

A Critical Analysis of International Political Economy for the Rights of Destitute Children in Street Situations In Pakistan

Aliya Abbasi¹

Abstract:

Children' rights have attracted an unprecedented level of attention, specifically since the promulgation and rapid ratification of the 1989, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). However, destitute children who work and/ or live in street situations continue to experience deprivations and social exclusion. This paper critically examines an exemplary case of "children in street 'situations" in the Pakistani context. Critical discourse analysis is employed to examine how 'children's rights and deprivations are framed in dominant debates. The framing of children's rights and deprivations in academic papers and non-academic reports as well as literature in "grey area" is examined to develop a nuanced analysis. The dominant rights-based approaches developed to address the problems of children in street situations provide temporary relief to some through the provision of basic welfare services. Nevertheless, these rights-based responses are insufficient given the intensity and complexity of the problem. Rights discourses must take into account the broader structural relations of political economy through which the conditions of deprivation are constituted and maintained. This paper approaches the argument about children's exploitation from a less studied but much promising international political economy perspective.

Keywords: children in street situations, UNCRC, rights, poverty, deprivation, political economy, Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

In its general comment 21 issued in 2017, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child uses the term, 'children in street 'situations' to refer to ""(a) children who depend on the streets to live and/or work, whether alone, with peers or with family; and (b) a wider population of children who have formed strong connections with public spaces and for whom the street plays a vital role in their everyday lives and identities"." (p. 3). By article one of the UNCRC, this paper defines children as persons less than eighteen years of age and mainly concerns destitute children who survive through working and/ or living on the streets of major urban areas (OHCHR, 1996-2019). Due to the precarious situation of their lives and the intermittent nature of their work, disagreements exist about the definitions and the magnitude of the problem (Reza & Henly, 2018). Although the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in its general comment 21 (p. 4) has declared that the exact number of children in street situations is not known, rough estimates put their number at 150 million worldwide (UNESCO, 2009-2014). Due to the paucity of up-to-date and reliable data in Pakistan, rough estimates on the UN webpage suggest the number of children in street situations varies between 1.2 to 1.5 million (UN, 2019).

¹ Holds PhD degree from University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia and has served as a Researcher at Queensland Family and Child Commission, Brisbane, Australia. Currently, she work as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Governance and Public Policy, National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad. Email: aliyaabbasi@numl.edu.pk

Irrespective of the estimates, it is not hard for anyone to spot destitute children (and adults) on the streets in major cities of most developing countries including Pakistan. In Pakistan slum settlements are on the rise, especially since the initiation of structural adjustment programs in the late 1970s and throughout 1980s (Davis, 2006). More recently, the numbers of children in similar situations are believed to be growing in the contemporary crisis of mass forced displacement within and across nation states' borders with disproportionate negative implications for 'children's wellbeing (Farooq, 2014; Human Rights Watch, 2019). While some researchers have warned against the dangers of over-estimation of children in street situations – or what is generically known as ""street children"" – (Ennew, 1996). Their rising numbers point towards the problem of abject poverty and growing inequality, which are causes of national and global concern (Davis, 2012). This is also evident in the rise of direct and indirect involvement of various governmental and non-governmental national and international organizations, law enforcement agencies, policy makers, media, and the society at large in the provision of welfare services and child rights awareness-raising campaigns (cf. Implementing child rights in Pakistan: alternate report for UNCRRC, 2015).

The overall consensus shows that poverty is a leading cause engaging children in work on and off the streets (Harter et al., 2005; Huggins & Mesquita, 2000, Reza & Henly, 2018). Dominant discourse and debates about children in street situations tend to foreground personal and individual level factors relating to poverty. For example, inter-related reasons underpinning poor 'children's decision to work and/ or live on the streets include material security provided through work to the children and their families, parental unemployment, dysfunctional families, and domestic violence (Bar-On, 1997; Herrera, Jones, & Benitez, 2009; Ali, 2014, p. 50). Moreover, widespread abuse and violence are reported to be experienced by children in street situations (Grover, 2007; Khan & Hesketh, 2010) and within their own households (Ali, 2014, p. 50). It is essential to highlight that 'children's presence on the streets and earning livelihood needs to be conceived in terms of the lack of equal opportunities to these children.

To some extent, there is an acknowledgment about modernization (Aptekar, 1994), global economic restructuring, and national economies exacerbating long-standing internal stratification dynamics and compelling children to work or live in street situations (Huggins & Mesquita, 2000). There is a need to critically engage poverty as a significant structural factor than merely a household problem and make it central to the analysis of a causal explanation of children in street situations, which, as already noted, has attracted a lot of political and scholarly attention. This problem needs to be addressed in its political economy context.

To develop argument about the significance of analyzing the rising number of needy children in street situations as an outcome of extensive individual's deprivations embedded in global political economy relations extending beyond time, space and national borders (over longer periods of development), the study proceeded in the following steps: recap dominant debates about the wellbeing and rights of poor children in street situations and underscore the importance of analyzing the 'children's deprivations through a critical international political economy lens. Such a critical perspective is vital to develop a relational understanding of the localized experiences of deprivation rooted in global power relations and institutions reproducing inequality. Secondly, this study examined how 'street 'children' and their rights are globally framed and advocated and

identified the problems of this dominant framing of street children. Finally, through an integrated approach, current study determined the relevancy of national and global 'children's rights-based approaches in highlighting the broader political and economic relations that deprive children in street situations and their families. The paper draws on the empirical case example of children in street situations in the Pakistani context.

BETWEEN THE DOMINANT NARRATIVES OF 'CHILDREN AS 'VICTIMS' AND 'ACTIVE SOCIAL 'AGENTS'

Influences of streets or consequences of being in the streets on 'children's personalities and well-being is a central theme in research about children in street situations (Toolis & Hammack, 2015, Kakchapati,, 2018). While children in street situations are often exposed to dangers and uncertainty of streets environment (Reza & Henly, 2018), these problems are highlighted with caveats. It is suggested that a sole emphasis on negative elements of streets and its influence on 'children's personalities stigmatize children in street situations in the long run (Brick, 2002). For example, highlighting the involvement of the children in petty crimes make them appear suspicious and a potential danger for society. In this context, concerns about the "'street child'" problem have various dimensions; for example, these concerns do not always originate from how to protect children and strengthen their rights but also about how to protect society from these children who are conceived as a potential law and order problem (Aptekar & Stoecklin, 2014). Therefore, policies dealing with the street child problems are faced with this common conundrum of whether and how to protect street children and (more affluent segments of) society from the (perceived) potential threats posed by the children at the same time. On the basis of these unintended consequences, protectionist approaches to the street child problem are challenged in the discourses (Aufseeser, 2014). It is believed to have led to harsh treatment of children by national governments and mainstream society (Lalor, 1999). To avoid these unintended consequences, a need to shift the focus of research towards positive aspects of the 'children's personalities and lives (e.g. resilience, agency, innovative survival strategies, and reciprocity) has been emphasized (Malindi & Theron, 2010). This is further implied to change the negative perceptions about children in street situations and deemed helpful to devise and implement programs with 'children's involvement (Orme & Seipel, 2007).

To improve the situation of children in street situations, the focus has started to gradually shift from conceiving children as helpless victims of violence and poverty to individual rights holders also espoused in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), 1989. Proponents of 'children's rights reinforce this position and reject the traditional approaches of conceiving children as merely objects in need of protection and charity (Brick, 2002). Children in street situations are constructed as active social agents who can change their own and other similar 'children's conditions. Thus, in mainstream discourses about children in street situations and their exploitation, UNCRC has increasingly become a point of departure. It is highly influential in defining conceptual frameworks and humanitarian concerns regarding impoverished children working or living in street situations (Conticini & Hulme, 2007; Brick, 2002). Accordingly, the rights-based approach focuses on the child who is no longer a matter of charitable concern but an active agent and a legal responsibility of States Parties (Ennew, 1996; Lundy, 2013). The UNCRC remains influential in providing guidance to national and global interventions to improve 'children's lives

and offer them better protection. It does this by making it central that children are the active social agents in possession of the complete set of rights (Ennew, 1996). Besides, keeping the adverse situation of children in street situations central, it is crucial to analyze what these rights entail in substantive terms, which children are promised as social agents under the rights-based approach. Thus, how such a rights-based approach can facilitate the universal realization of the rights of children in street situations.

In general, 'children's right to participation (in all decisions affecting them under 'adults' supervision and approval if needed) under Article 12 of the UNCRC dominates the 'children's rights discourse (Reynaert, Bouverne, & Vandeveld, 2009). Children are considered to be ""experts in their own lives"" (Kellett, 2005) and active social agents because of having voice and independent opinion. This may also lead to the expectations that children being the agents of change (Brick 2002) are capable of remaining resilient in the face of adversity and improving their situation. However, an uncritical appreciation of legal recognition of 'children's right to participation challenges the matters that affect their wellbeing (Bordonaro, 2012; Hart, 2008). For example, practical efforts aimed at child participation in varied cultural and institutional contexts pose challenges of discrimination and tokenistic participatory practices (Collins, 2016; White, 2002). Moreover, liberal rights discourses resonate with the dominant narrative that poor people, including families of impoverished children, bear a primary responsibility to fulfill their life necessities. As Reynaert, Bieb, and Vandeveld (2012, p. 159) observe:

...dominant interpretations of the concept of autonomy for children assume a view on childhood considering children as able to realise their rights autonomously, possibly without intervention of their parents or other adults. In global context of rising social and material inequality, it is important to underscore the relevance of resource distribution to implement and strengthen social and economic rights of children.

Concerns about resource redistribution are important but under-researched in dominant discourses of 'children's rights (Khadka, 2014). Khadka (2014) argues that socio-economic rights are a secondary concern in the UNCRC and mainly parents' duty. However, it is essential to mention that under the UNCRC, State Parties recognize 'children's right to a 'standard of 'living' adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral, and social development (Art 27). Furthermore, UNCRC emphasizes material assistance and support programmes concerning ""nutrition, clothing and housing"" (see Art 27.3). These provisions are implemented in the form of targeted interventions for 'children's welfare such as basic vaccinations, educational subsidies (food-for-education programs, school stipends, free universal primary and secondary education), and temporary shelters and institutional care for 'street 'children'. For instance, Article 20 requires the state parties to provide special protection and assistance to a child ""temporarily or permanently deprived of . . . family environment"". The UNCRC importantly broadens the scope of protection from specific economic exploitation (which also narrowly focuses on child labor) to all forms of exploitation that jeopardize 'children's welfare. While these targeted services provide relief to some children, they are unlikely to benefit children in street situation. In the case of children in street situations, many of whom lack proper shelter and identification documentation, such provisions are argued to be weak for those already left out of the welfare nets (Freeman, 2000, p. 281). The notion of 'protection from all forms of 'exploitation' is considered more of a 'catch-all 'phrase' rather than a justiciable entitlement and

inviolable right (Freeman, 2000, p. 281). Given the international hegemony of neo-liberal economic reforms in developing countries worldwide, targeted policies have become common to address the poverty-related problems faced by children, including hunger and inadequate provision of formal education (Costa & Michael, 2007). This also justifies the rise in the number of children in street situations, especially in developing countries.

The framing of 'children's conditions and deprivations greatly influences their responses to address their problems. Thus, a critical discourse analytic approach has been employed to problematize how structural factors underpinning the violation of 'children's rights are discounted in dominant debates and responses to minimize the number of street children (Herrera & Braumoeller, 2004). Academic papers and reports published by organizations working on 'children's rights have been reviewed to focus on how the street children's problems of poverty, social exclusion, and deprivation are framed. Literature in grey areas including the relevant blogs on the web and local newspapers in Pakistan has helped deepen the understanding of the politics of 'children's rights.

The Politics of Targeted Measures to Realize Children's Socio-Economic Rights

Where families find it hard to survive and cannot afford to protect their children according to the acceptable standards of society, states do not intervene to provide welfare as a public good (Nieuwenhuys, 2007). Instead attention deflects to short-term and ad hoc responses of giving money to parents for not sending their children on streets, temporary shelters, lecturing parents on raising kids, imposing fines on "'negligent' parents, and occasional rounding-up of children (Aufseeser, 2014). In the presence of these interventions targeted at 'street 'children' and their communities to protect their wellbeing, if violation of rules occurs, parents become targets of intense criticism for their negligence and denial of 'children's welfare (Reynaerta et al., 2012). This is the discursive practice from where stigmatization starts and is reinforced. Similarly, children in street situations are also expected to use these existing services provided to them under the overarching framework of their rights. Their repeated refusal to comply with these services (by running away from home, school, institutional care), compels practitioners to change their strategies by being more convincing and trust-worthy. These are the grounds for framing children in street situations and their rights around the popular "'children as social agent'" model. This model insists that the problem can be resolved and 'children's rights can be secured by empowering individuals (children, parents and communities within a particular country), with the primary knowledge and awareness about their rights.

In substantial terms, if poor parents are empowered with the "'knowledge' of their children's fundamental rights, which are non-justiciable in countries like Pakistan, they, along with their children can lobby for a change and demand to make these unjustifiable rights justiciable by challenging the existing discriminatory practice. However, the basic social and economic rights of children are not justiciable (Khadka, 2013). When poor parents/caretakers do not send their children to school and exploit them for economic gains, neither education nor food have entitled for poor children. In this scenario 'children's agency is made central to initiate a positive change in their lives and poor communities through a number of behavior-correctional and rehabilitative measures (Aufseeser, 2014). These measures can be called *reductionist approaches* because they put the responsibility to protect 'children's rights on already deprived and marginalized groups (Reynaerta et al., 2012). Causal explanations about 'street 'children' problem that foreground

individual-level factors ultimately make poor households a solution to the problem by making them responsible for the protection of their 'children's wellbeing. It is believed that giving voice to children and involving them in decisions that affect them would help improve their situation (Conticini & Hulme, 2007). Nevertheless, these explanations are inconsistent (non-generalizable) but tend to focus solely on (tangible) symptoms of the problem. Reductionist approaches analytically disconnect 'children's conditions from broader relations of international political economy.

The coexistence of near-universal ratification of the UNCRC and the persistence of millions of children in street situations globally, poses a serious question to the existing approaches to 'children's rights. This paradox points towards significant reconsideration of existing (non-inclusive) reductionist approaches to 'children's rights. Due to the politics of reductionist approaches, the problems of inequality and social exclusion are conceived in legalistic terms. The conditions attached to qualify for these limited, short-term, and inconsistent welfare measures such as having a legal identity (as stressed in Brick, 2002 and 'UNICEF's 2014 world report about children' excluded and 'invisible') filter out children in street situations who do not have birth certificates. Secondly, children in street situations who come from other marginalized groups such as refugees are also excluded from welfare benefits of any sort. Third and most importantly, children from marginalized groups are not entitled to any of the basic rights of food, shelter, health, and education.

The approaches that focus on 'street children as active 'agents' do not necessarily consider that these children are *deprived* of even the most basic needs of their lives irrespective of their attitudinal differences. In contrast, it is argued that children in street situations are deprived of even their fundamental rights and entitlements. Therefore, analysis of their condition needs to be conceived in broader terms based on tangible symptoms of the problem, thus disconnecting their conditions from broader relations of inequality. Violence in the household, perceived parental neglect, dysfunctional families are closely related to household poverty. Depending on their background, children in street situations may experience destitution due to various structural political and economic reasons situated within and beyond the nation-states including wars, neo-liberal economic reforms, and environmental degradation (Human Rights Watch, 2019). They have all been made poor not due to their poor households but the exploitation they continue to face even after becoming adults. Rights-based approaches, premised on ""children as active social agent"" model, expect children to become actively involved in the process of their lives improvement. However, how street 'children's (who constitute a deprived group) situation can improve by their involvement as agents without addressing the broader and invisible historically constituted sources of deprivation, is still unclear (Hart, 2008). Under the existing rights-based frameworks (generally guided by the UNCRC), nation states (depending on their scarce resources) are importantly made responsible for assisting parents/care takers in fulfilling 'children's needs and demands with 'children's active involvement. Yet, this ideal situation is hard to apply in case of poor households and children in street situations who mostly live in either slum settlements, temporary shelters or without a house at all.

Therefore, this paper argues that predominant approaches framing 'children's exploitation and the violation of their rights as a reductionist problem within a particular country and specific setting,

are conceptually and theoretically problematic. Restricting the "street children" problem to ascribed to poor people/groups/families/individuals, characteristics of agency, lack of awareness, parental neglect, and negative perceptions deflects attention away from engaging with their deep-rooted deprivations. Treating street children's problem in terms of reductionist approaches can be helpful to design and justify the logic of targeted interventions but short of offering any long-term solution to 'children's deprivations. It further fails to give imperative consideration to the embeddedness of the street child problem in terms of the broader structural and institutional arrangements that fail to accommodate the interests of weaker segments of society, rather uphold their deprivations (Nandy, 2002). The situations of deprived individuals and groups are not natural. An inevitable part of urbanization rather their experiences are historically constituted and created through various political economy related decisions in development. The social construction of 'street 'children' as primarily a problem of individuals, situated within big cities of modern nation-state, needs to meaningfully link the violations of 'children's rights with their systematic exclusion from mainstream society.

Although a number of responses to address the condition of children in street situations in Pakistan (like elsewhere in the world) have been developed over the years in alignment with global 'children's rights discourses, significant results have not been achieved. By specifically focusing on the case of street working or living children in 'Pakistan's urban areas, this study aims to show how the condition of Pakistani children in street situations has been created over the years. These conditions are linked with national and global political and economic factors that prioritize development as modernization and national interests as superior (said to highlight the consequences of Afghan war and war on terror) at the cost of poor children and their communities. Some of these children, in the long run, find themselves on the streets of urban areas to ensure their survival (Farooq, 2014). This critical position urged to analyze how children in street situations are systematically deprived of their fundamental rights of food, shelter, health and equal opportunities of any sort. In this way, the question and condition of children in street situations and the deprivation of their rights in terms of a broader political economy, social relational analysis unlike the 'children as social 'actor' models can be approached.

THE STATE OF CHILDREN IN STREET SITUATIONS IN PAKISTAN: A PLAUSIBLE EXPLANATION

The presence of children living or working on the street in Pakistan has been gradually increasing and becoming a cause of national and global concern (Ali, Shahab, Ushijima, & de Muynck, 2004; Iqbal, 2008; Jabeen, 2009; Khan & Hesketh, 2010; Rodriguez, 2017; Toor, 2001; UN, 2019). This trend is consistent with the rising number of children in street situations not just in the global south but in industrialized countries as well. For example, children and youth homelessness is associated with poverty in the US, Canada (Harter, Berquist, Titsworth, Novak, & Brokaw, 2005, p. 305; Harter et al., 2005; Grover, 2007, p. 231) and other developed countries worldwide. The proportion of children who are completely homeless is significantly lower in Pakistan, i.e. 5-10 per cent (Ali et al. 2004, p. 1708) and Latin America where around 90 percent children are connected to their families (Aptekar, 1994, p. 196). In these cases, the majority of children in street situations usually live at home and work to support their families. Contrary to the typical stereotype, these findings suggest that not all children in street situations are homeless. In Pakistan, an increasing number of children in street situations are reported to be Afghans origin those of families displaced

from war affected areas ("*The children working the streets of Karachi*," 2012; Mussadaq, 2013; Kadir, Shenoda & Goldhagen, 2019). Here, it can be argued that the presence of children in street situations in Pakistan is problematic and needs to be critically analyzed and addressed. The kind of response given to the problem depends to a great extent upon how the issue is understood and what causal explanations are proposed.

Children from poor households in Pakistan are believed to come on the street to work and support their family income (Ali, Shahab, Ushijima, & Muynck, 2004; *Surviving the streets: A study of street children in Pakistan*, 2012). An unprecedented level of rural to urban migration and the "'inability' of cities' fabric to absorb this influx of people is considered to increase the number of children in street situations (UNICEF, 2012). Due to these factors, many parents in Pakistan cannot provide basic necessities of life to their children (Ali et. Al, 2004). These factors are too important and need to be made as a point of departure. Existing debates about 'street 'children' in Pakistan tend to make repercussions of being on the streets as their central focus rather than household poverty. For example, children dropping-out of school, corporal punishment, and 'parents' tendency to use their children to make money (by involving them in begging) are claimed to be major contributing factors increasing the number of 'street 'children' (*Surviving the streets: A study of street children in Pakistan*, 2012). Similarly, violence in poor households and neighborhoods has been positively correlated with an increase in the number of children in street situations in studies (Scanlon, Tomkins, Lynch, & Scanlon, 1998) as diverse as Dhaka and Moscow (UNICEF, 2012). Nevertheless, conflict or neglect can happen in any household, but poverty and marginalization leave children with no other option but to fend for themselves and their families on the streets. It also needs to be challenged that if poor parents lose their capacity to provide for their 'children's basic necessities of life, they opt to send or accompany their children on the streets. The existing rights framework is unable to address the substantive issues of poverty.

Children in Street Situation as an Outcome of Social, Economic and Political Development

Factors such as flood, earthquake, famine, and war are highlighted in Pakistan to correlate them with the rise and sustenance of poor children in street situations. For instance, the Society for the Protection of the Rights of the Child (SPARC), a leading NGO in Pakistan for 'children's rights advocacy, in a report suggested that number of children in street situations in 'Pakistan's cities significantly increased in the wake of environmental calamities and conflicts including post-2010 flood in Pakistan. It is important to note that floods do not create children in street situations but deep-rooted inequalities and the poor conditions of peasants in some of 'Pakistan's agricultural-based rural areas. There have been reports in the news media how powerful individuals in villages diverted the flood water towards poor people to protect their land and other assets ("*Pakistan Landlords*," 2010). As noted earlier, when the violations of 'children's rights are highlighted, it is vital to establish important causal links.

Forced migration within and across borders is a long-standing issue in Pakistan and closely related to the recurrent rise in the number of destitute children in street situations. For over three decades, Pakistan has been a host to world's biggest refugee populations, mostly comprising Afghans, since the end of the Cold War (UNHCR, 2020). In addition to children of destitute migrant families, a great proportion of children in street situations belonged to families displaced during the war within and across the country (Emmanuel, Iqbal, & Khan, 2005, p. 9; Mohtasib, 2015; UNHCR, 2016). Decades

of on-going war forced many people to take refuge in the slums of big cities of Pakistan like Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar, Rawalpindi, and Islamabad. At the same time, all these children, their families and other affected people take refuge in big cities, often facilitated by governments and international organizations in the form of temporary shelters in and around urban areas. Given the short-term nature of these services, people who got uprooted from their homes and communities need to find shelter, food, and other necessities to sustain the living. Big cities often absorb these up-rooted people, including children, increasing population of slums and shantytowns. During this process, the short-term sympathies for refugees transform into concerns about their increasing numbers in the cities implicated in criminal activities (directly and indirectly) by mainstream media and governments.

Multiple factors behind children in street situations in Pakistan suggest that this is not a natural phenomenon simply correlated positively with urbanization and other disasters. Poorer segments of society including children in street situations are often the worst affected both in development such as urbanization and destruction such as war. The association of children in street situations with urbanization and slums often conceived as violent and immoral deflect attention away from the processes that produce poverty and compel impoverished children to work or live on the streets. Causal explanations that take individual /group characteristics as their point of departure target individuals and abstract them from these broader historically situated political and economic relations. The example of Afghan refugees in Pakistan, Internally Displaced Children (IDCs), and urban poor who migrate from rural areas in search of livelihood are essential in this regard. The dominant way of conceptualizing 'street 'children' and their rights is aligned with the politics of *reductionist approaches*.

Mainly due to poverty, children in street situations spend a different life from acceptable standards of mainstream society in Pakistan. This trend is consistent with findings from other developing 'countries' contexts where children in street situations experience social exclusion, public scorn, and disciplining from public institutions (Droz, 2006; Hecht, 1998; Herrera, Jones, & Thomas Benitez, 2009; Wares, 2019). The commonsense understanding about 'street 'children' in Pakistan, conveyed through various sources of information (direct observation, media reporting, NGO reports, and to much lesser extent, academic research) is that these children are ""different"" from the rest of society (UN, 2019). NGO and media narrative see them as a group (street children) who is stigmatized and exploited by their parents, as in the case of beggars (Amin, 2013). Their stigmatization is situated within their current status as poor, unhygienic, and low acceptance in case of refugees. In any case, poor children in street situations belong to the category of the ""other"", different, and socially excluded.

The close association of children in street situations with slum areas in Pakistan and the 'government's decisions about these settlements (legal or illegal) bear important implications for 'children's survival. For example, the demolition of slum settlements for developmental purposes, occasional rounding-up of children in street situations, and disciplining their parents for ""exploiting"" their children are the examples of national concern (Farooq, 2014; Shahzad, 2009). Their parents are held responsible for their deprived conditions. Therefore, policies and programmes are formulated to decrease the number of children in street situations to ""rectify' children's and parental behavioral issues (Amin, 2013). Thus, it is discursively established under

the framework of such *reductionist approaches* that the extent of 'street children' problem can be minimized (complete elimination is out of question under the present frameworks) mainly through targeting the individuals directly involved (Reynaerta et al., 2012). Implying that parents/caretakers/peers and segregated communities need to be targeted to stop the violation of children's rights trace the sources of street children's exploitation back into the poor households/ neighborhoods/ communities (Nieuwenhuys, 2001). Programmes aimed at the prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation of children in street situations need to contextualize the conditions of impoverished children and their communities in broader global social and material power relations. The 'strengths' of individuals (agency and resilience) to improve their situations cannot be effectively mobilized without addressing inequality and maldistribution of resources.

CONCLUSION

This paper critically examined an exemplary case of deprivation of children in street situations with a focus on the Pakistani context. The analysis reveals that the predominant position in mainstream discourses about children in street situations foreground individual-level factors in their causal explanations. 'Street children' are framed as active social agents capable of improving their deprived situation. In practice, this often entails tokenistic participatory measures that reproduce the hierarchies of age, class and social status (Reynaerta et al., 2012; White & Choudhury, 2007). Without addressing the underlying structures of inequality and poverty through universal social welfare services, poor families have little choice but to send their children to work in formal and informal sectors of the economy. The dominant discourses focus on improving the perceptions about poor children and behavioral correction measures based in underprivileged areas. This paper has approached the question about the conditions of children in street situations, their exploitation, and the deprivation of their rights in terms of a broader political economy, social relational analysis unlike the 'children as social actor' models.

Notwithstanding the importance of recognizing children's capabilities to impart a positive social change, the importance of their opinion, and their right to participate in decisions affecting them, it is argued that the condition of children in street situations is basically an outcome of extensive deprivations of individuals extending beyond time, space and national borders. The empirical example of children in street situations in Pakistan's urban areas analytically substantiates this claim. The deprivation of children in street situations in Pakistan has been created and reproduced over the years due to wars across and within border, environmental disasters, and forced migrations. The global and national rights-based approaches guided by the UNCRC's framework of children's rights developed to address the problem need to pay closer attention to the issues of inequality at the global, national, and local levels. The problems of children's exploitation and the violation of their rights must be seen substantially. The sources of their exploitation (which is also closely related to the exploitation of their communities) are grounded in historically constituted global political and economic relations of inequality.

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