpet and rugs industry make up around 2.5 percent of total exports.<sup>6</sup> Different estimates show that more than 1.5 million people are employed in this sector and more than three million people directly or indirectly depend on its earnings.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Irfan Ahmed Khan, *Child Labour in Thar*, 1998, Karachi, SCF.

<sup>5</sup> Pakistan Economic Survey, 2001-02.

<sup>6</sup> See State Bank of Pakistan, *Statistical Bulletin, 2001* and Export Promotion Bureau, *Pakistan's Exports of Principal Commodities, 2001-02*, GOP, Karachi.

<sup>7</sup> Pakistan produces both hand knotted and machine made carpets. According to knowledgeable informants, about 70 to 75 percent hand-knotted carpets are made in households while 25 to 30 percent in sheds in urban and rural areas. Hand knotted carpets have a higher demand in the foreign markets (95% of the hand knotted carpets are sold in

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Until the early 1970s, the carpet industry received no government patronage and limited carpet-weaving activity took place in big cities like Lahore, Multan and Karachi. In the 1970s, Zulfqar Ali Bhutto, then prime minister of Pakistan, adopted policies to encourage carpet-weaving in the country, including setting up a number of carpet-weaving centres in different parts of the country. This effort increased production, routed to the European and American markets. The data on carpet exports shows a 1.68-time increase in earnings in just one year, i.e. from 1970-71 to 1971-72, with an increase in earnings from Rs.65million to Rs.109million. The upsurge in demand for hand-knotted carpets in foreign markets continued in the 1980s and 1990s. However, with the slump in the international economy in recent years, the demand for hand-knotted carpets has declined. Even so, Pakistan managed to earn more than Rs15 billion last year (see Annex Table 1). The USA, the largest buyer of carpets from Pakistan, imports carpets worth US\$70-80 million annually.

Most of the carpets reaching the international market are produced in small centres/sheds and homes rather than in big workshops or centres. With the implementation of the labour laws and the Factory Act of the mid-1970s, many big centres disintegrated into small units that eventually moved into residential areas to operate in private homes and sheds. The business also expanded to small cities/towns and villages. The latest information obtained through surveys indicates that most carpet-weaving activity takes place in homes throughout the country.<sup>8</sup>

Although a large variety of carpets are made in Pakistan, two design types, Bokhara and Persian, dominate the market. The Bokhara carpets are single-knotted, lower-piled, simple-design carpets with fewer knots per square inch. The Persian types are double-knotted, higher-piled rugs with detailed designs and colour variation and a higher number of knots per square inch. The most famous Bokhara-type are the Mori, Jaldar, Saruk, and Jhoomar designs, which make up 90 percent of production. Among the Persian type are the Khorasan, Isphahan, Kerman, Tabriz, and Samarkand, named after major Iranian and Central Asian manufacturing centres. Some local varieties have a mixture of both local and Iranian patterns, including Chand Chothai, Shajarkari, Shikargah, Nani, and Mohenjodaro designs produced in different parts of the country.<sup>9</sup>

### **Chapter Three: OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The study's main objectives were to:

- Identify major steps in the production process to understand the nature of work in the carpet industry;
- Identify different arrangements between contractors and carpet-weavers to understand the nature of the relationship between parties;
- Develop an understanding of the socio-economic profile of contractors and carpet-weavers;
- Determine the extent of the peshgi/advance payment system in the production process;
- Determine the incidence of bonded labour in the carpet –industry;
- Determine different reasons for bonded labour in the carpet industry;
- Identify areas having a concentration of extreme types of bonded labour;

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foreign markets) as these are better quality and more durable compared to machine-made carpets. Machine made carpets are lower in price and mostly consumed in the domestic market. "Pakistan carpet Industry: Present and Future." The News International, Feb 26, 1992. The estimated employees in 15 units producing machine-made carpets obtained from Census of Manufacturing Industries (CMI) 1996-97 were only 2320, which is a very small percentage of total employees in the carpet manufacturing sector. The figures may not reflect the actual situation because of tendency of under reporting and low responses rate to mailed questionnaires.

<sup>8</sup> Export Promotion Bureau, Pakistan Hand-knotted Carpets: A Golden Heritage, no date.

<sup>9</sup> The carpet named "*chand chothai*" has a round centre with designs at the corner; the "*shajarkari*" contains tree designs; "*shikargah*" incorporates animal hunting scenes. The carpet named as "*nani*" is the modified version of an old Iranian design, and "*Mohenjodaro*" design incorporates both Sindhi and Iranian culture.

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- Provide recommendations for a future course of action.

## **Chapter Four: METHODOLOGY**

### ***a) DATA SOURCES***

To obtain information on bonded labour, both secondary sources and primary data were used. Secondary information was obtained from the existing literature on the carpet sector, including publications of the ILO, World Bank, UNDP and research made by different national and international institutions and published in government documents. Reference is made to these sources throughout the report and in footnotes, and they are listed in the bibliography.

Qualitative data were collected through individual and group interviews with exporters, employers, contractors/middlemen, carpet-weavers, carpet-washers, and other labourers in the carpet sector. Semi-structured interview guides were used for discussion with community leaders, village elders, government officials, elected members of the district government, representatives of the non-governmental organizations, trade union leaders, human right activists, social workers and other knowledgeable key informants to understand the dynamics of the carpet industry. Checklists were used for individual and group discussions with employers, workers (both adult and children), parents and exporters involved in carpet-manufacturing and trading to shed light on indebtedness and other arrangements which lead to the exploitation of labour in the carpet industry.

### ***b) SITE SELECTION***

In site selection, secondary information was used, along with information obtained from key informants, such as carpet-exporters/wholesalers, government officials, representatives of NGOs, trade union leaders and other knowledgeable individuals. The aim of these discussions was to identify the area where carpet-weaving activity takes place on a large-scale, as well as to seek information from these officials about problems confronting workers in this sector. Officials of the Labour Directorate, Small Industries Directorate, Local Administration, and Social Welfare Department provided some information and help in this regard. The most help was, however, provided by the carpet-exporters/wholesalers in different cities.

Key informants identified a number of locations; however, only those locations with a concentration of carpet-weaving activity were selected. Fieldwork for the qualitative and quantitative survey was carried out in 23 locations in all four provinces of the country. Among them, 14 locations were in the urban areas and nine were in the rural areas. Province-wise distribution of sites shows that five locations were in NWFP, nine in Punjab, seven in Sindh, and two in Balochistan. This selection reflects the approximate distribution of carpet-making in the country. The details of the areas selected are provided below.

#### **NORTH WEST FRONTIER PROVINCE (NWFP)**

The literature review and interviews with knowledgeable informants revealed that Afghani refugees dominate the carpet industry in NWFP [Al-Jalali et.al (1993)].<sup>10</sup> A number of refugee camps and other

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<sup>10</sup> For this particular information a number of persons were interviewed. Prominent among them were Master Khuda Dad, President, All Pakistan Bonded Labour Liberation Front (BLLF)  
Mr Khalid Jan Durrani, Director, Directorate of Labour, Peshawar.  
Mr. Zahoor, Deputy Director, Directorate of Labour, Peshawar.  
Mr. Asad Durrani, Peshawar University, Peshawar.

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localities with a concentration of Afghani refugees were referred to during the discussions. For the purpose of this assessment, two districts, Peshawar and Mardan, where refugee camps were established during the Afghan conflict, were selected. Some Afghani families still live in the regular refugee camps; others have settled in nearby localities. The local population were also engaged in carpet-weaving when the refugees established sheds in the local residential area. To cover both local and Afghani carpet-weavers, the following locations were selected:

Nazar Bostan, Peshawar  
Akhun-abad, Peshawar  
Afghan Colony, Peshawar  
Kacha Ghari refugee camp, Peshawar  
Jalala Afghani Camp, Mardan

The Kacha Ghari and Jalala refugee camps are in rural areas while Afghani colony is a semi-urban location with a majority of mud houses. The other two locations are in Peshawar.

### PUNJAB PROVINCE

A number of NGOs working on child labour and related issues have collected comprehensive information on the carpet industry of Punjab province [Akida 2002, Peri 1989]. We complemented this with information obtained from other sources.<sup>11</sup> Although carpet-weaving is found in many districts of Punjab, we selected only three districts for the rapid assessment. These districts had the highest number of looms operating at the time of the study [Akida, 2002]. Nine locations were selected from these districts. Among them, five are urban and four are rural.

These locations are:

Jahangir Park, Shahdara, Lahore  
Muridki village, Sheikopura  
Farooqabad village, Sheikopura  
Nazimpur village, Sheikopura  
Chungi number 3, Sheikopura  
Younispur village, Sialkot  
Basti Gagan shah, Duska, Sialkot  
Basti Hayat, Duska, Sialkot  
Tali Gila, Duska, Sialkot

Preference was given to areas where no intervention has been made by NGOs or international organizations to raise awareness among communities and provide educational facilities for child labourers. As intervention by these organizations has significantly improved the situation, it was felt that such areas would not reveal the full problem of labour bondage.<sup>12</sup>

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Additional Secretary, NWFP Industries, Peshawar.

Representative, All Pakistan Federation of Labour, Peshawar.

<sup>11</sup> The interviews with the following individuals benefited the process of site selection.

Representative, Pakistan Carpet Manufacturers and Exporter Association, Lahore.

Mr. Osama Tariq, Secretary, All Pakistan Federation of Trade Unions, Lahore.

Mr. Muhammad Ashfaq, President, Trade union, Multan.

Mr Javid Gill, Director, Labour Directorate, Lahore.

Ms. Seemi Waheed, Pakistan Administrative Staff College, Lahore.

Mr Jameel, Sociology Department, Punjab University, Lahore.

Ms Sarwat, SPARC, Islamabad.

<sup>12</sup> For more details, please see the quarterly reports of Sudhar, Buniad, and Save the Children-UK etc.

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## SINDH PROVINCE

The carpet industry in interior Sindh is located in the Thar Desert. Because of the recent drought in the area, a number of national and international NGOs are active in helping the needy and unprivileged population. Based on the available information and interviews with key informants, two urban and three rural locations were selected for assessment of bonded labour.<sup>13</sup> All these locations were in the Mithi Tehsil. The selected sites include:

- Harigan Colony, Mithi city
- Lohar Colony, Mithi city
- Dharar Village, Mithi
- Malyar Village, Mithi
- Bhadoor Village, Mithi

The discussion with key informants helped to identify areas in Karachi where carpet-weaving and related activities are taking place. The main activity, however, is in areas where migrants from Bangladesh and Myanmar have settled.<sup>14</sup> Two locations –

- Orangi town, Karachi and
- Korangi town, Karachi

were selected for the rapid assessment.

## BALUCHISTAN PROVINCE

As there are no secondary sources on the carpet industry in Balochistan, site selection was based on interviews with key informants.<sup>15</sup> The following sites were selected:

- East Hazara Town, Baroori, Nai abadi, Quetta
- West Hazara Town, Murreeabad, Quetta.

There are no other private sector carpet-weaving locations in Balochistan. A number of government-established carpet-weaving and training centres are running in some major cities.<sup>16</sup> It was observed that

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<sup>13</sup> Some of the persons interviewed for the information on carpet industry and bonded labour issue were  
Mr. Allah Nawaz Sumoo, Thardeep Rural Development Program (TRDP), Mithi, Tharparkar  
Mr. Noor Mohammad Gangi, Executive District Office, Mithi, Tharparkar  
Mr. Ram Singh Sohdo, Naib District Nazim, Mithi, Tharparkar  
Mr. Mohammad Sajjad, Superintendent, DCO office, Mithi, Tharparkar.

<sup>14</sup> A number of individuals were interviewed for obtaining information about bonded labour in carpet industry in Karachi. Some of the individual who provided information include  
Mr. Ghulam Rasul, Social Welfare Officer, Karachi  
Dr Khawar Kamal, Director, Labour Directorate, Karachi  
Mr. Hameed Ullah, Social Work and Candidate for Nazim  
Mr. Fateh Muhammad Burfat, Sociology Department, Karachi University.  
Naib Nazim, Orangi Area, Karachi.  
Mr. Saleem, Carpet Exporter and Wholesaler, Karachi.

<sup>15</sup> In Quetta, a large number of individual were contacted. Some of them are  
Sardar Atif Ali Sanjrani, Ex MNA, Chaghi  
Mr Asif Ali Changazi, Paragon Enterprise (Carpet manufacturer and Exporter), Quetta  
Mr Aziz Malik, Deputy Director, Balochistan Small Industries Department, Quetta,  
Syed Altaf Shah, Deputy Director, Directorate of Labour, Balochistan, Quetta.  
Mr. Aslam Pane Zai, Idara Taraqi, ( NGO), Quetta,  
Mr Sultan, All Pakistan Federation of Labour, Quetta.  
Brig. (R) Mumtaz, Refugee Commissioner, Balochistan.

<sup>16</sup> According to the Balochistan Small Industries department, Quetta, the centres were running in Chaman, Dalbandin, Noushki, Pangoor, and Nokundi districts. The biggest centre is in Chaman employing approximately 300 workers. The remaining centres are small, employing around 100 workers each.

there was not much exploitation of labour due to the application and implementation of government service rules. Therefore these centres are excluded from the sample.

## Chapter Five: SAMPLE COVERAGE

The initial plan included selecting three locations, one urban and two rural, in each province for the assessment of bonded labour. In each location, we planned to visit five workplaces, interviewing 10 workers at each site. The ground realities were, however, different and we had to modify our plan. For example, we found that most of the workplaces employed only six to eight workers. We visited a number of workplaces to cover all groups (exporters, contractors, middlemen, weavers and washers) involved in the production process to fully understand the process and the relationship between employers and employees. Special care was taken to include exporters, employers/contractors and employees of diverse backgrounds (ethnic, religious, tribal and caste).

Information was collected on the number of workers, their age and gender composition, family background, education-level, wage-rate, terms and conditions of employment, entry in the sector, and mode of payment. Specific information about debt bondage and other forms of bondage was also gathered. The check-list was not strictly followed in cases where other interesting issues emerged from the discussions.

The results of the study are based on the information collected from 374 workers, 38 contractors and 12 exporters.<sup>17</sup> In the process, our teams visited 109 workplaces, 32 homes and 77 sheds and interviewed at least one official from the labour department, one NGO representative, and one elected member from each province. The province-wise distribution of the sample is given in Table One.<sup>18</sup>

**Table One: Province-wise distribution of sample**

Sample	Punjab	Sindh	NWFP	Balochistan	Total
<b>Workplaces</b>	43	27	22	17	109
<b>Exporters/ wholesalers</b>	4	3	3	2	12
<b>Employers</b>	15	10	7	6	38
<b>Workers</b>	171	81	74	48	374
<b>Govt officials</b>	4	3	3	4	14
<b>Trade union</b>	2	1	1	1	5
<b>NGO representatives</b>	3	3	2	1	8
<b>Elected representatives</b>	1	2	1	1	5

## SURVEY TEAMS

Four different teams headed by a principal investigator collected data for the study. Each team was comprised of two male and two female members. This make-up was essential as no female was permitted by her parents to travel alone. Moreover, the inclusion of two females made it easy for teams to develop rapport with interviewees and other family members and to earn the trust of the community. The presence of two male members was necessary for the security of the team, especially for female members, in the far-flung and difficult areas. Each team member was a university graduate and had extensive field experience.

<sup>17</sup> We tried to include the industry representatives in the sample to have their view about the existence of bonded labour in carpet industry, besides other information. The representatives however forcefully denied the existence of bonded labour in the hand knotted carpet industry.

<sup>18</sup> For further breakdown, please see annexure tables.

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Many of them had already worked on surveys conducted by Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), National Institute of Population Studies (NIPS), and Population Council. In the selection process, other considerations, such as their familiarity with the area and the language spoken in that particular area, were also taken into account. A comprehensive training session was conducted for teams before embarking on the fieldwork.

## **Chapter Six: DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED DURING SURVEY**

The main difficulty encountered was site selection. Most government officials were reluctant to give specific information about the carpet-weaving areas, mainly because they were apprehensive about the involvement of children in the business. On the other hand, information about bonded labour provided by representatives of Bonded Labour Liberation Front (BLLF) proved to be highly exaggerated. (According to the BLLF representatives, as many as 60 percent of carpet-weavers are bonded). Exporters/wholesalers with shops in main cities provided the most relevant information. We solicited their help in identifying the areas with carpet-weaving activities without mentioning the bonded labour issues.<sup>19</sup> They not only identified the areas, but also the relevant persons involved in the business. Later on, when these exporters/wholesalers were interviewed, they showed their ignorance about the bonded labour issue in carpet-weaving sector.

No major difficulty was encountered in the fieldwork, except the attitude of the contractor/middleman. The contractors/middlemen or their *munshi*/representatives were sceptical of our motives and perceived us as tax persons.<sup>20</sup> It was extremely difficult to interview workers in their presence. On some occasions, the representatives of the contractors adopted a threatening posture and ordered us to leave the premises immediately. Workers were also ordered not to disclose any specific information. In Afghani camps, one contractor advised his workers to pretend that they did not understand our language. Some workers in Punjab and Sindh were so scared of the contractors that they simply refused to talk. Even in Karachi where people are usually more open than in other places, workers were not willing to speak out against their employers. However, our team members received full cooperation from the Hindu community in Thar Desert and Hazra Community in Quetta.

## **Chapter Seven: THE MANUFACTURING PROCESS**

To understand the problem of bonded labour in the carpet industry, it is important to study the details of the manufacturing process and the tools used at different stages of production. The hand-knotted carpet industry is highly labour-intensive in nature and few tools are used in the production process. The looms, usually made of wood or iron, play a vital role in carpet-weaving. The looms are simple devices made up of two poles vertically attached to two bars. An average loom costs Rs. 3500 and lasts for 15-20 years. A knife is used for shearing yarn after the knots are tied. A large comb is used for packing down the wefts. Once lines of knots are formed, clippers are used to trim the extra yarn. The carpet is made according to the detailed map inscribed on multi-colour graph paper known as *naqsha*. The *naqsha* is a simple, easy to understand replacement of the old coded map called *talim*.

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<sup>19</sup> One of the reasons of hiding the purpose of our study from exporters/wholesalers was the apprehension of team members to receive the cooperation from them in identifying the right places. Therefore it was decided not to reveal the purpose till the situation was known.

<sup>20</sup> *Munshi* is the representative of the contractor in relatively bigger workshops who not only works in the shed as weaver but also monitors the work force in the absence of contractor. In some situations, *Munshi* also helps in the purchase of raw material, food and other needful items and makes some decisions for smooth functioning of the workshops. In general, however, he is not empowered to make decisions regarding labour.

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As hand-knotted carpets are mainly export items, the manufacturing process starts with the orders received from abroad. The exporter contacts contractors/middlemen to engage weavers to complete the order. The commissioned weavers are given advance money as a subsistence wage to begin the work. The exporter pays this amount through the contractor under terms and conditions agreed upon by both parties. Usually the exporter and contractor mutually agree on the price (per piece) and payment schedule in advance. Some money is paid upfront by the exporter for the purchase of raw materials and for advance payments to the weavers. The contractor receives the remaining amount according to the schedule and pays the workers according to the weekly progress of the carpets. Because exporters are rich and influential in the business, contractors usually avoid cheating on them and abide by the terms of agreement.

In general, looms are owned by the exporters and the contractor/middleman arranges carpet-weavers to work on these looms. In some cases, the contractors/middlemen also own looms and rent them to the workers. Informants revealed that about 75-80 percent looms are installed in homes and only 20-25 percent in sheds. Weavers prefer to have looms installed in their homes, to save on travel and food costs and so that the whole family can take part in carpet-weaving. When looms are installed in sheds, carpet-weavers' work on separate looms, sometimes with the help of their children. The exporter also provides other equipment and raw materials such as wool, cotton and silk.

The design and size of the carpets to be made depends upon the orders received from abroad. The wage and time to complete the carpet depends upon many factors, including the type, size and quality of the carpet. Production of a 4x6-foot Persian double-knotted carpet such as Bakhtiari, Tabraiz, Isfahan and Kashan takes a single worker six to seven months, while a single-knotted Mori, Bukhara or Jal Sarooque carpet of the same size takes a weaver three to four months.

Weavers are paid either a daily wage or by piece-rate, depending upon the agreement. In times of high demand, weavers get relatively better deals in terms of wages and working conditions. During low demand, employers try to dictate their own terms and conditions by paying lower wages and imposing other restrictions. A weaver starts work on a new carpet with a minimum advance payment of one week and a maximum of one year. The amount of advance is determined according to existing practice or as negotiated by the parties. The amount of the advance usually depends upon the agreed-upon wage-rate or the total labour cost of the carpet. Male family members agree the wages of females and children.<sup>21</sup> The acceptance of an advance is an unwritten binding contract between the carpet-weaver and the contractor. The weaver is expected to complete the carpet and the employer is expected to pay wages on time. In most cases, payments are made weekly with the loan adjustments. Final payments are made on the completion of the carpet.

Payment for a double-knotted carpet is higher than that for single-knotted carpets due to the double labour effort, costly raw materials and the carpet's greater value in the international market. Most often, highly skilled labours are hired to work on complex double-knotted carpets. These workers are in high demand as their skills bring a premium. Most of these weavers work alone and complete the whole carpet.

It takes at least two years to become a skilled worker. Although there is no restriction on an adult becoming a trainee weaver, it would be difficult to attain the skill level of workers who started carpet-weaving as children. Carpet-weaving skills are acquired on-the-job in private sheds or on home-based looms. There are no government training facilities in the country and the burden of training new entrants is on the private sector.<sup>22</sup> A trainee begins by watching skilled workers, observing the knot-making process,

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<sup>21</sup> Traditionally in a male dominated society like Pakistan, decisions about the participation of females in economic activities and the terms of employment are usually made by the adult males without any consultation with female members of the family. The majority of females accept these decisions without any objection.

<sup>22</sup> In Balochistan province, there are some centres being run by the Balochistan small industries department. The funding for these facilities is insufficient which is making it difficult to continue running them.

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how knots are cut and how different colours are used. After a couple of weeks, a trainee child actually starts the knot-making process. The *ustad* (a skilled labourer who accepts a child as his student) guides the child about the type of knots, colour of wool to be used, and place of that particular colour in the carpet.

On completion of the carpet, the contractor/middleman settles accounts with the workers and makes the final payment after deductions of outstanding amounts. The carpet is then delivered to the exporter who settles his accounts with the contractor. The exporter then transports these carpets to workshops for further processing, i.e., washing, drying and clipping.

Washing is altogether a different occupation and only experienced workers adept in washing, drying and clipping do these jobs. Washing workshops are run by individuals who were once themselves washers. The washing and related processes are performed on a piece-rate basis, depending on the size and quality of the carpet. Carpets are first rinsed with water and, then, diluted solutions of sulphuric acid and bleaching powder are applied together to clean and produce fast colours. The carpets are thoroughly brushed both before and after this process. The washed carpets are, then, hung on bamboo poles or walls to dry. Finally, the carpet is clipped using a special pair of scissors to give it final shape. No standard procedure is adopted in the process of cleaning, drying and washing.

The whole process (weaving, washing, drying and clipping) takes five to six months for a single-knotted carpet and eight to nine months for a double-knotted carpet. In the production process, manual labour is employed in all stages of production, including weaving, washing and drying. Because of the intensity of labour used in all steps, the relationship between parties plays a crucial role in the emergence of bondage.

## **Chapter Eight: HAZARDS IN CARPET WEAVING**

The **Child Labour Survey (CLS)** 1996 collected information on hazards affecting children in different industries. According to this survey, the carpet industry has the highest incidence of illness and injuries for children. A number of studies conducted in the carpet sector identify the hazards involved:

- Work-related injuries;
- Eye disease and eye strain due to insufficient light in workshops/sheds;
- Pain due to continuously sitting in specific positions;
- Pulmonary diseases due to wool dust;
- Headaches due to concentration required by the work;
- Skeletal deformation;
- Weakness and malnutrition due to inadequate food.

The assessment process gave special attention to the health of workers and the workplace environment. Visits to different areas indicated that almost all children working in the carpet-weaving sector experience finger injuries, through the use of sharp instruments. Injury rates are highest in NWFP and Balochistan provinces where young children are employed in a higher proportion. No worker takes any safety measures during the work and no medical help is available in case of emergency. The environment of the sheds (for example, older workers in almost all sheds were found smoking cigarettes) is also a health hazard.

The health of the workers in all provinces is poor. In NWFP, and in Karachi many workers were observed to have coughs. In Thar Desert, most of the workers are malnourished and many of them have some type of skeletal deformation. We met many sick workers in their homes and found that most of them were diagnosed with TB and other pulmonary diseases.

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The situation of female weavers in the carpet industry is also far from satisfactory. The majority of them are frail and malnourished and complain of continuous bouts of headache and weak eyesight. The condition of women working in their homes is better than those employed in the sheds.

## **Chapter Nine: WHO ARE THE CARPET-WEAVERS?**

Different communities are involved in the carpet-weaving activities in different parts of the country. In NWFP, carpet-weaving is concentrated among Afghani refugees of particular tribes or ethnic groups called “Tajik” and “Gillim Jum” who started weaving in the refugee camps of NWFP during the early 1980s when they realized that foreign forces occupying Afghanistan would not be leaving soon and that they would have to stay longer in Pakistan. The Afghani refugees are not very social beyond their own strong-knit communities, live in extended families and pool their resources to live a better life in the refugee camps. Over the years, some Pashtun tribes from Afghanistan have entered carpet-weaving.

The rapid expansion of carpet-weaving among the local population started when those Afghani families who preferred to stay in Pakistan, settled in low-income areas and *Kachi abadies* such as Afghani colony.<sup>23</sup> In these colonies, sheds were established for carpet-weavers and carpet-weaving also started in the homes of these refugees. Women and children were dominant among workers. The easy entry lured the local population also to take advantage of income-earning opportunities.

In Punjab, low-income families involved in non-agricultural activities first entered carpet-weaving. In the beginning, the work was confined to cloth-weavers, but gradually unemployed persons from agricultural families also joined this sector. Now workers from diverse background are engaged in carpet-weaving. The only common factor among them is their illiteracy and unemployment.

The Thar Desert, where both Muslims and Hindus of different castes live side-by-side and are involved in carpet-weaving, presents a unique picture. Each village where carpet-weaving activity takes place is dominated by a particular religion or caste. For example, in Malyar village, workers are Muslim Bajeers. In Dharar village, Hindus of Mangwar caste are involved in carpet-weaving, while Hindus of Bheel caste are also settled in the village. Bhadoor village, visited by our team, has both Muslim Bajeers and Hindu Mangwars, but Muslim Bajeers are mainly involved in carpet-weaving.

In the Orangi and Korangi areas of Karachi, Mohajar communities (Biharies and Burmese) are involved in carpet-weaving. The Bihary community migrated from Bangladesh, while Burmese migrated from Myanmar. The majority of them brought carpet-weaving skills with them when they migrated to Pakistan. In the beginning, male workers, along with their families, continued to weave carpets as their main source of income, but later, males shifted to other higher-income professions to raise their earnings. Their families, however, continue carpet-weaving at home to earn additional income. The younger generation is also involved.

The carpet industry in Balochistan is limited to the areas surrounding Quetta where Hazara tribes are settled. The Hazara tribes are Shiah Muslims and have roots in Iran and Afghanistan. They are mostly business-minded people and are particularly good at carpet-weaving and shoe-making. Hazaras are not very open people and avoid mixing with other communities. A large number of Afghani Hazaras have also taken refuge in this area and work as carpet-weavers.

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<sup>23</sup> The Kachi abadies are illegal settlements with makeshift structures. Due to the lack of basic facilities, these abadies are like slum areas. These abadies are usually on unused government land; therefore dwellers can be evicted without any advance notice.

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## Chapter Ten: LABOUR ARRANGEMENTS

Different types of arrangements were encountered in the carpet-weaving sector of different provinces. The exporter provides finances in all cases where he places an order with the contractor/middleman. Some funds are paid upfront, and the remainder upon the contractor's demand. In cases where contractors/middlemen produce carpets for sale and not at the exporter's demand, contractors themselves have to finance the whole production process. In this case, the contractors sell their product to the exporter who pays the best price.

Two systems of payment are prevalent, daily wage-rate and piece-rate. When the loom is installed at the worker's residence, the work is carried out on a piece-rate basis with the rate fixed per line/inch of knots completed. When looms are installed at a common place or shed, the workers are engaged either on a piece-rate basis or on daily wages. In all of these cases, the exporter/wholesaler provides raw materials through the middleman. Wages depend on prevailing market conditions, skill level, bargaining power of workers, and their vulnerability to exploitation. Contractors charge workers rent of Rs 15-20 per loom per week as part of the deal.<sup>24</sup>

Where looms are installed at the homes of the carpet-weavers, the exporter, through the contractor/middleman provides raw materials and the "talim" of the type of carpet to be made. Carpet-weavers are expected to work on the carpet at their convenience and with family help. The majority of weavers prefer this arrangement as they can save on travel and related costs. Moreover, they can monitor their children and get help from the family in weaving.<sup>25</sup> In this arrangement, the carpet is contracted out to the whole family for completion. The contractors monitor the progress of the carpet on a weekly basis and pay for the completed portion of the carpet. The rates are usually the same as in the sheds.

Weaving sheds may be rented or be the contractor/middleman's own property. Female weavers work in separate sheds close to their homes. Bathroom and kitchen facilities are available in all sheds and workers are free to use these facilities. There is no restriction on workers talking but they mostly concentrate on their work due to its complexity. We found no sheds where adult females work side-by-side male workers. In some cases, however, female child workers were helping their male family members in the male sheds.

In NWFP, the majority of looms are owned by the carpet exporters/wholesalers having shops in Peshawar. Middlemen/contractors negotiate different labour arrangements for work on the exporters' behalf. The exporters/wholesalers finance the weaving activities through contractors.

In Punjab, similar arrangements prevail. The main characteristic of the carpet sector in Punjab is, however, the ownership of sheds by a few local contractors. For example, out of four places visited by our team in Lahore, three were owned and operated by one contractor and the fourth shed was owned by his father. This indicates that a very few families have control over the business in particular areas of Punjab. The only business tie these people have with the exporter is the contract of carpets to be manufactured. The contractors arrange looms, raw materials, and labour and sell carpets to exporters/wholesalers.

Most of the workers in Punjab are hired on daily wages and only in exceptional cases, on a piece-rate basis. Workers are obligated to complete a carpet they start or otherwise face the wrath of the contractor. Contractors are influential people, having links with police and local administration. They forcefully implement the contract and take all possible steps to punish those who breach it. Some workers

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<sup>24</sup> Workers are paid net of rent payment. The wages and other income quoted elsewhere are also net of rent payment.

<sup>25</sup> Monitoring of children was a very serious consideration of workers as they believed that children get spoiled without their active vigilance. Besides skill accumulation, this was another reason for these workers to bring their children with them in the sheds.

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told the story of two workers who left the village and did not come back because of their fear of the contractors.

In Thar Desert, carpet-weavers work for daily wages, mostly in sheds/workshops owned by the sub-contractor/middleman. Exporters have contacts with the middlemen who sub-contract work to local contractors. These local sub-contractors live in the surrounding villages or in Mithi city and hire labour from their own villages and castes. For example, a Mangwar sub-contractor in Dharar village uses only Mangwar workers; a Bajeer sub-contractor, only Bajeer workers. These workers follow the same terms and conditions prevailing in other parts of the country. They are allowed to choose their own schedules, but must work eight hours a day. In Mithi, the sub-contractors are influential Muslims or Hindus with property in the city area. The labour is arranged through a Munshi who is empowered to set terms and conditions of employment. Low-caste Hindus (Harigans) make up the majority of the labour force. In Karachi, we found both types of arrangements in the Orangi and Korangi area: those who work in their homes are paid on a piece-rate basis, while in sheds, the payment is made both on a piece-rate and daily-wage basis.

In Balochistan, in addition to the usual arrangements, skilled workers contract the weaving of an entire carpet. The amount of the contract varies from carpet to carpet, depending on the time required for completion. On average, Rs.18,000 to Rs.20,000 is paid for a 4x6-foot double-knotted Persian carpet requiring a single worker six to seven months. Another arrangement is the per-line rate, which also varies from worker to worker. The employers own the looms, provide raw materials and fill the orders received from wholesalers/exporters.

## **Chapter Eleven: WORKING CONDITIONS**

As mentioned earlier, carpet-weaving takes place either in a common workplace/shed or the weaver's home. Families who prefer the installation of looms at their residence, live in one-room houses with a veranda and courtyard (shade). The loom/looms are installed either in the room or in the veranda. The lighting in the veranda is better than in the room. The weavers sit on hard benches to weave the carpets or on a *chattai* (mat), both uncomfortable. In most cases, facilities such as water, bathroom and kitchen are available.

The majority of the sheds have five to eight looms. The biggest shed we observed had 11 looms installed. Each worker has his own loom. Ninety percent of these structures are *kacha* and only 10 percent are *pacca*. Usually, looms are installed in a big room, which is properly lit. The sitting space is, in most cases, not sufficient for weavers to move freely. In the sheds we visited, wool dust was flying around and nobody was wearing a protection mask. Many weavers were smoking. Other weavers were chewing tobacco and spitting on the floor, making the environment even more unhygienic and injurious to health.

In around two-thirds of the sheds we visited, weavers were from the same area and returned home after finishing their work. In the rest, weavers were from far-off places and stayed in the sheds. Inspection of the sheds revealed that they live either in the main hall or stock rooms, their beds stacked in the corner of the workshops. In almost all cases, facilities such as kitchen, bathrooms, water, gas and electricity were available for the use of these workers so that they could save on labour time and spend more hours on work. Our teams found no recreation facilities in any of the manufacturing facility. None of the places were registered with the labour department and nobody was aware of such a type of registration.

The participation of children in carpet-weaving varies from place to place. In all workplaces our teams visited, children under 15 year were working alongside adult weavers. Almost half of the total workforce employed in the establishments we observed were children (see Annexure Table 3 for details).

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The workshops/sheds we visited in villages of Thar Desert were unique as they are small, round huts with small windows for light and fresh air and without electricity. Two to three looms were installed in each hut. These sheds were neat and clean. Most of the workers are from the same village, so no boarding and lodging facilities are available for workers. Some looms are installed at the weaver's residences where female workers are also involved in carpet-weaving. The environment of these work places was also clean.

In Mithi, most of the workshops are in the residential areas and operate in the big houses as well as in single rooms with such facilities as kitchens, baths, storerooms and bedrooms. Local people as well as workers from other areas are present. Only a small proportion of the workforce is Muslim and the vast majority are Hindus. The employers have links with local representatives and administration. In most of the cases, and the employer has started his business with his own capital. All carpet-weaving takes place in the sheds and no looms are installed in homes in the city. The workshops are managed by the *munshi* who is responsible for the hiring and firing of the workers. He is also empowered to set terms and conditions for employment. Board and lodging (sometimes storage rooms) is provided to migrant workers. Employers come occasionally to monitor the progress of the work. Although temperatures run high in Thar, our teams found no fans in any of the sheds.

## **Chapter Twelve: ENTRY INTO THE CARPET WEAVING SECTOR**

Entry into the carpet-weaving sector used to be easy because of the high demand for hand-knotted carpets in the international market. Employers were open to hiring new workers willing to work for minimum or no wages in return for getting on-the-job training and who, by increasing the supply of trained weavers, would allow employers to dictate terms and conditions and suppress market wages. In general, no special procedure was required to enter the carpet sector beyond an introduction to the employer by a referee who would take responsibility for the worker's behaviour.<sup>26</sup> Today, however, with the rising unemployment in the country and the decline in demand for Pakistani carpets abroad, good connections with employers are important to enter this sector.

In Punjab, many contractors have withdrawn from the carpet sector, leaving many skilled carpet-weavers jobless. The survey team found many workshops closed that once employed more than 20 people. New entrants into the sector must have links with the employers/middlemen.

In Thar and Quetta, the prerequisite for entry is to be from the same religion/caste/tribe as the contractor. Hindus in Thar prefer Hindu workers of their own caste, while Hazaras in Quetta prefer their own tribesmen.

## **Chapter Thirteen: TERMS AND CONDITIONS**

Terms and conditions in the carpet industry are set by the contractor/middleman and vary from employer to employer. Due to the slump in the carpet business, even highly trained carpet-weavers are unemployed; consequently, contractors have even more power to employ workers on their own terms.

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<sup>26</sup> The common referees were close relatives, friends /neighbours or business associates. Many people enter the carpet weaving sector as a temporary step while looking for better paying jobs in other sectors or some other alternative businesses. For example in Karachi, we observed that many carpet weaving families started Agar Bati businesses where the whole family was able to work and make a decent living. Some carpet weavers start working in Banarsi cloth making where they are able to make more than their earnings from carpet weaving.

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Terms and conditions are set by mutual consent; they are not formally recorded but are properly understood by both carpet-weavers and employers.<sup>27</sup> As negotiations between contractor and weaver are conducted in secrecy, the rate paid to different weavers working for the same or different employers is not uniform. Older and skilled weavers working for the same employer for a long period are paid better wages and some of the stringent conditions are relaxed.

Once in place, weavers are unable to breach the terms of the contract. If they leave before the work is finished, they have to refund the full cost of the carpet (i.e., the cost of the raw materials at market prices plus transportation costs) in addition to paying a penalty. This condition is decided at the time of the contract, but the cost is determined after the breach of the contract. Usually the employer suggests the terms of settlement and some influential person of the area, who has knowledge of the business and is acquainted with both parties, decides. In rare cases, employers may cancel contracts and pay compensation (i.e., the total labour cost agreed at the time of the contract) to the carpet-weavers.

Workshops run by Afghans are different as far as terms and conditions of employment are concerned. They hire only Afghani workers or persons from their own ethnic group. In many cases, the contract is given to the head of the household and it becomes his responsibility to get the carpet completed in the given time limit. The worker is not obliged by the employer to engage either family members or other weavers. In a few cases, employers have hired illegal Afghani refugees on punitive terms and conditions (e.g., piece-rate wages below the prevailing market rate; food and shelter provided with the cost deducted from the final payment; prohibition to leave the premises; etc.). The employer has the power to impose new terms and conditions whenever he likes and the workers have no choice but to accept these.

In Punjab, terms and conditions are more stringent than in other places. Skilled workers are given some benefits in terms of working hours, day-offs, and higher wages. The information collected from the field indicates that adult workers receive a minimum of Rs. 600 per week and a maximum of Rs.1200 per week. Younger workers are paid less than 50 percent of the wages of older workers. The overall (including children and adults) average wage for both sexes is around Rs.70 per day, while skilled workers receive Rs.125 per day. About 60 percent of child workers receive Rs.10 per week as pocket money; their actual wage is collected by their parents. Trainee children, on average, receive Rs. 10 per day, while those who have completed training receive Rs. 40 per day. The average wages of children are Rs.20 -30 per day.

Weavers begin work at 8 a.m. and they can go on working till 8 p.m. They are given a one-hour break for lunch. Most of the workers are not content as they are not free to work with other employers. The majority of those who work at home are paid on a piece-rate basis at the end of every week.

In Balochistan, terms and condition for carpet weaving vary. Some employers set tough conditions, while others are easy-going. In one workshop, workers were not allowed to talk, while in another, they were sharing jokes. In one, the employer allowed workers such “perks” as three tea-breaks with biscuits and a two-hour break for lunch. In other workshops, no such liberties are allowed.

The Hazara community in Quetta is well aware of the benefits of education and all school-age children attend school. Relatively soft terms and conditions are set for these children: flexible hours to allow them to work after school; pocket money in addition to the wages turned over to their parents. Weekends and days-off are unpaid.

About one-fifth of the workforce employed in these workshops is made up of highly skilled Afghani Hazaras, deported from Iran during the recent crackdown and now living illegally in Pakistan, under the protection of the local Hazara community. These people, trained on high-value Persian carpets,

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<sup>27</sup> In general male family members, whether they are weavers or not, decide on these conditions. Women and children are not consulted in the whole process. In a male dominated society like Pakistan, this is an expected attitude.

receive different terms and conditions from the local workforce: on-site housing, food, and protection as well as their wages. Afghani Hazaras are known for their dedication, working day and night to complete their carpets. Wages are quite low in this community, ranging from Rs.30-80 per day. In some exceptional cases, Rs.120 per day may be paid. Children's wages are determined according to the work they perform: trained children receive Rs.20-40 per day while trainees get a maximum of Rs.10 per day. The piece-rate is very low in Balochistan: workers are paid from Rs.2-6 per line.

The general terms and conditions include:

### **Raw materials**

Raw materials and equipment are the responsibility of the contractors, who get these from the exporters.

### **Wages/piece-rates**

The wage/piece-rate is decided at the beginning of the contract and earnings are paid weekly. Some advance money is paid upfront, but the payments start with the end of the first week. Almost all of those surveyed acknowledged that they receive full payment at every weekend (after deduction of the weekly instalment). Wages of male workers are higher than those of female workers. No special wage premium is given to relatives of the contractor, who are treated like other weavers. Children are paid lower wages and, most often, their wages go directly to their parents. Wages during the apprenticeship are less than regular wages. No gender difference in wages was observed for child weavers.

The terms and conditions for absconders from the law were different. They work in return for food, shelter and protection from the law. Employers also provide them with some money for cigarettes or chewing tobacco and other expenses.

**Table 2: Average weekly earnings of weavers in different provinces (Rs. /Week)**

<b>Province</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Children</b>
<b>Punjab</b>	500	400	170
<b>Sindh</b>	425	400	375
<b>NWFP</b>	400	350	200
<b>Balochistan</b>	375	350	150

### **Hours/days of work**

Weavers are usually expected to work for 8-10 hours a day with a one-hour lunch break. In NWFP and the Punjab, weavers were found working for more than 10 hours daily. In the villages of Thar, weavers are expected to complete eight-hours daily but are given flexibility in choosing their schedules. In Mithi, weavers work from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m, seven days a week. In NWFP and Punjab, we found a number of weavers working seven days a week, while in Sindh (except in Thar) and Balochistan almost all wage-rate workers take one day off.

### **Mistake/no completion of carpet/late delivery**

Workers are obliged to complete the carpet contracted before moving to another employer. All workers are bound to produce perfect carpets. If a defect is found, workers are held responsible and bear the cost of replacement or repair. This condition is almost universal and implemented if a defect is detected. Workers who breach the contract in any way must refund the cost of the raw materials and pay a penalty set by the employer. Those who are unable to complete the carpet on time are given more time but with a deadline. If they cannot complete it within that deadline, the employer deducts some amount (usually 10-20% of the total labour cost) from their wages. No special conditions are set as far as the size of the carpet is concerned.

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### **Repayment conditions of advance**

The conditions for repayment of the advance are almost the same in all provinces. Twenty percent is deducted each week from the weaver's earnings. In case the loan is taken from contractor for some other reason (e.g., illness, funeral, marriage in the family) and the amount exceeds a specific limit (which may vary from place to place), weavers are charged interest that is deducted on a weekly basis. These interest rates vary from location to location, but in all cases are higher than 20 percent per annum.<sup>28</sup>

### **Deduction for loom rental/ shelter/ food**

Two types of rates are charged for looms. Looms supplied by exporters rent for 5-10 rupees per week, while those provided by the employer rent for 15-20 rupees per week. Weekly payments are made after the deduction of these rents. Rates are almost uniform across the provinces. Those who live in the sheds are charged for food and rent of the premises: in NWFP, Rs. 500 per month; in Sindh and Balochistan, Rs. 350- 400 per month; in Punjab, Rs. 350-450 per month.

## **Chapter Fourteen: SALIENT FEATURES OF THE EMPLOYERS AND WORKERS**

### ***CONTRACTORS / MIDDLEMEN***

Although the ultimate employers of the carpet weavers are the big exporters and wholesalers operating in big cities, they are not involved in the labour arrangements. Contractors/middlemen act as their fronts, finding the weavers and setting the terms and conditions for work, in the majority of cases, manipulating these terms and conditions in their own favour. In all the cases we observed, the contractors/middlemen are now influential persons who entered the business as carpet-weavers. Over time, they accumulated earnings and managed to buy their own looms. They have then established contacts with exporters and started taking orders directly from them to receive higher financial returns. Their knowledge and experience in carpet-weaving is the key to their success.

In our sample, all contractors were males in the 20-50 years age group. We found no female contractors in the entire country. The majority of these contractors are married, contracting as a full-time job, and illiterate with no formal schooling. About one-third of them own some looms installed at the weaver's residence or in sheds on a rental basis. In general, one employer has 20 to 25 looms spread across different carpet-weaving localities. The contractors' major activities involve the monitoring of carpet-weavers, making arrangements for raw materials and taking care of the needs of their weavers. In our sample, a small minority of the contractors own workshops. Most of these contractors belong to a strong tribe /ethnic group.

### **NWFP**

In NWFP, both local and Afghani contractors operate. Because of strong tribal customs, most of the local contractors are attached to tribal *maliks* and do business under their patronage. In return, they provide work to absconders from law given protection by these *maliks*. The Afghani contractors are legal residents in Pakistan and belong mostly to the Pashtun tribes. They are well aware of the refugee community and do business only with Afghani families, providing them work at their residences. In some cases, they rent houses and place illegal refugees with legal ones. These contractors (both local and Afghanis) have a net monthly income in the range of Rs.10,000.

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<sup>28</sup> Weavers prefer to borrow from contractors because of the low interest rate (compared to the interest charged by informal lenders who charge more than 50 %) and the flexibility in returning the loan. In most of the cases weavers repay the amount by working longer hours.

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## PUNJAB

Employers in Punjab are socially influential people, well-connected with the police and local administration. All of their weavers complain of their abuse. Most of them operate in family business, controlling the business in a particular area. These people are economically well-off, earning more than Rs. 10,000 per month (net).

## SINDH

In the villages of Thar, employers/contractors belong to the dominant caste/religion and do business with their own tribe/religion in that village. For example, T, the employer in Darhar village, is a Mangwar Hindu employing an all-Mangwar workforce. Similarly, A, the employer in Malyar village, is a Muslim Bajeer employing only Bajeer weavers. In a small village, only one employer operates while in a relatively big village, more than one employer may be in business. The majority of employers are illiterate and in the 25-35 year age group. The contractors in Mithi are from influential families and run carpet-weaving centres with the help of a frontman/*munshi*. All of them are married with children and do this activity as a full-time job. In Thar, the average net earnings of employers is between Rs. 5,000 -7,000 per month.

The employers of Karachi are mostly from Mohajar families and do not belong to socially high circles. These employers are mostly literate (on average, five years of schooling), married and in the 21-50 year age group. On average, they have net earnings of Rs. 5,000 - 7,000 per month.

## BALUCHISTAN

In Balochistan, the carpet activity in the private sector is concentrated in the Hazara community settled in Quetta. All contractors in our study were from the same Hazara tribe doing business within the Hazara community. All of them were young (25-35). They are mostly illiterate but keen to educate their children. All are Shiah Muslims and settled in Shiah localities. Because Quetta is not the main market, they buy raw materials in either Lahore or Karachi, which raises their costs. However, they are still able to make Rs. 5,000, on average, per month.

## ***CARPET-WEAVERS***

All carpet-weavers are from very poor families living in low-income areas. Almost all of the village workers are landless; carpet-weaving is their only way to make a living. In around two-thirds of cases, the whole family is involved in carpet-weaving. The majority of adult workers are 18-40 years. Females make up about a quarter of the total labour force. The majority of them are less than 15 years of age. In the sample, children under 15 made up about 40 percent of the total labour force employed. These children are from the poorest strata of the population and their parents are in no position to send them to school.

## NWFP

In NWFP, about 70 percent of the workforce is male and only 30 percent female. Young girls aged 6-15 years, work as weavers in workshops run by the Afghanis, but we found no female weavers in the sheds managed by local contractors. For home-based workers, all children and female family members who know carpet-weaving work on the carpets. The male members of the household either work in the workshops as carpet-weavers or engage in some other activity.

## PUNJAB

The low demand for carpets in the international market and the high supply of labour (due to minimal employment opportunities in other sectors) put the weavers in a vulnerable position vis-à-vis their employers. More than half of the workers employed in the sheds told the survey team that they have been physically mistreated by their employers at some time. Realizing their position, weavers accept this behaviour as a fact of life. Female employees, who mostly work in their homes, are somewhat protected from this behaviour. Their share in the total workforce in the carpet sector is about one quarter in Punjab.

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## SINDH

The sample of the study shows that the workers in Sindh are predominantly males and over half of these are under the age of 15. The majority of them are illiterate and very few have attended school in the past. The workforce employed in the workshops of Thar is mostly Hindu belonging to the low caste Hindu tribes called Harigans. The workers employed in the village carpet-weaving centres are from the same village and caste as the employer. We noted that almost everybody in a particular village is a close relative. Therefore, all workers are relatives both of each other and of the employer. It was further noted that:

- There are no female weavers working in the weaving centres/sheds; all of them work at home.
- In Thar, about 40 percent of weavers are children under 15.
- In Mithi, most of the child workers are from nearby villages and very poor families. They used to take care of the livestock but, due to drought and absence of other alternatives, came to the city to earn some income to help their families back in the village. Their parents put them in these workshops to get training and, then, employment. Most of them are illiterate and unwilling to attend school.
- The older workers are married and live in the same neighbourhood.
- Carpet-weavers employed in Karachi are Mohajars of different ethnic backgrounds. The dominant groups are Biharies and Burmese. They migrated to Pakistan in the early 1970s and started working in the sheds at a time when economic conditions and opportunities were good. They took advantage of the situation and have diversified into different trades.

## BALUCHISTAN

In Balochistan, all workers surveyed were from the Hazara tribe. About half of the workforce is made up of children working under the guidance of adults. About 40 percent of these young carpet-weavers are females (5-18 years) working both in the sheds and in their homes. All children employed in the carpet sector attend school, working after school hours. These children are paid low wages, plus nominal pocket money to keep him or her interested in the job. Their regular weekly earnings are given to their parents.

## **Chapter Fifteen: THE PESHGI SYSTEM**

The advance, or *peshgi*, system is common throughout the country and all workers take some advance payments. We can divide the system of advance into three categories. In the first case, the amount taken is quite low – in general, less than Rs 1,000 and repayable in easy instalments. This is common practice in the carpet business and poses no serious consequences to weavers. Weavers do have to accept some conditions: they must work for the same employer till the repayment of the full amount and are not allowed to leave the village/town without the permission of the employer. In our sample, 224 out of 374 weavers (60% of the sample) had taken less than Rs.1,000 in advance and were repaying 20 percent of their weekly earnings every week.

The other two types of *peshgi* are of a more serious nature. These include:

- (1) an advance to meet an emergency, and
- (2) advance labour charges of a longer period (usually a year).

In both cases, the weaver accepts a substantial loan from the contractor. The accumulation of debt provides the root cause of bonded labour and the exploitation of workers. We observed that, in 75 cases, the amount was more than Rs 5,000 and, in some cases reached Rs 15,000 due to prolonged illness or economic shocks in the family. Carpet weavers pay off this amount in small weekly instalments, but the balance remains standing due to high interest rates.

The prevalence of cases of children being put in bondage, against an advance payment for their labour is highest in Thar Desert. The economic conditions are bad in Thar and employment opportunities

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minimal. Having no alternative, this is the only option for survival. We met a number of parents who have taken an advance payment for their children. The children live at their workplaces, trying to pay off their debts with their hard labour. The employer charges interest on the advance and about Rs400 per month for boarding and lodging expenses. In many cases, parents pay off the remaining amount of the loan after some months but then take an advance for another full year of their child's labour to meet their expenditures.<sup>29</sup>

Our team observed that in Thar, some workers have taken more than Rs 30,000 just to pay for the funeral rituals of a family member. They had been paying 20 percent of their weekly wages to the employer for many years but could not pay back even one quarter of the debt. One worker told us that it would take years before he would be able to pay his entire debt. As there are no written accounts, the workers are unaware of the outstanding amount. Due to illiteracy, they are not able to maintain their own accounts. If a dispute arises, community elders settle it through consultation with both parties. Due to the contractor's stronger position in the community, he usually receives a favourable decision.

The system of major *peshgi* is also prevalent in Karachi and most of the victims are widowed females. In cases found in the Hazara community, *peshgi* amounts exceeded more than two years of earnings. The workers who took these amounts were employed at sheds and working long hours to pay off this debt. They were given some amount at the end of each week to cover daily expenditures.

The analysis of field data collected by our teams from all four provinces indicates that all workers have taken loans/advances from their employers. The minimum debt is Rs.800 and the maximum, Rs. 75,000. Those who have taken large loans are in no position to bargain with their employers. These workers pay back the loan by small instalments every week. They are bound to work for the employer until the loan is paid. The weekly payments made to these workers are barely sufficient to keep them alive.

In all cases, the contractor/employer or his representative maintains the accounts and makes adjustments according to the work performed. Some workers also maintain their accounts but these seldom tally with those reported by the employer. The workers are terrified of their employers and forced to work according to their will. If they try to escape the area, the employer and his associates trace them to make them pay back the loan. Workers are afraid to return home where they might be found.

## **Chapter Sixteen: PREVALENCE OF BONDAGE**

The main factors responsible for the existence of debt bondage in the carpet industry are Pakistan's poverty and unemployment in general and the deteriorating conditions of the carpet industry in particular. The system of *peshgi* is common, with every weaver taking some advance as a sign that he is engaged by the contractor and will work for him until the carpet is completed. The amount is usually repaid in small instalments as the work progresses. In the end, contractor and weaver settle the accounts once the advance is repaid in full.

In some cases, usually due to a family emergency, the weaver is forced to borrow a larger amount and enters a vicious cycle of continued borrowing. The evidence shows that some workers take loans that they will not be able to pay back in even ten years. The heavy loan increases their vulnerability to exploitation and forces them to work under conditions of bondage. Due to their weak economic and social standing, they can neither leave the area nor refuse to work. Such cases are detected throughout the country.

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<sup>29</sup> For example, the father of P. took Rs 15,000 from the employer as advance payment. After 8 months he came back to the employer, paid back Rs 5,000 and asked for another Rs 15,000, the full payment for his child's labour for the next year.

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## ***BONDAGE DUE TO ILLEGAL STATUS***

In NWFP, two groups of workers qualify as bonded labour. One group is the Afghani refugees illegally resident in Pakistan. Most of these illegal Afghani refugees are in Afghani-dominated colonies. Employers provide them with food, shelter and protection from the law, but at very low wage-rates compared to market wages. Illegal Afghanis know that they are being exploited but have no choice, as conditions in Afghanistan do not allow their return. This type of bondage was also detected in Balochistan.

The other group vulnerable to exploitation includes people running away from the law who have taken refuge with a *malik*, submitting to the *malik's* will and with no plans to leave him under any circumstances. The local population is reluctant to establish any social contact with these people. As they have no future and are unable to move freely in society, these workers are victims of the worst forms of bonded labour.

## ***CHILDREN UNDER BONDAGE***

Young children whose parents take money in advance for their work are the true victims of circumstance. These children receive half the wages of older workers. They are not allowed to leave the premises until the debt is fully paid. They live on-site (without their parents or any family member), and an amount of Rs.300-400 per month, on average, is charged for their food and shelter. All of them are malnourished. For lunch, they are usually given some rice mixed with locally grown vegetables; for dinner, lentils and vegetables. Meat is served once a week.

They are forced to work much longer hours than adult workers. On inquiry about the low wages of these young workers, the contractors gave inadequate responses. They claimed that these children are learning skills and are unable to weave independently, that they are slow and heavily indebted. Older workers sexually abuse these children.<sup>30</sup> On two occasions, children wept as they talked about the injustice of their treatment.

The parents are of the view that these children are sacrificing their time for the welfare of the family, when their family needs them most. Most of the parents do not consider the work of these children as harmful. Rather they think that the school system provides no future job guarantees and, therefore, it is useless to send children to school. After a few years of work in these workshops, the children will be able to earn their living independently.

## ***OVERALL ASSESSMENT OF THE SITUATION***

Data for overall Pakistan show that in 29 (out of 374) cases, workers who have taken loans are forced to work under unacceptable conditions. Most of these workers are either adults who took advance payments to meet an emergency, or children whose parents took advance money in return for their labour.<sup>31</sup> These workers are bound to work for the same employer until they pay off all their debt. They cannot work for another employer until they clear their accounts with the current one but their low wages make it an uphill battle to pay off the debt. Our teams noted that many workers consider it their moral obligation to

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<sup>30</sup> This information was obtained with lot of probing and with the promise of confidentiality of these secrets and security from employers. The male team members who knew the local language interviewed the children in isolation. In that interview they revealed about the sexual exploitation and other harsh attitudes meted out to them. Not only this, but these children told about other young children given the same treatment.

<sup>31</sup> The child bondage issue i.e. pledging of individual children's labour was prevalent only in Punjab and Thar district of Sindh. These children were from very poor families with no alternative source of earnings. Due to drought in the Thar region, the situation is particularly bad for Tharee families. For their survival, these families are compelled to put their children in bondage.

keep working for those employers who extended the loans to them. In 12 cases, weavers were found working for no wages (their wages were taken by the employer as loan payment). The survey teams found about 19 cases (nine percent of the total) in rural areas and 10 cases (six percent of the total) in urban areas where weavers could not repay their loan even with extensive labour. These findings are in sharp contrast to the common belief that the carpet industry has a relatively low incidence of bonded labour.

**Table 3: Prevalence of debt bondage in different provinces (number of cases)**

Province	Prevalence of bondage in carpet sector		
	Urban	Rural	Total
Punjab	3	12	15
Sindh	4	3	7
NWFP	1	4	5
Balochistan	2	-	2
Pakistan	10	19	29

The province-wise situation of bondage (Table 3) shows that Punjab has the highest incidence of debt bondage. In Punjab, 15 cases (12 rural and three urban) were victims of heavy debt. Our team noted that seven workers have taken advances of more than Rs 5,000, while five workers more than Rs 70,000. In an additional three cases, more than Rs 15,000 had been taken as advance payment for a child worker. The situation in Sindh is also far from satisfactory. We found seven workers (three in rural and four in urban areas) living in debt bondage in similar conditions as their counterparts in Punjab. Two cases were found in Balochistan. In NWFP, five cases were found which come under the bondage category.

## Chapter Seventeen: RECOMMENDATIONS

1. This rapid assessment proves the existence of bonded labour in Pakistan's carpet sector. The RA approach is, however, limited and the problem calls for more in-depth investigation, particularly in Thar and rural Punjab, where the most exploitative working conditions for adults and children are prevalent. Future research should focus on at least two types of cases where a high degree of coercion exists:

- (i) Situations where people have accumulated loans over Rs. 10,000 and are unable to pay them back. The particular questions that need to be investigated are:
  - a. How did these workers fall into this situation and accumulate such heavy debts?
  - b. What factors played a role in debt accumulation?
  - c. How is their daily life affected by these loans?
  - d. Is debt a cause of exploitation of labour?
  - e. How are these people being exploited?
  - f. What restrictions are imposed upon them?
  - g. What immediate measures can lessen their suffering?
  - h. What are the chances that they will fall back into this situation once helped?
- (ii) The situation of children who are put into bondage by their parents. The focus of the in-depth study should be on:
  - a. How has this system of advances for child labour evolved?
  - b. What are the reasons that force parents to send their children into these situations?
  - c. What are the social compulsions of these families?
  - d. How is the advance money used? Are these loans used for consumption or for asset accumulation?

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- e. What is the hidden rate of interest?
  - f. What can be done to help them?

2. The system of monitoring of the carpet sector needs revamping and restructuring because the existing system is not effective. Monitoring staff are totally ignorant of the situation in the field. There is no check on the wages, terms and conditions and working conditions of carpet weavers.

3. The provincial labour departments are understaffed and unable to check gross violations of the rights of the workers. There is no female labour inspector in the whole country to check the situation within homes.

4. Steps should be taken to get workers out of debt. This can be done through the allocation of funds in the budgets for this purpose.

5. Micro-financing facilities should be provided to those who are willing to start their own businesses. The current micro-financing system run by NGOs using the funds provided by Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (PPAF) leads itself to debt-bondage. The interest is so high that workers take new loans to pay off the previous loans. On a loan of Rs. 10,000, the borrower has to pay Rs. 1,100 per month for a year to pay off the loan and payment starts from the same month in which the loan is taken.<sup>32</sup> No grace period is given to workers to first earn and then pay.

6. In this regard, the role of NGOs needs to be carefully investigated. Who is extending micro-financing facilities in the area? The information obtained from weavers indicates that they have to borrow from informal sources to pay back the loan. This increases their chance to fall into the debt trap and become victims of debt bondage.

7. Educational facilities should be expanded and improved and more opportunities should be created for carpet-weavers to send their children to school. Bad economic conditions are the main reason for non-attendance. Poverty has forced many families to withdraw children from schools. These families should be given monetary incentives to send their children to school.

8. The government should create more employment opportunities in areas where the private sector is reluctant to invest. This would give alternatives to indebted workers to improve their economic condition.

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<sup>32</sup> We calculated that on Rs 10,000, the borrower has to pay Rs 3,200 as interest in one year. The interest rate charged by the NGOs is therefore at the rate of 32% per year, which is high compared to prevailing market interest rate of around 10%.

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## Annexures

**Table 1: Quantity and value of export of carpets and rugs**

Year	Quantity (million square meters)	Value (Rs. million)	Unit value Rs/square meter
1980-81	2243	2.5	897.2
1981-82	1679	1.9	883.7
1982-83	1913	2.2	869.5
1983-84	2323	4.7	494.3
1984-85	2031	2.1	967.1
1985-86	2693	2.7	897.4
1986-87	2439	2.8	1228.0
1987-88	4445	3.1	1434.0
1988-89	4451	3.1	1435.8
1989-90	4923	3.3	1497.4
1990-91	5003	3.5	1409.7
1991-92	5709	3.9	1453.8
1992-93	4524	3.3	1368.0
1993-94	4583	3.1	1468.9
1994-95	6116	3.4	1812.0
1995-96	7131	3.7	1946.0
1996-97	7820	3.7	2113.5
1997-98	8709	3.5	2522.0
1998-99	10209	3.8	2681.0
1999-00	13686	5.1	2662.1
2000-01	17015	6.3	2666.1
2001-02	15275	5.1	3006.9

Source: Pakistan Economic Survey 2001-02

**Note:** In the following tables, numbers in parenthesis are the actual sample corresponding to the given percentages.

**Table 2: Age distribution of workers**

Province	Male		Female		Total	
	<15	≥15	<15	≥15	<15	≥15
<b>Punjab</b>	18.7 (32)	58.5 (100)	17.5 (30)	5.3 (9)	36.26 (62)	63.74 (109)
<b>Sindh</b>	24.7 (20)	55.5 (45)	9.9 (8)	9.9 (8)	34.57 (28)	65.43 (53)
<b>NWFP</b>	16.2 (12)	54.1 (40)	27.0 (20)	2.7 (2)	43.24 (32)	56.76 (42)
<b>Balochistan</b>	18.8 (9)	41.7 (20)	22.9 (11)	16.7 (8)	41.67 (20)	58.33 (28)
<b>Total</b>	17.1 (64)	57.2 (214)	18.2 (68)	7.5 (28)	37.97 (132)	62.03 (242)

**Table 3: Age distribution of male workers**

Province	Male		Total
	<15	≥15	
<b>Punjab</b>	24.24 (32)	75.76 (100)	100 (132)
<b>Sindh</b>	30.77 (20)	69.23 (45)	100 (65)
<b>NWFP</b>	23.08 (12)	76.92 (40)	100 (52)
<b>Balochistan</b>	31.03 (9)	68.97 (20)	100 (29)
<b>Total</b>	22.93 (64)	64.39 (214)	100 (278)

**Table 4: Age distribution of female workers**

Province	Female		Total
	<15	≥15	
<b>Punjab</b>	76.92 (30)	23.08 (9)	100 (39)
<b>Sindh</b>	50.00 (8)	50.00 (8)	100 (16)
<b>NWFP</b>	90.91 (20)	09.09 (2)	100 (22)
<b>Balochistan</b>	57.89 (11)	42.11 (8)	100 (19)
<b>Total</b>	70.83 (68)	29.17 (28)	100 (96)

**Table 5: Gender distribution of workers**

<b>Province</b>	<b>Males</b>	<b>Females</b>	<b>Sample size</b>
<b>Punjab</b>	77.19 (132)	22.81 (39)	100 (171)
<b>Sindh</b>	80.25 (65)	19.75 (16)	100 (81)
<b>NWFP</b>	70.27 (52)	29.73 (22)	100 (74)
<b>Balochistan</b>	60.42 (29)	39.58 (19)	100 (48)
<b>Total</b>	74.33 (278)	25.67 (96)	100 (374)

**Table 6: Urban and rural distribution of workers**

<b>Province</b>	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Rural</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Punjab</b>	25.73 (46)	74.27 (125)	100 (171)
<b>Sindh</b>	62.96 (51)	37.04 (30)	100 (81)
<b>NWFP</b>	35.14 (22)	64.86 (52)	100 (74)
<b>Balochistan</b>	100.00 (48)	0.00 (-)	100 (48)
<b>Total</b>	45.19 (167)	54.81 (207)	100 (374)

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- No. 2 A Perspective Plan to Eliminate Forced Labour in India, by L. Mishra, July 2001.
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