

# A rapid assessment of bonded labour in domestic work and begging in Pakistan

Collective for Social Science Research, Karachi

Special Action Programme to  
Combat Forced Labour

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**Working Paper**

**A rapid assessment of bonded labour  
in domestic work and begging in Pakistan**

**Collective for Social Science Research, Karachi**

**International Labour Office  
Geneva**

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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 knowledge functions – 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. This paper examines labour arrangements and bonded labour in domestic work and begging. The research and analysis was undertaken by a team of researchers from the Collective for Social Science Research in Karachi<sup>2</sup>. The same team also investigated three hazardous industrial sectors in Pakistan: construction, glass bangle-making and tanneries, the results of which are reported in another Working Paper.<sup>3</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>4</sup>

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

<sup>2</sup> The authors can be contacted by email to: [kalektiv@yahoo.com](mailto:kalektiv@yahoo.com)

<sup>3</sup> See Declaration Working Paper No. 21: A rapid assessment of bonded labour in hazardous industries in Pakistan: glass bangles, tanneries and construction.

<sup>4</sup> SAP-FL can be contacted by email to: [forcedlabour@ilo.org](mailto:forcedlabour@ilo.org)

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## Glossary

### **Domestic Work**

<i>Agarbati</i>	Incense sticks used for fragrance at holy places
<i>Ayah</i>	Female childminder
<i>Baji</i>	Older sister, term used by employees to refer to female employers
<i>Bania</i>	Moneylender, usually with reference to Hindu trader caste (Sindh)
<i>Bhattas</i>	Brick kiln
<i>Biradri</i>	Kinship
<i>Dera</i>	Male sitting place
<i>Haris</i>	Agricultural tenant (Sindh)
<i>Haveli</i>	Large house
<i>Jhonpra</i>	Hut made of wooden sticks and thatch
<i>Kacha</i>	Non-durable construction, usually of mud or thatch
<i>Masihi</i>	"Low" caste Christians in Punjab, also known as Isai
<i>Munshi</i>	Contractor or landlord's manager
<i>Muzara</i>	Agricultural tenant (Punjab)
<i>Parchi Charhana</i>	Charge on workers for any loss to employers
<i>Paro/para</i>	Locality within village or town (Sindh)
<i>Peshgi</i>	Advance payment
<i>Pukka</i>	Durable construction, usually of concrete or bricks
<i>Sobedar</i>	Non-commissioned officer (in Army or Police)
<i>Tal</i>	Fire wood shop
<i>Watta Satta</i>	Exchanging of girls for marriage

### **Begging**

<i>Bagri</i>	Non-Muslim group (mainly lower Sindh) associated with marginal agricultural activities, now involved in begging and sex work in Karachi
<i>Basti</i>	Slum settlement
<i>Bhattoo</i>	Traditional nomadic caste associated with begging
<i>Burqa</i>	Full body veil
<i>Charpai</i>	Cot
<i>Daig wala</i>	Shopkeeper who sells cooked rice
<i>Dhol</i>	Large drum used on festive occasions
<i>Garvi</i>	Brass goblet/urn
<i>Ghagra/Kurta</i>	Traditional skirt and shirt
<i>Gurgula</i>	Traditional caste of clay and wooden toy makers, also associated with begging, mostly non-Muslim (Sindh)
<i>Guru</i>	Chief of a group of hijras who owe him allegiance
<i>Hamam</i>	Public bath
<i>Hijra</i>	General term for group that includes eunuchs, transsexuals, transvestites and hermaphrodites
<i>Jhonpris</i>	Huts
<i>Jhuggis</i>	Huts made of cloth and wood sticks
<i>Kunda system</i>	Illegal electricity connection
<i>Log/Bhidai</i>	Money given to Hijra on festive occasion such as birth of a child or wedding, to earn blessing

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<i>Madrassa</i>	Religious school
<i>Malang</i>	Disciple of a holy man
<i>Marsias</i>	Elegy
<i>Mazar</i>	Shrine
<i>Mehndi</i>	Henna
<i>Mirasi</i>	Caste of musicians traditionally responsible for recording lineages (Punjab)
<i>Moulvi</i>	Muslim priest
<i>Musali</i>	Historically oppressed caste in Punjab villages, also known as Muslim Shaikh
<i>Muslim Shaikh</i>	Historically oppressed caste in Punjab villages, also known as Musali
<i>Nirban</i>	Eunuch
<i>Paan</i>	Betel
<i>Patharidar</i>	Term used (in Sindh) for person who provides legal cover for illegal activities, or controls illegal economic activity
<i>Qawali</i>	Religious song
<i>Rilli</i>	Traditional patchwork quilt
<i>Riyasati</i>	Term used for migrants into Karachi from southern Punjab
<i>Sadqa</i>	Alms or other charitable offering
<i>Sehri</i>	Time before dawn
<i>Shikari</i>	Traditional hunter-scavengers now associated with begging, mostly non-Muslim (Sindh)
<i>Thelas</i>	A hand driven cart
<i>Wangar</i>	Trade in unpaid labour between employers
<i>Zakat</i>	Alms

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## **Chapter One: INTRODUCTION**

This report presents the results of a “rapid assessment” (RA) research project on bonded labour in two sectors in Pakistan: domestic work and begging. These rapid assessment studies are part of a larger group of studies commissioned by the Bonded Labour Research Forum in Pakistan, and sponsored by the International Labour Organization. Each assessment is based mainly on sector-specific fieldwork.

### **a) Issues in bonded labour research**

Bonded labour constitutes one of the gravest violations of individual human rights. Its presence in any society poses a serious challenge not only to the people who are bonded, but also to all individuals and institutions. Bonded labour is a coercive and oppressive labour arrangement disguised by seemingly legitimate and “voluntary” transactions between individuals. This “transactional cover” is, indeed, the main difference between “bonded labour” and outright slavery and, not surprisingly, issues concerning the definition of terms absorb much of the attention devoted to the policy debate on bonded labour.

Internationally recognized and nationally endorsed legal definitions of bonded labour can be powerful instruments in the fight against bonded labour. At the same time, however, statutory definitions do not remove the problem of consensus-building; they merely displace this problem to the interpretive level. In other words, the question changes from “What is bonded labour?” to “To what extent does a particular labour arrangement come within the purview of bonded labour statutes?”

Empirical research allows us to address this question in a meaningful manner. It is possible to highlight three themes relevant in empirical research on bonded labour in Pakistan. These are, respectively, violations of the person, debt bondage, and social hierarchy.

#### **Physical restriction, coercion, violence against the person**

Bonded labour is generally perceived – both at the popular level, as well as in the minds of legislators and the judiciary – as akin to slavery. Any labour arrangement involving the loss of an individual’s liberty and where physical restriction and violence against the person are accepted norms is abhorrent. Some types of personal abuse – such as child labour, sexual exploitation and rape – must be explicitly included in the category of violence against the person. These and other forms of abuse exist in Pakistan in a range of social and economic relationships. They are not limited to instances where people are held in chains, but also exist in less conspicuous settings where the chains are the invisible ones of social control.

#### **Debt bondage**

Debt bondage is now widely recognized as a common “legitimization” of bonded labour. Legislative definitions are built around the issue of debt bondage and the *peshgi* (i.e., advance payment for workers) system. Debt bondage also poses some of the most serious legal and policy obstacles to the eradication of bonded labour as the credit-labour linkage exists across a range of economic relationships, many of which do not appear to be particularly oppressive. The extent to which a labour arrangement involves debt bondage depends on a range of other factors: Is there something structural in the initial advance that makes the debt non-serviceable? Do the terms of the contract create monopolistic relations between the creditor and debtor? Is the use of physical violence an accepted form of sanction within any given credit contract? Different forms of credit-labour linkage are known to exist in the various sectors of the Pakistani economy. Their documentation would clarify the range of activities where coercive practices exist, with or without the presence of debt bondage as a legitimizing mechanism.

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## **How social hierarchy affects access to law and markets**

Existing empirical work in Pakistan (as well as in other parts of South Asia) has shown the importance of ethnic and/or caste hierarchies in the persistence of bonded labour. Certain groups, due to their ethnic and/or caste identity, are perpetually disadvantaged in access to the rule of law and markets. Ethnic and/or caste hierarchy, therefore, needs special attention in empirical research on bonded labour.

### **b) Analytical approach**

The present study is premised on the understanding that bonded labour is usually disguised behind seemingly legitimate and “voluntary” economic transactions. From an analytical point of view, it is useful to consider the range of activities where some level of coercion might exist. Some of these activities will come under the purview of legalistic definitions of bonded labour; others may fall outside it; and still other activities, though they fulfil the legal definition of bonded labour, may not be particularly oppressive or coercive. The violation of the person is only the most conspicuous and extreme form that “bondedness” might take.

The main objective of the proposed research, therefore, is to use qualitative research tools to document the range of labour, credit and labour-credit arrangements that exist in particular sectors of the economy. In examining the economics of these relationships, we can make a more comprehensive, multi-disciplinary analysis that provides insights into the social and political dimensions of any particular labour, credit, or labour-credit arrangement. Case studies are developed to document the dynamics of these different forms of arrangements and, in particular, to further understanding of the vulnerability to bonded labour.

### **c) Methodology**

The aim of the present study and complementary studies undertaken in the first phase of the programme of research on bonded labour is to develop some empirical insights into the nature and scope of bonded labour in Pakistan, using “rapid assessment” (RA) tools.

The rapid assessment is a useful starting point for a long-term research programme on bonded labour in Pakistan. The RA report gives programme and policy-makers a useful overview of the issues at the higher level, and indicates needed areas of research. In other words, the RA is most valuable as a preliminary framework, but insufficient unless its insights are further explored.

This RA used qualitative methodology, with some modifications, in all five sectors covered by this report. Since the purpose of the RA was to gain a preliminary insight into the nature of the problem, and offer insights, questions and issues for further research, the tools of qualitative research were the most appropriate for gaining a significant level of insight in a relatively short period of time. Further, since it closely examined many sectors – even at this preliminary level –for what appears to be the first time, qualitative tools were also deemed useful for helping to frame what could be a quantitative exploration at some future point.

The field tools used by the RA research team were as follows:

**Community profiling:** Based on observation, informal interviews, and available research, the field researchers provided a brief social, economic, and development profile of each research site. A site was a place, either work or residential, where people engaged in the labour sector in question were assembled. The profiling information, although gleaned from a simple exercise, provided valuable detail on caste and other social issues influencing bondedness.

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**Key informant interviews:** Field researchers identified knowledgeable individuals, employers or employees, in each community who could provide an overview of the kind of people engaged in the labour sector being explored, the employers, the labour arrangements, and issues of coercion/harassment or bondedness. Key informants also helped to identify other individuals for formal interviews.

**Informal interviews:** These discussions with individuals or small groups proved the most valuable source of information. As time was short, restrictions on the employees inevitably tight, and some sectors dangerous to explore, informally structured interviews were the bedrock of our RA methodology. The themes of labour arrangement, migration, coercion/harassment, bondedness, vulnerability, etc., were explored with numerous individuals and their employers during this RA.

**Formal interviews:** This category includes in-depth interviews with individuals (employers, contractors, or employees) in the research sectors, as well as structured focus groups. The interviews were recorded and documented for analysis. A greater reliance on focus group discussions was not possible in the RA due to the sensitive nature of our inquiry in some areas.

**Observations:** Field researchers spent significant time quietly observing sidewalk congregations of beggars. Their observations form a significant part of our research data, functioning as a cross-check to interview material and providing new opportunities for understanding the complexity of a given labour sector. Some localities were observed in significant detail and findings were enhanced with select interviews. This technique, allowing for a more rapid coverage of a workplace in a given sector than a full-blown community profile and numerous informal/formal interviews, has resulted in the inclusion of numerous observation sites in the RA report.

The RA focused on two provinces for each labour sector explored: Sindh and Punjab. Within these provinces, urban as well as rural settings were covered to allow for maximum opportunity for comparison. In Punjab, the city of Lahore and the district of Sargodha (including nearby villages and the town of Sargodha) were the RA research sites. In Sindh, urban Karachi, and district Sanghar (including Shahdadpur town and nearby villages) were covered.

Fieldwork took place from December 2002 to January 2003. It took approximately two weeks of fieldwork to cover each sector (both Punjab and Sindh). Field researchers prepared individual site reports upon completing coverage of a particular location, compiling their interview notes/transcriptions, observations, and community-profiling information before proceeding to a new site. Site selection was done after initial spotting to identify localities where communities of workers could be found.

The emphasis varies slightly among the qualitative research tools used for the different sectors due to the nature of the sectors themselves. For example, in the begging sector, focus group discussions and workplace observations were impossible, due to the sensitivity of the sector and the beggars' suspicion.

This report should be read together with a companion report by the Collective, addressing bonded labour in three "hazardous" industries in Pakistan (construction, tanneries and glass bangle-making)<sup>5</sup>.

#### **d) An overview of sectors**

##### **Domestic work**

Domestic work is often regarded as a sector in which workers are highly vulnerable to coercion and abuse. The international debate on forced labour, for example, pays a great deal of attention to the possible association of domestic work with trafficking, child labour and physical and sexual abuse. In many countries young women migrants, the vast majority of domestic workers, are particularly vulnerable to

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<sup>5</sup> See Working Paper n° 21: "A rapid assessment of bonded labour in hazardous industries in Pakistan: glass-bangle-making, tanneries and construction".

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abuse by employers and/or by the authorities if they are illegal or semi-legal migrants. They may also be cut off from their own families and social networks.

Domestic work has the added complexity in that the workplace is someone's home. Unlike work that takes place in a recognized "workplace" environment, domestic service occurs in an environment that is likely to be marked by highly personalized relations (and extraordinary dependence) between employer and employee. Formal laws, as well as informal social norms governing employer-employee relations, may have less significance than traditional and familial norms of behaviour within the private domain.

For these reasons, it was reasonable to expect that there might be bonded labour or other coercive labour arrangements in this sector. Although the sector was presumed, *a priori*, to be important in terms of both employment and the share of national income, little statistical or secondary data existed to verify this presumption. The rapid assessment on bonded labour in this sector, therefore, can be considered a first "sketch" of the sector in general and coercive labour arrangements, in particular.

### **Begging**

Begging is the most unconventional of sectors studied in this series of studies. In fact, it is not clear if begging even qualifies as an integrated economic sector. The nature of activities and the range of people involved are extremely heterogeneous and pose profoundly complicated questions of definition: To what extent is begging an economic activity? What constitutes a "labour" arrangement? How might different forms of begging be related to other seemingly associated "economic" activities, such as scavenging, sex work, entertainment and other services? What is the interaction between begging and illegal activities such as petty crime and selling narcotics?

In addition to these definitional problems, the study of begging is complicated by the sector's social domain. In most societies – or at least in the "mainstream" cultures of most societies, begging involves the loss of status. Many of the forms of begging are also proscribed by local and national laws and regulations. Begging, almost by definition, encompasses a range of activities at the social, economic, political and legal margin.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that relatively little systematic information about begging in Pakistan exists. We may begin with some prior hypotheses based partly on anecdotal evidence and partly on received wisdom that begging is associated with coercive and abusive labour relations. Newspapers periodically run stories about "beggar mafias" that operate in a highly organized manner, and exploit the "labour" of street beggars. Some versions of the "beggar mafia" story have police officials running the organization. There are also anecdotal accounts of kidnapped children being maimed and used as beggars.

### **e) Structure of report**

Chapters Two and Three provide sector-wise reports on domestic work and begging, respectively. These individual chapters are self-contained to a great extent and may be read as stand-alone sector studies. Each chapter begins with a brief statement of the research team's assumptions concerning the sector, and an overview of its research strategy, methodology and fieldwork. This information is followed by a description of the sector, including details of the nature of work, working conditions, technology (where appropriate), and profiles of individuals and communities associated with the sector. Finally, each chapter provides details of labour arrangements and identifies and analyzes conditions of coercion and bondedness.

Although each chapter provides sector-specific conclusions, some cross-sector themes are addressed in Chapter Three (Conclusion) drawing on findings on all the sectors covered by the Collective for Social Science Research. The comparison of labour arrangements and other findings within and across sectors

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provides some useful insights into the nature of labour arrangements, in general, and bonded labour, in particular. This chapter ends with recommendations regarding future policy and research work.

Annex One is a sector-wise literature review based on a search of recent published and unpublished sources. An attempt was made to make this review as comprehensive as possible. Each sector review begins with a short summary of the existing material.

## **Chapter Two: DOMESTIC WORK**

### **a) Introduction**

The domestic service sector is another largely undocumented informal sector of the labour force, due to two factors. First, the state is already unable to implement existing labour legislation in the formal sectors and lacks the will and ability to monitor conditions in the informal sectors that are well beyond its current reach. Second, the private home is believed to be a predominantly female sphere, true to the structure of a deeply patriarchal state and society. The public sphere is male-dominated and the private sphere the realm of the hidden female so it is inappropriate and undesirable for the former to investigate the latter's functioning too closely.

While it was not possible to document working conditions through close observation of the workplace, fieldwork did yield findings that confirm the complexity and variety of labour arrangements in this sector. Research techniques were similar to those used to investigate the begging sector. In both rural and urban settings in Sindh and Punjab, male and female field researchers worked in teams to hold formal and informal discussions and even focus groups. The research sites and interviews held are documented as follows:

#### **Rural**

- Village A, Village B (villages outside Sargodha): with 16 and seven interactions, respectively, including key informant interviews, individual interviews, household profiles and the remainder documented as informal interviews.
- Village C (village outside Shahdadpur) Four informal interactions with workers took place in this site.)

#### **Urban**

##### **Punjab:**

- Lahore: Yasmin Colony, Meo Colony - In Lahore, 38 documented interactions took place, including focus group discussions, case studies, household profiles, key informant interviews and individual formal as well as informal interviews.
- Sargodha: Gill Walla Chowk - In Sargodha, a total of eight documented interactions took place, including informal interviews, case studies and key informant interviews.

##### **Sindh:**

- Karachi: Three localities of Orangi (Zia-ul-Haq Colony in Sector 12, Sector 14, and Ittefaq Colony in Thurani Goth), Neelam Colony/Shah Rasul Colony, Rehmanabad (Bangali Para), and Salehabad in Gulshan - 42 formal and informal interactions, including three informal group discussions and five key informant interviews.
- Shahdadpur: Tanki Para (locality near Railway Station) - 17 formal and informal interactions with domestic servants and their employers.

In addition to fieldwork conducted at these sites, other localities in the cities, towns and villages were the sites of interviews with employers and profiles of their households. In Lahore, this research took place in Model Town and Askari Housing Society, while in Sargodha it took place in Satellite Town and College

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Road. In Karachi employers in Defence Housing Society and Clifton, including Neelam Colony, were interviewed, and in Shahdadpur this research took place in Tanki Para with employers interviewed in Janipura.

## **b) Description of sector**

### **What is domestic service?**

Domestic service is a labour arrangement within a private home in which the employers are the owners or rent-paying residents of that home and the employees provide work in return for wages, in kind payment, or debt relief. The work is performed by men, women or children and includes many tasks: gardening, guard duty, driving, cooking, serving of meals, cleaning, dish-washing, clothes-washing, sweeping, dusting, ironing, child-care, massaging. The labour is undocumented and untaxed; it is outside the purview of the state. The contractual agreement, almost always between the employer and the employee or employee's family, is unwritten, non-binding, and heavily biased in favor of the employer. Domestic service is only available to the elite of a given community, be it a village, town, or urban neighborhood, and the service-providers are among the poorest and most vulnerable in rural and urban society. Domestic workers need have no education and make no investment to enter this line of work, and the skills required to perform it effectively require no formal training.

### **Who are the workers?**

We will introduce the communities covered by the RA and identify them in terms of patterns and key features that distinguish them. Those mentioned hardly exhaust the range of domestic workers, but they do highlight the socioeconomic conditions of those who do this work.

#### **Rural-based workers**

**Village C** outside of Shahdadpur town in Sindh has about 150 households. This village is several decades old and the Balochi caste dominates. The head of this community is MD Baloch who owns 300 acres of agricultural land. Houses are a combination of mud and cement with the outer walls made of mud plaster. Facilities include electricity, a boys' primary school and a religious school for girls. There is no running water; villagers drink from ground water wells. Although this is primarily an agricultural community, people are turning to other forms of work because of the lack of sufficient irrigation water. Almost all women lack a basic education, while some have limited religious education. Women are not allowed much mobility, not even to work their lands. Most women do domestic work in their own homes, but there are some houses where domestic servants are engaged to care for animals, milk and graze cattle, clean garbage and manure, and tend to male guests. In villages such as these, only the landlords can employ domestic servants.

**Village A** is 20-25km from the river Jhelum, a place where sugarcane and citrus fruits are cultivated, with most of the land owned by Z. The population is largely Shia, with the inhabitants belonging to the Arain, Syed, Jat and Malik Awan castes. The labourers are Musalli, Mirasi and Tarkan. The community is divided between the richer members who are in the livestock business and live outside the village in nearby cities, and the others who are permanent residents and do agricultural and domestic work. Their families have served the landlords of the village for many generations, and their women have kept their houses in return for leftover food.

**Village B** is located in southeast of Lahore-Sargodha road. The village is divided into two parts known as old village and new *basti*. More than 60 percent of the "low castes" live in new *basti* that is not electrified. Approximately 95 percent of the landlord households live in the old part of the village. The Makhdoom families, with 50 households, dominate local politics and the economy. Mussali make up one-third of the total population with 100 households and are considered the main source of labour, especially domestic

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work, for Makhdoom families. Twelve households of Makhdoom *biraderi* have shifted to Sargodha in search of better educational opportunities for their children. The migrant families usually take two domestic servants – one male and one female -- with them to Sargodha. These workers are always from the Mussali families, though not always from the same family.

There is one Government Middle School for girls and one Boys' Government Primary School in the village. The nearest boys' and girls' high schools are at the distance of five and 14km respectively. There is no health facility in the village and people have to go five km away for minor treatment. A government doctor is available at a distance of about seven km from the village, but people prefer to consult private doctors in Sargodha (which is around 17 km away) for major ailments.

Agriculture is the major source of income. Sugar cane and wheat are the major crops. Orange groves are a big source of income in the area. Total land of the village is 270 *murabas* or 6750 acres. The majority of the youngsters from low castes families have moved to major cities (Lahore and Sargodha). Only one village female, from a "low caste" family, was reported as being a salaried employee (teacher).

### Urban-based workers

Domestic service in urban centres does not seem to be as distinctly based on caste hierarchies as it is in rural settings, but there are nonetheless some identifiable caste/community features to the sector. These do not cover all urban-based domestic servants, however.

**Meo Colony** is a residential community about three decades old, located at Pull Bandia Wala Choungi in the south of Lahore. The land is the property of the central government, leased to between 150-200 households. The original residents were Meo by caste; now they include Masihs, Mirasis, Kumhars, Pathans and Niazis, Kumars and others. There are two private schools, a church and no government school, drinking water is irregular and the colony has electricity. The streets of this locality are narrow and the sewerage system is poor; people fill tanks with dirty water and dump it out of range of their houses. Most residents are uneducated and do daily labour or run small shops, depending on their caste affiliation. Almost all women, except Niazis, work as domestic servants. Household earnings total Rs. 3,000-4,000 per month.

The **Kumars** are among the lowest in the caste hierarchy in the Punjab. Its members, who are Christian, traditionally lived in interior Punjab around the town of Kasur and were involved in brick-kiln work. Over the last two decades, these families have migrated to Lahore. They live in *kacha* houses, without basic amenities other than electricity.

The women and girls work in houses doing cleaning and washing only. The men do odd jobs or are unemployed. They are uneducated and the children unschooled. One girl in a focus group discussion said, "I feel that our parents do not want us to study because they fear we will become clever and liberated and will find boys of our choice [to marry] or else befriend boys."

Interestingly, one woman mentioned that, although her husband is unemployed, they still borrow money from his former brick kiln, suggesting that the link with traditional work remains strong and that relationships with their new domestic service employers have not replaced the old relationships. Women said they rarely borrow from their domestic employers because trust is not established if they have not been working there long enough. But domestic service is an improvement for some respondents, who say that the work is easier than working at the *bhattas*, brick kilns and provides a fixed monthly salary.

Additional financial support is forthcoming from the Kashf Foundation, a micro-finance non-government organization that provides small loans to low-income women. A number of women interviewed in Meo

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Colony said they preferred to take loans from Kashf and pay back in monthly installments rather than borrow from their employers.

#### **Case study of a rural migrant**

For S, a migrant to Sargodha from another town in the Punjab, domestic service has been something of a success story. S is 46 years-old, married, has her own house in Khushab, and has six children (one daughter lives with her, another in Khushab, one son works for daily wages, another studies in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, another daughter is in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade). She and her husband are not literate. Their caste is Mussali; they came here five years ago to educate their children. They also have their own house here.

In the house where S works, two other girls also work in the kitchen, one Mussali the other Christian. S cleans and washes. She and her daughter get Rs. 1,000/month and a sack of wheat, and clothes for summer, winter and Eid. Initially, she earned Rs.500, but within a month it was raised to Rs.1,000. She has taken advances against her salary twice before and her employers did not ask for the money back. S has no problem and goes to see her children every eight to ten days. She works from 7am to midnight. She says the employers are kind; she is allowed to watch television. Her employers are landlords.

Low-caste Christians (known as Masihs) also form communities of domestic workers in small towns in the Punjab, such as Sargodha. In a Protestant Christian community of 500 homes, households of 8-10 members live on Rs. 2,500-3,000 per month, and are functionally illiterate. Men and women work as sweepers with the city corporation, but most of them earn a living primarily through the women's and children's domestic service. They clean, wash clothes and do dishes for a fixed monthly salary. When interviewed, a woman domestic servant from this community said that, because her people are Christian they are stuck doing house-cleaning work, and, without education, cannot do anything else.

**Yasmin Colony** in Salamatpura, south Lahore, is a small, mainly Muslim community of 50 homes belonging to families of different castes. It has one mosque, a private middle school for boys, a school for girls, a small hospital and a market. Its residents have the reputation for drinking and sexual promiscuity. Poor water and sanitation facilities are a primary cause of infectious diseases among the residents. Each family has 12-15 members, and their total monthly incomes per household are about Rs. 4,000-5,000. Men and women are almost entirely uneducated, and 80 percent of their children do not go to school. The main income sources for the residents are domestic work (for both men and women) and daily wage labour (by men).

In Karachi, **Neelam Colony** and **Shah Rasool Colony** are two adjacent settlements opposite the Abdullah Shah Ghazi Mazar and in the heart of south Karachi's wealthy residential area of Clifton. Shah Rasool Colony is the poorer of the two; its inhabitants are rural-urban migrants from a wide mix of communities. The dwellings are divided into *paras*, small neighborhoods, divided according to ethnicity and caste with little apparent interaction. Each household has about 8-12 members; sometimes, to save rent (Rs.2,220-2,500/month), more than one family shares the space. There are two government schools in the area. Sindhi sources say that 95 percent of the Musalli community does domestic work, while their men gamble, bet and smoke. Meanwhile, the women make extra money from sex work. Some Sindhi drivers have married these women. The Pathan residents are mostly landlords of the local dwellings, and their women do not leave home or mix with outsiders.

The adjacent Neelam Colony is more affluent, with *pukka* plastered homes, multiple shops and cleaner streets. This community does not produce domestic servants; its residents appear to be small business-owners, as well as migrants from around the country. Some women from Shah Rasool Colony work for employers in Neelam Colony. The salary scale here, although it is lower middle-income, is not so different from that quoted by women who work in more affluent parts of the city.

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Another low-income community in Karachi where many domestic servants reside is **Salehabad Colony** in Gulshan-e-Iqbal, located closer to the center of this vast metropolis. It is an illegal settlement occupied for the last 30 years, with about 1500 *pukka* homes and *jhonpris*. The residents are predominantly Sindhis (Magsis), Punjabis and Riasatis (southern Punjabis). The Karachi city government plans to rehabilitate the residents near the New Sabzi Mandi outside of the city due to plans to construct a road on this land. This, of course, would deprive those who work as domestic servants of easy access to their places of work, such as the residential areas of Gulshan-I-Iqbal. The men in this area work in steel, scrap paper, tailoring as well as in domestic work (e.g., as drivers and watchmen) while the women work inside the houses of their employers. They would like to educate their children, but say they cannot afford to.

There is a vast migrant Bengali population in Karachi. Its communities can be found in Rehmanabad (near Aisha Manzil), Machhar Colony, Landhi area, Korangi area, Orangi Town and Moosa Colony. While men work in the garment and textile factories, hold jobs in construction and fishing, do daily-wage labour, some also work in domestic service. In particular, Bengali men who are in Pakistan with no families, often with wives and children at home in Bangladesh, find work as cooks. Women also work in the garment factories and as domestic servants. Orangi Town is a vast slum settlement housing migrants from throughout the country and the region, who came to Karachi in search of a better life. Two sectors of Orangi were investigated in this RA. The first is a predominantly Bengali community and the second is Bihari, both are the residential areas of many domestic servants who work throughout the city.

In **Sector 12 of Orangi Town** lies Zia ul-Haq Colony. Part of it is registered with the authorities. The total number of households is over 2,000 and the area is ethnically mixed, with Bengalis in the majority (1,100 households) and Muhajirs also dominating (800 households). Children go outside the colony for their schooling, as do families who need health care. Gas and electricity facilities were installed in the mid-1990s under the MQM leadership. The men work in construction, textile mills or cottage industries and women do a combination of home-based work such as weaving or incense-making and domestic service.

In **Sector 14 of Orangi Town** (Johar Chowk) there are approximately 2,000 homes of predominantly Urdu-speaking Biharis. The residents are politically organized, with an elected union council and a heavy MQM influence. Development work in the area stopped during political strife in the city 1995-99, but there are water, gas and electrical facilities. There are no government schools, but over 25 private schools in Sector 14 are highly attended, as are private clinics. Men work in garment and other factories, embroidery and sandal-making, while women do home-based work (incense-making, date and garlic-peeling, embroidery) and also work at garment factories and in domestic service.

In the town of **Shahdadpur**, Sindh, the locality of **Tanki Para** lies near the Railway Station. Among the castes/communities who live here, the Bheels dominate with 300 households, and other residents include Kacchi Hindus, Makranis, Memons, Muhajirs (Urdu-speaking migrants from India), Marwari and Megwar Hindus, and others. There is no water supply - people rely on their own hand pumps for drinking water - but there is a gas line that few can afford. Electricity lines are in place. The Memons and Muhajirs own their own businesses and have jobs, so they are better off economically than the other residents. While the majority of men and also some women in the Bheel community are involved in road construction, the Hindu men work as shoemakers and the women as domestic servants. However, they are only permitted to work at the houses of *Banias* (Hindu money-lenders), so very few clean houses of Muslims.

### **Who are the employers?**

Domestic servants, by definition, work for families. In urban areas, the employers are middle to upper class; in the rural areas, the employers are predominantly the landed, wealthiest households in any given village. The rural employers may also have households in urban centres, which will be staffed by domestic servants from their villages whose relatives also work on their lands.

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In rural Punjab, domestic servants work for landlords. For example, in the Punjabi village Village A, Z is a landlord with a large staff. One family whose members all work in Z's house found that their son was included in Z's daughter's marriage dowry, so now he lives in her household far away from the village.

In Sindh, outside of the city of Karachi, the employers of domestic servants all seem to be landed families. In the town of Shahdadpur, the employers interviewed may have been professional (i.e., government servants or doctors) but their domestic servants come from the villages where they own land. In the village site, as well as in interviews with domestic workers from additional villages, the only families that can afford domestic servants in a rural setting are the landlords.

The rural landlord may also turn out to be something of a benevolent employer, helping to make the worker's dream of rural-urban success a reality.

**Case Study: F working in Model Town, Lahore**

F is 49 years-old, illiterate, and belongs to the caste Khandway. She is married and has six children. She came from a village in Pind Dadan Khan eight years ago. They lived in Chorani where her husband used to carry wood on camels but they could not survive on the money and wanted to educate their children. The camels were rented so they had major debts (almost 40,000 rupees). "We went hungry as all the money was given in loan payment." They talked to the Choudhry of their village and he told them to come to Lahore where many members of his family were living. F has been working in the same house for the last eight years. They sold their buffalo and a camel and paid off their loan before coming to Lahore. The rest of the debt has been settled by sending money from Lahore.

F is very happy here. Her husband is a guard, and she works as a cleaning, washing and cooking woman. Her daughter works with her and they earn Rs.4,000 rupees a month. Two of her daughters are married and live in Pind Dadan Khan. They have given them a small piece of land that is only useful in the rainy season. Her three sons go to the local government school; her employer pays their fees. They have separate living quarters and their owners pay the utilities but they cook their own food.

Since the workplace of domestic servants is in the private sphere and in the informal sector (where rules governing labour arrangements do not apply), employers enjoy abusive privileges over their domestic staff. In the private sphere, social arrangements of caste, class and gender advantage prevail. For example, a case study quoted here of an educated family, one actually affiliated to the judicial system of the country, demonstrates this reality.

**Case study: Z's household , upper-middle income locality, Lahore**

Z is 46 years-old, married, and came to Lahore six months ago. She belongs to an educated professional Syed family with ties in Sahiwal and Faisalabad. She has three children all of whom are studying, two in Lahore and one abroad. Her husband is a senior judicial officer.

Z has two servants, a boy, 12, from Lodhran where his older brother works in her husband's office, and a girl, 10, from Faisalabad where Z's family has rural links. The girl spends the night with Z's daughter. Her work is cleaning, dusting and washing and another woman comes in to wash and iron clothes. The girl was upset initially and wanted to go home, but has settled in now. The boy also gave Z trouble initially and would go to the local hotels to listen to songs or go kite-flying. Now he does not go out much and only indulges a little in kite flying. He gets Rs. 1,000 a month and gets new clothes on occasion. The girl gets Rs. 500 and old clothes, and on Eid also gets new clothes and 10 *maunds* of wheat. They have given a buffalo to her parents. "We educate them; the boy is interested; the girl is not. We do this so that they are able to attend to phone calls and take down messages. We never give advance money."

Z says there is a lot of "sex work" in the village in Faisalabad. The girls indulge in it for money for clothes or for wheat or rice. Their clients are mostly drivers and they give Rs. 5-10 per occasion.

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There is no concept of education or even *namaz* there. Girls start at the age of 10 until they are 40. "This girl's mother had told me not to let her go out."

One young woman in Lahore, who comes from a landed family and is a teacher, believes that the domestic servants in her family are irreligious, unaware and uncultured. (They are Musalli and, due to their low caste status, are often considered non-Muslim by others, even among beggars.) Two girl servants were given to her on the birth of her two sons, and she says that the girls are very well taken care of in her house. This employer appears to be convinced that, as domestic servants, they are protected from illicit sex, drugs and alcohol that are vices common to village life. Her parents pay Rs. 300 to each servant's family and ten bags of wheat per year. These families are indebted to her parents, which is why she was sent these servants girls to work in her own home.

But not all urban-based employers of domestic servants are landed; the business, professional and middle-classes all have help at home to various degrees. From the most elite, who employ Sri Lankan or Filipino nannies to care for their children, to the small shopkeeper who has a sweeper come in to clean his home, domestic service is integrated into the work of every home that can afford it. Most common is the part-time hired help, and as the income-level of the employing household rises, so, too, will the number and type of servant. The full-time cook, driver and *ayah* are found in the homes of urban upper classes.

One new trend in urban areas is the growth of service centres that function as small businesses whose role is to locate and place domestic servants in upper-class households. This is in response to a growing need among professionals and employers, who do not bring servants from their lands, to identify reliable individuals to work in their homes. Whereas in previous years, employers relied on informal networks, sometimes through nurses and churches, to identify communities or families whose members could work in their homes, the process is now becoming formalized. In Karachi, for example, the Domestic Service Agency opened over one year ago, and now places the full range of domestic servants with elite households in addition to the owners' original nurses placement service. The employees who register with the agency provide verifiable identification and pay half of their first month's salary to the agency, while the employers pay a fixed fee of Rs. 2,000 for the service. This agency, although not yet established as the norm for hiring domestic servants in urban centres, could be viewed as a first step towards formalizing the domestic service sector and stabilizing the pay scales and labour arrangements with employers.

### **c) Labour arrangements**

The labour arrangements in the domestic service sector vary according to rural and urban settings and also according to the background of the employer and worker. That is, caste-based domestic service in the home of a landlord comprises the most oppressive labour arrangements and is most likely to involve bondedness. RA field research revealed that in urban centres domestic service does offer some opportunities for advancement among workers whose alternatives include begging, brick kiln work, labour in a landed household or agricultural work in poverty-stricken areas of the country such as Southern Punjab. There also appears to be some possibility for domestic workers to enter into the more organized sectors through the mediation of domestic service employment agencies in large urban centres.

### **Rural**

In rural Punjab and Sindh, domestic workers have the least negotiating power with their employers. Labour arrangements are largely determined by the caste-class of the domestic workers. Whereas this is largely true for urban-based domestic workers as well, in rural settings the workers have the least options to explore other income-generating strategies or to change their employer in case of extreme exploitation.

### **Caste-based work**

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In Punjab, the dominant caste doing domestic service among our respondents is Musalli, otherwise known as Muslim Sheikh. Musallis also figure prominently among the begging communities, in both rural and urban Punjab and Sindh.

**Case study: N and family, village A**

N is a Musalli woman (Muslim Sheikh) illiterate, married, and working in the *haveli* of Z. Z owns N's home, although she built it herself. In her house, she has electricity but no other amenity. She has four daughters and two sons. Her husband, M, also works in Z's house. Two daughters live in Multan. N and her daughter, T, clean the floors, wash the clothes and do the dishes in G's house. Her husband looks after the animals and their sons water the lands. They work from five in the morning until eight at night. Their own house is right next to the *haveli*, so that they can be summoned in case work is needed at any time. Z's wife is particularly cruel, and hits them with her shoes. If they are sweeping she follows them around hitting them with her shoes saying they are working too slowly or not doing the job right. Z also hits her husband and sons but N isn't sure for what reason.

N came here six years ago. Before that, she used to live in a village whose landlord, Chaudhry (landed employer), loaned her Rs. 80,000 to marry off her son and daughter. But it was very difficult to repay the loan, so the outstanding Rs. 60,000 was "re-financed". That is, Z paid the amount to his friend the Chaudhry. In effect he bought them by taking on their debt and so they came to work with him.

T says that if a flowerpot breaks during cleaning, and if it is worth Rs. 25, then it is added to the loan at a rate of Rs. 500. If an animal dies, its value is also added to the loan. It has gone from Rs. 60,000 to three lakhs. This system of deducting money for every item damaged is called *parchi charhana*.

By way of some compensation, every person is given 200 rupees and one sack of wheat. They use the wheat to reduce their loan and do not take it. Here, kidney and eye problems are common. T and her brother were married off in *watta satta*, but she got divorced and that is why she is back. Z often has men friends over who drink, and think nothing of bothering the Musalli girls .

In a rural setting, labour arrangements are based on the traditional relationship between a landlord and his tenant farmer, who is inevitably indebted to him. Domestic servants come from this caste-based or class-based community of agricultural workers who are completely dependent on the landlord and who seek to reduce their debt to him by providing labour.

A number of exploitative arrangements evolve as a result of the absolute power and control wielded by the landlord/employer over his staff. For example, Shahdadpur town in Sindh is mainly inhabited by rural migrants who retain strong ties to their villages. One doctor has a government job as a district health officer, and his guard-cum-gardener is his official ward attendant. Each of them draws a government salary, the latter drawing Rs. 2,895 per month, but they live in the town and do not fulfill their government duties. The doctor, thus, uses the male servant's labour and pays him nothing for it. He is a small landlord in his village and the servant comes from his home setting.

Sometimes, caste affiliations to traditional labour sectors are shed through urban employment, but ties are hard to break. For H from Meo Colony, Lahore, for example, domestic service in the city is a step up from the brick kiln work in rural Punjab that is her family's hereditary line of work. However, as mentioned above, when she needs loans or salary advances, she does not ask her urban employer; instead, her husband returns to the brick kiln where he used to work and borrows money. H isn't happy with her work arrangement, especially, the abuse and salary deductions by her employer whenever he is displeased, and she says she is constantly ill.

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### In kind payment

In rural and town settings, a dominant feature of compensation for domestic service is through in kind payment, usually wheat. In village A, certain families traditionally work for the *Makhdoom* (a landlord caste). Landlords, say respondents, buy servants and do not let them work anywhere else until they have repaid their loans. People who work for them get 40 *maund* of wheat for one year of work. Young girls also work for them and get Rs. 200-300 per month. In Z's house some of the workers are bought and indebted and cannot go unless they repay their debt – which is ever increasing.

In Sargodha city, the landlord employers continue with their system of paying domestic servants in kind. For example, in one *Makhdoom* household in Satellite Town, Sargodha, the owner has 16 *muraba* of land in his village. In his city house, he employs five full-time servants. They all get paid in kind with fixed amounts of wheat per year; the driver alone also receives a salary of Rs. 1500/month. Three of the men are also allowed to work one acre of the landlord's land each.

A modified version of in kind payment continues in the cities. Domestic servants who work for landlords in their urban homes receive wheat in their villages by way of payment. Men and women domestic servants with other, non-landed employers, also say they receive occasional food and clothing. However, this is not in lieu of their salaries, but in addition to their monthly remuneration.

### Loans and bondedness

There is clear bondedness among rural domestic workers, usually caste-based, who work for landlords and whose families are indebted. As a result, the workers and their children do not receive adequate remuneration to pay off their debt, and are not free to decide for whom they will work. Workers may be bought and sold (by way of landlords assuming the loan arrangements from one another) without their participation in the decision.

The most common event that can put a family into debt seems to be a marriage. One rural Punjabi family got into debt because a relative demanded the princely sum of Rs. 50,000 before he would agree to a *watta satta* marriage between two of his children and a nephew and niece. In order to raise the money, a landlord who employed the family located another landlord who offered to put up the sum in return for the labour of one of their young daughters, whose work would eventually repay the debt. A contract was written up, the girl was sent, and the marriages took place. Over time, the family expects to recover their daughter.

In another Lahore household, a 12 year-old girl works in the house of a landlord. Her father works on the landlord's land, for which he receives 20 *maunds* of wheat per year and 20 *maunds* of rice, the latter of which goes back to the landlord to repay their Rs. 60,000 loan. But the girl's full-time labour is also part of that repayment agreement: she works in the landlord's city house for Rs. 500/month doing cooking, dishwashing, and clothes washing.

In village C, the RA research identified mainly male workers who perform a combination of duties within the landlords' houses, as well as tending to the animals. The workers were boys whose fathers farmed the landholdings of the employer, and also men who had to give up farming their own lands due to insufficient irrigation water. Rates for grazing cattle 12 hours a day are Rs. five per day. Full-time domestic male servants earn between Rs. 400-1,000/month, but say they rarely receive their full wages, and these wages are often sent to their fathers directly.

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If a family gets into debt with a landlord, its members surrender their labour and control over their lives to their employer. As he uses their labour in payment for their debt, he exercises the right to decide who will work with him and which members of the family he may wish to use in his bargaining with other landed families. In addition to the examples quoted above, a bonded servant can also be “gifted” from one landlord to another. Once under the new master’s control, the domestic servant, usually a girl, has to do housework and may also be used for sex. The servant cannot go to another house or work anywhere else without leave from the employer.

SH, age 20, has been working for a landlord in village A, Punjab, since she was four. At 15, her employers moved her to Lahore against the wishes of her mother, who eventually agreed to the conditions imposed by the landlord. SH moved between city and village twice over the next few years. Eventually her marriage was arranged to a servant from another *zamindar* in another village, known as *watta satta* of two villages. If SH had refused she would have been beaten, so she agreed. For her entire life, her labour has been under the *parchi* system described above. Sometimes, SH works extra long hours as punishment and receives beatings with sticks and horse-whips.

## Urban

### Part-time work

Domestic service is a particularly attractive form of work for uneducated, lower class migrants to the city as it requires no investment. The advantage of part-time work for women is that they can return home to their household duties in the evenings. Earnings from part-time work at more than one household are usually higher than full-time live-in domestic service with one employer. The proximity of urban slums to posh residential areas facilitates women working as part-time domestic workers. Efforts to “clean out” these illegal settlements are counter-productive to the survival strategies evolved by these low-income workers. From the perspective of employers, part-time women workers are cheaper to hire than full-time male servants. RA field researchers estimate that, in Lahore, part-time women domestic servants charge about one-sixth the salary of a full-time male servant per activity per month. This allows middle-income families to afford domestic help.

Part-time domestic service can be found in small towns, although the opportunities and pay scale are not as attractive as in the urban centres. In Shahdadpur, Sindh, for example, women who work as domestic servants on a part-time basis are those who left their villages due to extreme poverty, family and marriage problems, or widowhood. Rates for part-time work vary, with Rs. 250 being the remuneration for two hours of dish-washing or clothes-washing per day, and Rs. 200 for giving a massage to the mistress of the house and baby-sitting, or cleaning the wheat. Weekly clothes-washing (by hand, of course) fetches Rs. 25 per time. Women do multiple jobs to help support their families, and respondents mentioned that at times they were tempted to move to Karachi where pay-scales would be better but where other risks (see Sexual Harassment below) are greater, too. Respondents said that, compared to bigger cities here, women also have to work on Sundays and, compared to Karachi where they could get 300 rupees for a certain work, they get 200 here and at times 150.

Women part-time domestic workers from Meo Colony and Yasmin Colony in Lahore have a similar pattern of working in three to four houses per day, and earning a fixed Rs. 300/month from each employer. They clean (washing floors, dusting and sometimes bathrooms) wash pots and pans, and do not cook. If dishwashing is included, they can earn Rs. 800/month. Some women and girls earn as little as Rs. 200 per house, and other as much as Rs. 600, but this is rare. Women who work most of the day, but do not live at the residence of their employers, are still considered “part-time”. Their working hours are flexible, but their earnings do not reflect the 6-8 hour work-day that may be the routine. For example, a woman from Yasmin colony who cleaned house for a family and whose husband was their driver, earned Rs. 1,000/month.

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Earnings are supplemented with Rs. 50, 100 or 500 on the occasion of Eid, as well as old clothes and toys that are given on occasion by the employers.

**Case study: Meo Colony, Lahore**

A, age 11, is from the Christian community and has been working in houses for the last three years. She goes to the residential Neelam Colony from her home every day and works in two houses, where she does cleaning and washing. Her mother and sister work nearby in other houses. She gets Rs. 300 rupees and food and at times extra money, but if she is late or absent then she is severely admonished and in case of too many absences her salary is deducted.

She works from 8 am to 5 pm. If her work is finished early, she joins her mother and sister and helps them. When her mother is not with her, her *baji* makes her work more than usual. She makes her clean the ceilings and sends her to grocery stores and does not let her go early. She hands her the care of her children and takes a nap and keeps her late. A does not like cleaning work, especially the toilets. The children of the house where she works are in her age group, but she is not allowed to play with them.

There are other domestic jobs that involve only a few hours of work a day and enable the worker to earn from many houses each month. These include gardening, ironing, and cooking. These tasks are predominantly the territory of male workers and, not surprisingly, they bring in a higher income. One gardener in Lahore from Yasmin colony earns Rs. 800 from each of eight houses per month, and an additional Rs. 200 from another five houses where he works fewer hours per month. His total income is at least Rs. 7,400 for what would be considered day-work only. No female domestic servant reported a salary approaching this amount.

Women who have day jobs, whether with one or multiple employers, complain that if they are absent or late from work their employers ruthlessly cut their salaries. This is particularly onerous for domestic workers, who resent this practice that seems prevalent in both Lahore and Karachi. As a result, they dread arriving to work late, although they lack any control over the timeliness of public transport.

Orangi Town Bengali women migrants to Karachi who do domestic service say they spend Rs. 17-20 per day on their transport to and from work, and spend Rs. 1,000/month on house rent and utilities. In addition, they spend on their children's education. One Punjabi domestic worker from Shah Rasool earns Rs. 1,000/month for a 9am-4pm (part-time) work-day.

In Sector 14 of Orangi Town, inhabited by Biharis from Bangladesh, a group discussion with women domestic workers was frank and friendly. Women domestic servants in this community have similar labour arrangements as other part-time workers in urban centers, with a pay scale ranging from Rs. 2500/month for a full day's work with one employer to Rs. 3500/month for full-time work. Some women only work a few hours a day with an employer, bringing in Rs. 1,000-1,700, which they supplement with embroidery work or incense-making. These women are determined to educate their children - a major motive behind their employment - and also keep their families together despite the growing drug addiction among their husbands.

**Case study: KM's family in Shah Rasool Colony, Karachi**

KM, age 45, migrated to Karachi from Gujranwalla 25 years ago. He was a brick-kiln worker in his native village, but in the city he began as a construction worker. Today, he lives in a rented house at Shah Rasool Colony for Rs. 2,500/month. His house has one bedroom and lounge, running water, gas and electricity. He also owns a television and tape recorder. He lives in the house with his wife, two sons and two daughters.

KM works as a sweeper with the Karachi Development Authority, for Rs. 2,200/month, from 6am to 2pm, with Sundays off. His job was arranged through a contractor and he is content to keep the

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arrangement. He makes extra money working as a gardener in the evenings in a private home, for which he is paid Rs. 500/month with Rs. 100 as a tip on Eid.

His wife, age 38, has been a domestic worker since she was very young. In fact, it is the profession of women in the family, while men are traditionally brick-kiln workers. She used to earn Rs. 1,000/month working at multiple private homes, and now she has just one employer and earns Rs. 1500/month, for working seven days a week, 8am to 1pm. One of her daughters used to work with her until she married a brick kiln worker and in the Punjab. Her second daughter, age 16, has been employed since she was 10 years-old at the home of an army colonel. She used to earn only Rs. 500/month and now gets Rs. 1500/month. The two young sons do not work yet; one is studying the Quran and the other is in school.

KM says it is hard to manage his household on this level of income, and the worst disaster is an illness in the family. He would prefer it if his daughter did not work alone in a private home, apart from her mother.

### Full-time work

Full-time domestic work brings with it more uncompensated labour and it is possibly for this reason considered advantageous to the employer. Working hours for live-in domestic servants will vary, but the assumption is that the servant will be on call 24 hours a day. In return, the servant receives room and board as part of his compensation.

One type of full-time domestic work in the cities is a replica of rural arrangements, in which caste-based domestic servants serve the landlord in an arrangement with roots in bondedness. When feudal families come to the cities, they are known to bring a household set-up with them that is based on the system they are accustomed to. This means that the domestic servants come from their village home, and from the same caste or family that has traditionally served the landed, and work under conditions of long hours, virtually no pay or holiday, and often high abuse.

#### **Case study: P working in Model Town, Lahore**

P, age 13, is a Musalli by caste. She has been living here for the last four years, since she arrived from the village Chak J near Sargodha. Her father runs a *tonga* and her mother used to work in the *Choudhry's* (landed employer's) house in Chak J. P has six brothers and sisters.

P works in the *Choudhry's* daughter's house. She worked at the *Choudhry's* house in the village before, but when his married daughter had a baby. P was sent to Lahore to work in her house. She looks after the baby boy and cooks. She used to do all the cleaning and washing work as well as the cooking but since her *baji* had her second child, a 10-year old girl called D has been brought from Chak J to do the cleaning.

P does not want to stay with her *baji*. She says the husband scolds her and makes the servants work the whole day. If any guests come at night they are woken up to work, even at midnight, and even then they are scolded. The younger servant girl, D, is even beaten by *baji*.

Nonetheless they have to stay here because their parents have borrowed money from the *Choudhry*, although she does not know how much. P gets 800 rupees a month but does not get the money; it is deducted out of the loan. There is no extra money, but she gets transport money when she goes home to Sargodha. If a guest gives her any money as a tip she gives it to *baji* towards the loan payment.

She is not stopped from eating anything she wants and receives new clothes from her employers. However, she wants to stay with her own family. There is no male in the house and if there is, then *baji* does not leave her alone in the house.

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There is a sharp contrast between the labour arrangements of full-time and part-time servants, even in houses with a feudal culture. For example, in Lahore, one educated employer whose husband works in the Punjab Tourism Department has only two servants. A part-time older woman comes to clean and wash clothes, for which she receives Rs. 450 and Rs. 300/month respectively. A boy, 12, works full-time dishwashing and helping out in the kitchen, for which he receives no remuneration at all. He is the son of their *muzara* on their village lands in Bahawalpur, so the assumption is that his labour is in return for his father's continued employment and possible financial support.

Sindhi families in Karachi with large or medium land-holdings in their home villages have similar rural-based labour arrangements with their domestic servants, although with some variations. For example, a landed family may have servants from the village who receive no salary and in kind payment to their village-based parents, but at the same time part-time salaried domestic servants hired from the city may work in the same house. One large and influential landlord had yet another arrangement with his domestic servants in Karachi. Most of them belonged to his caste, and he considered them his relatives, some of whom have been working with him since they were children. However, they are paid in cash and receive pocket money. He trusts them because they are his relatives and explains they are not bound to him in any way.

Other full-time domestic jobs include the following. Men work as drivers, cooks, bearers, security guards, in some households as full-time positions. The pay scales vary, but start at approximately Rs. 3,500/month in the cities. Full-time occupations for women are usually as maids, or *ayahs*, with a similar pay-scale. Salaries are customarily increased by around 10 percent annually. The issue of gender-based inequalities in pay scale for full-time workers needs to be researched further.

#### Job insecurity

One characteristic of urban domestic service is job insecurity. Part-time as well as full-time domestic workers have no binding contracts with their employers. Respondents in both Lahore and Karachi complain that if they are absent too often (determined by the employer) or if they demand a salary increase, they run a very high risk of losing their jobs. In this context, advances are also not as forthcoming as they are in the rural setting, where the *peshgi* system bonding agricultural workers (*haris*) to the landlords translates into bonded employment of domestic service in return for loan repayment. Employers may or may not be willing to furnish salary advances to their domestic servants. The decision is at the employer's whim which increases the pressure on the employee whether to risk his/her job by requesting a salary increase

#### **d) Forms of coercion, harassment, and violence**

##### **Sexual harassment and exploitation**

Women domestic servants complain consistently about being subjected to various forms of sexual harassment. They say men "bother" them, or "tease" them, and sometimes their language does not reveal the full extent of the harassment. For example, in village A, Punjab, a mother and daughter work together inside the house of a wealthy employer. The daughter is divorced and now lives with her parents, and she said that her employer often has men friends over who drink, and then start to "bother" the Musalli girls like herself and "think nothing of it." Interestingly, her mother did not mention this problem, and it was not possible to decipher how physical or threatening the men are with the girls during such episodes.

In both Punjabi villages, women domestic workers alluded to the drunken behavior of *zamindars*, how they make them do "strange" things. Sexual abuse was hinted at, but women appeared reluctant to talk about it directly.

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In Shahdadpur town, women domestic workers pointed out that sexual harassment was less common than in Karachi because the town is small and most people know each other. There were numerous stories of women who had returned from the big city because of the sexual abuse or harassment they experienced. Sometimes, the women face hostility from the male members of their own families who accuse them of having relations with the master of the house and who object to the women talking to anyone in the street.

The vulnerability of women to sexual exploitation on the one hand, and sex-based restrictions by the family on the other hand, are well illustrated in one case. A widow working in Shahdadpur fled her village because her family was pressuring her to remarry. She broke all contacts with the village and started working in houses. She befriended a *sobedar* who helped her in her monthly expenses but they did not get married. By working part-time in many houses she managed to raise her eight children. Now that they are grown, her sons object to her working and taking food from her employers. She only works in two houses now, earning Rs. 400 from each.

In urban centers, women domestic servants who travel on public transport and walk to and from work every day regularly experience the whistles, catcalls and comments of men in public. Younger girls in particular are singled out for such treatment, but any woman of any age is vulnerable if she emerges from her house. Girl workers from Yasmin Colony said in their focus group discussion that men who work in houses surrounding their employers' residence made it a habit to harass them.

One such girl, now 16 years-old, went to work in the home of two professionals who had a son. Over time, she developed a sexual relationship with the boy while his parents were out of the house, although it is unclear how voluntary this relationship was on her part. She was pregnant within three months. When the parents found out, they arranged for her to have an abortion, gave her some money as compensation, and also arranged for her to marry her cousin.

Among the Bengali community interviewed in Sector 12 Orangi Town, respondents said that some women had been sexually harassed by the master of the house when his wife was absent. One woman accepted his offers and now he pays all her household expenses. Another woman left work because she did not want to accept his advances.

## **Violence**

Violence in the home is difficult enough to acknowledge in Pakistan, let alone to document and analyze. In the case of domestic servants, their vulnerability to this crime is increased because they are engaged in an unequal power relationship with their employers in the private sphere, well away from the reach of legal redress. In rural areas, where the law is in the staunch grip of the landed classes, violence can be exercised safe from constraining factors. For this reason, possibly, reports of violence against domestic servants in rural areas are greater in number than in urban homes.

In village A, the family who is indebted to their employer, Z, say that he beats the men when he is discontent. His wife hits the women workers with her shoes, following them around as they wash and sweep the floors, admonishing them to work faster. Another domestic worker, Q, 20 and Musalli, who used to work at Z's house says that when she tried to protest against his plans to remove her son from school and put him to work with his father to train horses, he beat her very badly. She says this was the first time in her life, although she had been working since the age of four, that she realized servants have no right to live or think, and not even any right to make choices.

Violent behavior is not limited to rural areas. Domestic servants from Yasmin Colony and Meo Colony have tales to tell of a "bad" *baji*, one who slaps girl servants when she is not satisfied with their work or loses her temper, and are full of praise for a "good" *baji* who doesn't raise her hand against them. They

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particularly fear being accused of theft by their employers, and each community had members who had undergone police investigation and lost their jobs.

## **Vulnerability**

### Young girls

Common sense as well as much social research indicates that the people most vulnerable to high-risk activities are adolescents. The population aged 10-24 years enjoy neither the protection given to small children nor the powers of adults, yet they are often expected to shoulder the burdens of the latter but treated as unknowing children. The RA research confirms that adolescents, and even younger children, are in the sectors of the labour force that we have covered and, to varying degrees, suffer from exposure to physical and emotional trauma.

When under-age boys and girls work, it cannot be assumed that they do so with their full consent. These workers usually, but not always, say that they would prefer to be studying and that the family cannot afford to put them in school. Further research into young domestic workers is required in this regard. Case studies collected during the RA document how under-age domestic workers send their salaries directly to their parents, have little say over whom their employers will be, and are expected to continue working until they marry and leave home.

In domestic service, we found that young girls working in private homes are particularly vulnerable to violence and harassment as discussed above. Older women are less likely, it seems, to be paid less, beaten, or sexually harassed, probably because they are considered more able to look after themselves. The girls in the focus group in Yasmin Colony, for example, said that employers are harsher with younger girls and that they are more likely to get beaten at work or harassed by men on the street.

#### **Case study of F from Sargodha**

F is 14 years-old and works at *Makhdoos*'s (landlord) house. Her family belongs to a village near Sargodha. Her father was a labourer but four years ago was injured by fireworks during a wedding and now stays home; her mother works at a *tandoor* and her brother is a driver in the village at the *Makhdoom*'s house. Her brothers have studied until primary level, but her sisters have not.

F cooks, cleans, and washes clothes in the house. She has been here for the last six years. The work has increased over time. She gets 36 sacks of wheat, about one *maund* per year, and no salary. Sometimes, when she is given a little cash hand-out, she buys tea and sugar for her family, since these items are expensive. Her employers give her old clothes and a new outfit for summer, winter and Eid. She would like to get 500 rupees because the work-load is heavy but she would not like to work anywhere else. She says her *baji* is nice, does not scold her if something is broken and pays for her medical treatment. F wants to study and has just started reading Urdu with her *baji*. She likes to watch television and Indian channels (since there is cable in the house) and also listens to music with *baji*. Washing pots and pans is tough work, she says, and so is making 20 to 25 chapattis a day. But there are all kinds of facilities here in the town, unlike the village where there is not even a toilet. Every two months she goes to visit her family.

Employers who are landlords in the rural areas, or who replicate the landed lifestyle when they move to the cities, seem to hire young girls and boys more often than do employers from professional backgrounds. Hence the case studies, quoted above, which describe under-age children, particularly girls, doing cleaning, cooking, and looking after their employers' children. These children work in return for little or no money, and usually come from families who are somehow bonded, through indebtedness, to the employer in the village. Their families are also likely to work traditionally for the landed employer, based on caste affiliations.

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For example, in Sargodha, one educated woman whose husband has one *muraba* of land in his village and works as a government servant in the city. The male servant, full-time, has been with the family for 25 years and comes from their village. He works as a watchman, gardener and dishwasher, and receives ten *maunds* of wheat per year as compensation. The female servant, on the other hand, receives Rs. 600 per month for washing, cleaning, and cooking. She is 16 year-old married Musalli girl. Her former landlord “gave” her to this landed family two years ago for domestic work. She is not allowed to go to see her husband, but only visits her family occasionally at her village. She says she is happy with her current employers because, unlike in her former place of work, they do not physically torture her.

### Migrant workers

The Bengali community in Karachi is particularly vulnerable to harassment by the authorities because its members are predominantly illegal migrants from Bangladesh. According to key informants, men may earn Rs. 3,000-4,000 per week in garment factories but the police take most of the money and send them home with Rs. 500 or 1000. In 1991 a Bengali settlement near Ayesha Manzil was ransacked and burnt during internecine fighting in the city, causing severe losses to the residents. Although many Bengalis have real or faked identification cards, they continue to be harassed by the police and have difficulty obtaining Pakistani passports. Some Bengalis feel that the Bihari community gives them a bad name, because the latter are also Bengali-speaking migrants but engage in organized crime.

### e) Conclusion

This initial exploration into the largely undocumented terrain of the domestic worker in Pakistan has yielded some findings immediately relevant for the purposes of assessing bonded labour. First, there is bondedness in the domestic service sector, as identified among workers in rural settings whose employers are landlords, and among workers in urban settings whose employers remain landlords in the rural areas. This bondedness is directly related to agricultural bondedness, since the original debt was usually incurred when the workers were *haris*. Second, the majority of domestic workers come from castes that traditionally engage in agricultural work, brick-kiln work, begging, or casual labour (i.e. low income sectors, in which bonded labour is often found). Third, the vulnerability to coercion and harassment is particularly high in the domestic service sector because of the workers’ extreme dependence on their employers and the fact that they work within a private setting, far from the scrutiny of even neighbours. Boys and girls both work long hours, and girls, in particular, are susceptible to sexual violence from a young age.

## Chapter Three: BEGGING

### a) Research approach and summary of fieldwork

In Pakistan, popular perceptions of begging are coloured by combination of moral/religious views and first-hand experience. Neither people nor development researchers have delved deeply into the issue of who begs and why, and under what circumstances. The public is preoccupied with alleviating guilt through occasional hand-outs to beggars (particularly during the holy month of Ramzan), making judgements on the credibility of an individual beggar he/she encounters, or expressing strong views on whether begging should be permitted or not. Begging is viewed as a sign of growing poverty, or indigence, and as an occupation of last resort, but nonetheless as potentially linked to crime and illicit activities. It is generally understood in the press and in development circles that beggars work in groups and mafia-style organizations and are themselves exploited by their *thekedars* because they are unable to keep their earnings for themselves.

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Our RA fieldwork aimed to document the diversity of beggars, their work histories, levels of abuse and coercion they encounter, and their labour arrangements. The sites chosen were:

**(i) Sindh province**

1. Urban: **Karachi**

- Moria Goth, Star Gate locality, near Shah Faisal Colony
  - Ghazi Goth community, opposite Karachi University
  - Observation sites: Abdullah Shah Ghazi Mazar, Zia Colony and Salehabad in Gulshan-I-Iqbal .
- In Karachi a total of 79 documented interactions took place that included informal interviews, case studies, formal and key informant interviews, and formal observation sessions.

2. Urban: **Shahdampur** - near bus stop

3. Rural: **village C**

In Shahdampur and village C, 25 interactions in total took place. They included one focus group discussion, one key informant interview, and the remainder as documented informal interviews.

**(ii) Punjab province**

1. Urban: **Lahore**: Subsazar Scheme, Badami Bagh, China Scheme, and Singhpura.

Observation sites: Data Darbar, Bibi Pakdaman and Badami Bagh (trucking station)

In Lahore, 34 documented interactions took place, including three key informant interviews, and formal as well as informal interviews.

2. Urban: **Sarghoda**: Shaukat Park

3. Rural: **village A**

In Sarghoda and Village-A, two group meetings and two informal discussions were held.

Fieldwork took place over a period of two weeks in each province. Researchers began by carrying out observation visits on selected sites to see whether they would be appropriate for further research. Among the sites listed above, some did not contain much evidence of begging and were not pursued. For example, Shah Abdullah Ghazi's Mazar revealed the linkages between begging, drug use and sex work, but was more useful as a site to explore the latter problems and the *hijra* culture. In the sites with obvious communities of beggars, field researchers visited repeatedly to have formal and informal interviews with men, women, children, and key informants who were occasionally somewhat removed from the community itself. Community profiles were also prepared on the basis of interview material and researchers' observations. Field researchers went to the research sites in groups and divided into pairs to conduct their interviews, but some of the work also required that our male researchers make exploratory visits and conduct the *hijra* interviews independently and sometimes at night.

Focus group discussions were not possible (barring one in rural Sindh) because the topic at hand was sensitive for informants. Many respondents do not care to admit publicly that they beg for money, want to keep their begging secret from their families and/or combine it with illicit sex work. Field researchers had to conduct their work with discretion, in parts of the city that were unfamiliar and potentially hostile to them. Informal discussions and individual interviews were better able to further the goals of the RA.

Respondents, particularly women, spoke cheerfully and extensively about their work. They invited field researchers into their homes for discussions, allowing ample opportunity for close observation of their living conditions. One-on-one interviews proved difficult, particularly because male relatives often intervened with comments of their own, and children gathered to listen along with other household members. Men and boys were more reluctant to discuss their begging practices apparently because of shame about their occupation. This made it difficult to assess with accuracy male involvement in begging, particularly that of adult males. Within communities, one ethnic group would be reluctant to admit involvement in begging, while they would quickly identify another group that does this work. In beggars'

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residential communities there was an expectation that the researchers would offer charity or help to solve their problems.

### **b) Description of sector**

Begging is a vast and complex informal work sector that does not lend itself to a precise definition. Rather, it encompasses a range of activities whereby an individual asks strangers for money on the basis of being poor or needing charitable donations for health or religious reasons. Beggars may also sell small items, such as dusters or flowers, in return for money that may have little to do with the value of the item for sale. Begging activities are not always organized by group, caste or mafia, and there may or may not be an intermediary involved.

We came to realize that begging as an activity is best understood by observing its linkages or roots in certain socio-economic factors. Some of these are rural-urban migration issues, increasing urban unemployment, caste-based restrictions and opportunities, illegal businesses such as drug trade and sex work, and the all-powerful role of the *patharidar* in a range of mafia activities that include using children, elderly and the disabled as beggars. This type of criminally organized begging was most difficult and dangerous to explore during the RA, and whatever scarce but reliable information could be gathered is presented below. A beggar's techniques and labour arrangements will depend on how he or she came into this line of work. The socio-economic factors that determine if and how an individual turns to begging, limit his/her opportunities for progress. So, whereas there is no clear-cut bondedness in the begging sector of the kind seen, for example, in the agricultural sector, this kind of labour is nonetheless coerced or forced through a severe set of circumstances.

The field research team searched for sites where professional beggars either live or work. The former sites were the location of the main interview discussions whereas the latter became locations for field observations. Other research sites included buses, where field researchers observed women begging, and informal encounters with beggars at various street crossings around the cities. In addition, city government officials, policemen and traffic policemen gave their views on beggars during formal interviews at their offices.

### **c) Community profiles of large urban sites**

This section provides an overview of the ethnic composition, living conditions and general work history in the main research sites in the provincial urban and rural settings.

#### **Karachi (urban)**

Site: Moria Khan Road. Star Gate (railway station) Shah Faisal Colony.

The site is located off the main Shakra-e-Faisal Boulevard leading to the Karachi Airport, near the railway station on Moria Khan road. The settlement lies between a shopping plaza and large school on one side used by the middle-class residents in the neighborhood of Shah Faisal Colony nearby and the railway station on the other. It has 350-400 residents, or 35-40 households. Houses are built of cement with iron doors. They have two rooms with a courtyard, kitchen and bathroom. There is electricity, illegally wired through what is called the *kunda* system, and no gas. Houses have hand pumps that bring up brackish water, and there is potable water from a pump on the street. There is no government school in the vicinity and the residents cannot afford private schooling. People use the government Jinnah Hospital for medical care, since they cannot afford the nearby private clinics. They also visit a certain doctor who has a nearby clinic and treats them for only Rs. 10 each and also offers a ration card system for food supplies to the needy.

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The beggars here are Muslims, living in 40 households. They call themselves Bhattu Rajput Charan, by caste or kinship grouping, who migrated from Rajasthan in India to various cities in the Punjab (where they used to live a nomadic lifestyle) and then came to Karachi in 1980. They prefer to call themselves Rajputs, because this name carries a higher status, but because they are low in status and practice begging, others refuse to refer to them as such.

As a whole, the languages Seraiki, Ranghri and Punjabi can be heard in the community. Some claim to have had lands in the Punjab, where they did agricultural work and sold buffalo milk. They came to Karachi to improve their lives. They built their own houses, while working at the airport as porters.

Women wear *ghagra* and *kurta*, indicating their Rajasthani roots, and men *shalwar kameez*. Women have nose-rings in both sides of their nose and men have one earring. Informal discussions with women show they are mainly concerned with the lack of male employment, water, and proper drainage. Some houses had fridges and freezers inside, with dirty clothes hanging on the windows. The women seem to be fairly well dressed, suggesting that the dirty clothes are “uniforms” used for their begging work only.

The men in this community lost their jobs as porters at the airport – they do not explain exactly when or why. Since the residents cannot find work, they have turned to begging, which is their traditional occupation.

Mostly women beg, while men do not admit to doing so and it was not possible to determine the extent of their involvement. Some young boys work at nearby vehicle show rooms and shops in the bazaars. People seemed unhappy, and boys in the streets unhelpful. The children beg, too, on the whole, although some do attend school. Girls, especially older ones, are generally kept at home. Women, in addition to begging, also work at home doing embroidery, and men have small stalls in the locality that sell paan, vegetables, fruit or miscellaneous small various items.

Site: Ghazi Goth, University Road

This settlement is located off Main University Road, opposite the Karachi University. It is built of *jhonpris* (dwellings made of bamboo and wood covered by old clothing of different kinds). There are 500-600 such *jhonpris* in the settlement, around 200 of which belong to Muslims and the rest to Hindus. The total number of residents is estimated at 3000-4000, around eight to 10 people per home, and in a hill overlooking the settlement there are additional *jhonpris*. There is no *pukka*, or cement/brick house in view.

On the side of each dwelling is a washroom, also made of cloth and sticks. Kitchens are outside the main homes, in the dirt before the entrance, in the form of kerosene stoves dug into the ground. The toilet is a nearby hill. There is no public hospital, health centre or school nearby, nor any private facilities, barring one private health clinic outside the settlement.

Among the Muslims are Afghan Pathans, Punjabis, Sindhis. Caste or kinship groups include some Baloch, Sindhi Solangis and Talpurs, and Seraikis. Among the Hindus there are Marwaris, and Bhagris. The Hindus have been here since 1987. Hindko, Seraiki, Pushto, Sindhi, and Marwari languages are spoken.

These migrants from outside Karachi, who are mainly beggars, have illegally occupied formerly deserted government land over the last ten years. A member of a religious-political organization gave them protection when they came here and encouraged them to build settlements. Even now, they turn to him for help when they have problems and he gives them 1,000-1,500 rupees without asking for it back or for any work in return. Apparently, he has a *madrassa* that offers free education and he enjoys good relations with the police and other members of the city administration.

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The people steal electricity as in other sites, but it works only in the Marwari area, or one section of the settlement. A light-bulb, fan and cassette recorder can be run on this facility. The rest of the residents have no electricity, so at night the people use kerosene lanterns. They get water from the nearby *madrassa* and other houses, and fill their containers once a day.

Few residents are educated; at most, some have learned basic arithmetic. They say that their children cannot study at all because there are no nearby schools. They spend most of their time begging. No hospital is available in their area and the people say they travel to government hospitals as the last resort. They buy medicine from stores for which they borrow and beg money when possible.

They say that during the rainy season, water comes into their homes and the streets fill with mud, so sitting and working then is difficult. Sometimes, their houses collapse due to rain. KDA, the Karachi Development Authority, has tried to destroy the settlement many times: once they bulldozed it and another time they set it on fire, killing a little girl.

The settlement was initially known only as a Hindu *basti*, but within a few years Muslims also came here in search of better earnings. The Muslims without possessions begged, although the women did some work from their homes. Some southern Punjabi men work in nurseries, others sell fruit, etc. The Bhagri Hindus come from Hyderabad in Sindh where they used to farm – as *haris* -- in Badin along with the women. But, due to drought, they came here in search of regular employment. The Bhagri men began to sell fruit and the women beg. They did not beg when they were in Tando Adam. The Marwaris mainly originated in Tando Adam, but are basically from India. In Tando Adam they were occasional labourers and frequently unemployed, so they came here in search of regular employment. This suggests that begging is something of a fall-back option for these groups when other income-generating measures are insufficient. The Hindus are believed to have better begging skills, which is a cause for jealousy.

Hindus and Muslims live in harmony within the community and residents attend each other's festivities. The Marwaris think of themselves as superiors to the Bhagris. The two groups do not visit each other's houses although they are both Hindu. The Bhagris are closer to the Muslims, but they live in a separate area. The community does not fight on religious or ethnic grounds; most rows are over water or children.

### **Lahore (urban)**

#### Site: Badami Bagh

This is a locality of small *pukka* houses, with about 50 of them involved in begging, behind the Railway Station in Lahore. The area was populated in 1970 on land owned by the railways; the residents now number approximately 1800. There are no basic utilities, barring illegally-wired electricity. The majority of population is engaged in begging, with caste-based begging by the Bhatto and Bazigar clans. They are in favour of educating their children. Residents are migrants from Daska near Sialkot.

The residents appear reluctant to admit that they beg for a living, but, on the other hand, do say that begging is the family profession. The whole family may do this work, but mainly the women beg, along with selling fruit. Unmarried girls do not beg. Earnings may be Rs. 50-150 per day. Men do odd jobs to supplement incomes. They are able to keep their earnings for themselves, beyond occasionally paying off the police when action to evict them is threatened.

Women use a card system to beg, as in other sites, while travelling on buses. There is a strong suggestion that women combine begging with sex work, their clients coming from the nearby bus stop and including drivers, conductors, passengers and police.

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Site: Singpura

This settlement has been built on land owned by the Railway Department. The *jhuggis* number around 125, and are located right next to the Railway Colony. The older inhabitants are Baloch who migrated from Shikarpur in Sindh. They are the poorest of all, as evidenced by the fact that their shabby shanties. Muslim Sheikh migrants from Bahawalnagar make up the other main group. About 200 families left Bahawalnagar, near the Indian border, over the last two years out of fear of a war with India. Many have since returned, and others plan to go back in the near future. Other residents came from Delhi, after Partition, to Khanewal and then to Lahore. They are Rajputs, but call themselves Changez.

The Punjabi community is in the majority, with only 25 percent Baloch. Their communities are clearly demarcated. Since this settlement is still not registered with the government, the Railway Police collects 20-30 rupees from every hut each month through harassment and intimidation.

It appears that all residents do begging along with other income-generating activities if possible. The Musalli migrants from Bahawalnagar used to sell earthenware pots and stitch clothing for a living in their hometown, earning Rs. 2,000 per month, and the men could earn Rs. 100-200/day as labourers. But here in Lahore they beg, which they claim is the most lucrative activity for them.

**Case study: Z in Singpura**

Z, aged 60, is a Muslim Sheikh beggar from Singpura with five children. She came from Bahawalnagar, where she lived in a *jhonpri* near the railway colony that belonged to the government. In Bahawalnagar, her family used to sell earthenware pots, but she says their work is actually begging and they did not make enough money from the pots. Since they came to Lahore, they have stopped selling pots altogether because the begging work is going well.

“Each of us makes 100-150 rupees/day. Other than that people give us charity and food. Boys go out to beg, not the girls. Only older women and small girls can go out to beg. They go to work in a van and mainly go to Data Darbar, Shahi Qilla. They don’t ask for money in streets and bazaars because people there give less and scold a lot. But at the *mazars*, people give a lot of money and food as well.”

Z’s people are regular migrants. If they put up a *jhonpri*, they stay for six months to a year, by which time, “we are forced to leave and we look for another place. Before we set up a *jhonpri*, we check to make sure there is a water supply somewhere nearby.” They currently share the settlement with Sindhis. She says they rarely have in-fighting, but if they do the men beat the women. “No one comes in between in these fights, because they happen daily in our homes.”

Local residents wish to educate their children but cannot afford to. Men do some begging and are also rag pickers – an occupation that can bring in Rs. 100/day. A man can spend Rs. 4/day on *paan* and Rs. 10 on cigarettes. Women say they beg because, otherwise, they cannot make ends meet. They also do activities such as collecting old paper for re-selling to earn money. As beggars, they say they can earn Rs. 200-300/day, and they give their earnings to the family elders. Among the Changez the women stay at home but small male children are put to work – even at a car workshop. Some among the Punjabi community have cattle, such as buffaloes, goats and poultry as a second source of income.

The smaller urban sites in Lahore, where full community profiles were not possible because the beggars were not in a concentrated locality, are discussed below:

Site: Sabzazar Scheme

There are thousands of huts in this settlement now scattered over three kilometres due to its expansion over the last ten years. The land has been inhabited since 1965, and residents often have to move from plot to

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plot to avoid harassment, since the Lahore Development Authority regularly comes to demolish their dwellings.

The beggars in this locality are Mirasi by caste, i.e., singers and drummers at festivals and family occasions who also train *hijras* and dancers. They perform outside marriage halls, parties, and in other public places. Although they work, in the sense that they beat drums or sing, in return for money, it is considered a form of begging. They will not do what they consider to be “hard labour” in other sectors, because they believe that their caste status and vocation has made them only fit for this work. The Mirasis in this community are migrants from Raiwind in the Punjab, and are not related to the respondents in other RA sites.

Some of the beggars have migrated from rural localities to small towns (Raiwind) to Lahore in search of better incomes. Combining their traditional work with agricultural or livestock occupations, however, has not been sufficient for many of their community.

#### Site: China Scheme

This area is near Mint Pakistan in Lahore, where many residents live in *jhuggies* and are reputed to be beggars. Respondents are Khokar by caste and Muslim. They lack basic amenities, including electricity, and are illiterate. They refer to themselves as paper collectors and waste collectors, and deny that they beg. They say they collect *zakat* and funds on religious holidays. It appears men do the collecting work, and they say their women remain at home and are not permitted out. Women say they will not do domestic service for fear of being accused of theft.

Researchers felt that the women may have been sex workers and were hiding the true source of their income. Men were better-dressed than their declared work would suggest.

#### **Urban observation sites**

##### Abdullah Shah Ghazi Mazar, Karachi

This religious shrine, located on the seafront in south Karachi and surrounded by the most expensive residential areas of the city, has grown tremendously in recent years. A combination of discreet observation and informal interviews gave the researchers a sense of the activities that keep this place bustling around the clock.

Beggars are linked with the proliferation of drug addicts, who live around the Mazar and purchase and sell drugs here. Many addicts are beggars sitting alone or in small groups on the footpaths. Children who live in nearby slums are put to beg by themselves during fixed times every day at the Mazar in order to supplement family earnings. Women from rural areas who have fled their homes are referred to the Mazar, where they may stay by setting up *jhonpris* in the nearby field and begging and/or engaging in sex work for a living.

The Mazar culture is predominantly based on drug sale and addiction rather than begging. Sex work by men (*hijras*) and women, and possibly younger girls is suspected. The site combines drugs, begging and sex work as major activities indulged in by visitors, residents of the *jhonpris* in the field next to the Mazar, and flower shop owners in front of the Mazar.

Begging at the Mazar was linked to the drug addicts, who begged in order to finance their habit.

##### **Case study: Shabana at Abdullah Shah Ghazi Mazar**

S, from Punjab, has been in Karachi for the last 12 years. She was born Christian, but chose to become Muslim and escaped here for unknown reasons. Some people brought her here from Cantonment Railway Station and left her in front of the Mazar. Her husband left her, and she lives

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in a *jhonpri* with her two daughters around 15-16 years-old. Her son is about five, which suggests he is not from her husband. She is a *malang*, or devotee of the Mazar, and lives here and lives off of the food and rations distributed. She begs for a living, she says. She and her children bathe at a nearby *hamam*, or bath house, all four of them for 40-50 rupees. She appears to be involved in sex work. She said that girls who come for shelter to the Mazar are harassed by the flower-selling men who make them do sex work since they are involved in it themselves and bring clients. Other people who come to the Mazar bring other women here for sex work as well.

#### Near Sohrab Goth, beggars colony in between flats, Karachi

This community was established over a decade ago, and is under the protection of the *madrassa* located in front of it. Residents give Rs.100/month to the *madrassa* as a sort of mandatory donation. There are 100 houses with 8-12 people living in each. People speak Marwari, and their houses are made of cloth and wood, with the bathroom outside. They were *haris* in Sukkur, and call themselves Megwar Hindus. They say that the *zamindars* did not keep responsible accounts so they had to come here. They feel protected by the *moulvis*. It appears they actually work for the *moulvis* who make a fair amount of money off them each month in return for their protection. The irony is that non-Muslims are being used for the earnings of the *moulvis*. Perhaps the residents change over time, and the area accommodates recent rural to urban migrants upon their arrival in the city. Male residents sell onions or balloons, while women beg on the streets and with cards on buses. Men also beg and do occasional labour.

#### Data Darbar, Lahore

Because it was difficult to speak to beggars on traffic intersections, due to recent police action against them, it was not possible to interview beggars at their workplace. Alternative work sites were selected. One such site was the entrance to the Data Darbar compound in Lahore, a religious shrine that attracts visitors from all over the city and country.

Begging at this location is organized, with delineated groups occupying fixed spots. The activities are managed by a few individuals with the cooperation of the policeman on duty. Women ask for money after placing garlands around the neck of visitors. Women beggars at the entrance were disabled but occupied the most lucrative seat, for which they had to pay thousands of rupees to a *daig-walla* at the Darbar, who in turn paid the police to allow them to remain there. There is a linkage between organized begging and sex work. Women who have run away from home due to various reasons are lured to the Darbar, where they are installed in this work by gang leaders with the cooperation of the police. It is suggested that women are put to work as beggars by day and prostitutes by night.

#### Bibi Pak Daman, Lahore

People have been coming to this religious shrine for the last 20 years. There is a place on top for travelers to come and stay. One side of the *mazar* is for men; the other for women.

Women beg for money after placing badges with a holy inscription on visitors. They also predict the future in return for money and food. Children beg in the streets. Earnings are Rs. 100-150 per day, and similar for sweepers. There is no salaried work. We found less violence, corruption and organized illegal activity than in Data Darbar, and fewer beggars. It was suggested that the police take a 50 percent cut from each beggar.

#### Badami Bagh (bus stop and truck stand) Lahore

This is the largest truck-stop in Lahore, spread over three kilometres and receiving thousands of trucks a day. The dominant form of begging here is by young women, who also engage in sex work. Children can be seen sniffing glue at the bus stop. Professional beggars rent small children, ages 3-5, to beg for them for 12

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hours a day. The children are given drugs and rags to make them appear retarded, ill and undernourished. These children are likely to end up as heroin addicts.

#### **d) Community profile of small urban centres**

##### **Shahdadpur**

The main begging community is Muslim Sheikh (also known as Musalli) by caste or kinship, who are said to be non-Muslims because they are presumably so low in the caste hierarchy. They speak Seraiki, and come from a village in southern Punjab where they worked in agriculture. When the crop failed and they could not repay their debts (Rs. 10,000-15,000) to the landlords, they came here to beg to reimburse the money. They have been here for the last 12 years.

They inhabit 20-30 houses in Shahdadpur, and the community numbers between 200-300. The women and children in this community beg, while the men collect paper. The men also beg occasionally, but feel they do not need to because the women earn enough. They tend to sit around, smoke cigarettes, and do a bit of work. Some members of the community go to Karachi as well, but when they heard beggars were being arrested, they did not go this year. Men sell the old paper they collect for Rs. 40-50 per *maund*, which takes them 3-4 days to accumulate.

Individual women seen begging. All told stories of a disabled or ill member of the family whom they have to support in the absence of an earning husband. Women mainly said they were widows. The women beggars were accompanied by children, who begged alongside their mothers.

##### **Sargodha**

###### **Site: Shaukat Park**

This is a satellite town of Sargodha, which houses a begging community that settled here 16 years ago. They are Mirasis from Bekaneer in India who used to earn a living through their traditional occupation as well as horse-trading. When they came to Pakistan, they could not get the land that they claimed the government had allotted them, and the tribe dissipated to cities around the country. Some came to Sargodha and have relocated nine times within this city.

They live in huts on three plots surrounded by houses. Twenty households own *kacha pukka* houses, equipped with electricity and latrines. These houses are adjacent to shanty huts. Only two huts have electricity due to a local notable who has given them a free electricity connection. They are basically uneducated; a few men have completed primary education, but women's education is limited to study of the Quran.

Their weddings are very extravagant. They do not allow marriages into other families. There are many stories of women who marry outside the family and are never allowed to return.

The people call themselves Mir Alam, and their *baradri*, or kinship group, numbers 3,000 in Pakistan. They have relatives in D.I. Khan, Sargodha, Lahore and Peshawar. Their people have been in the country for the last 35 years, and primarily earn their living through singing at festivals and in public places, and now they claim they sing on TV and radio as well. They claim the famous folk singer Reshman, and newer commercial names such as Nasibo Lal and Naheed Pervaiz as their own.

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## **e) Community profile of rural sites**

### **Village C, district Sanghar, Sindh**

The village has a mixed group of castes or kinship groups, including Shikari, Gurgala and Bhalli. There is a boys' middle school, but it does not function. There is no girls' school or police station or phone system. Men are labourers in factories, and have shops for fruit or vegetables. People do not necessarily stick to their traditional caste vocations. The village, said to be 250 years old, is named after a dervish, and there is a *mazar* for him.

In this village, women appear to beg while men do the jobs mentioned above. Some of the beggars are converts to Islam from Hinduism, possibly to benefit from *zakat* and other religious-based charity. Women and girls who beg do not seem to be doing much other work. Men are reluctant to admit that their daughters beg. Girls who beg emerge for their interview in clean clothes and makeup. Some girls go to Shahdadpur to beg, but not every day. They claim to earn Rs. 30-40 per day.

### **Village A, district Sargodha, Punjab**

The respondents in this village are of the Mussali caste, the lowest caste in Punjab and Sindh. They claim to have settled in this village over 200 years ago. They live in a cluster of 30 houses 300 yards from the main houses of the village. The houses used to number 200 at first. Their people used to earn from begging and *chaj*-making, and later added agricultural and livestock work. Some went to the city and made some savings. Now the community is divided between the richer ones who do the livestock business and live outside the village in nearby cities, and the others who are permanent residents and do agricultural and domestic work. Their families have served the landlords of Jutt for many generations, and their women have kept their houses in return for left-over food. They believe that their association with begging is a thing of the past, taking place only rarely in the village and not at all among their community members in the city. The wealthier community members who left the village still come back to marry their children within the clan. They get free wood and milk from the landlord on weddings and deaths.

## **f) Labour arrangements**

Labour arrangements in the begging sector are, not surprisingly, unconventional and difficult to categorize according to usual notions of what constitutes work and how it is compensated. We looked for information from beggars about how they worked, i.e., demanded money, and how much control they exercised over their earnings. Labour arrangements in this sector involve whole families. Individuals' perspectives have to be seen in the context of their families and communities in most cases.

This section describes labour arrangements by categories of beggars. It begins to develop an analytical framework for looking at begging. Our site visits allowed us to document different types of beggars in various geographical locations in the country. We can now look for patterns in the kinds of beggars and the work techniques and/or labour arrangements. There are overlaps with different categories of beggars sharing similar labour arrangements. Further research would be needed to uncover the intricacies of labour arrangements and issues of harassment/coercion/bondedness.

### **Police and law enforcement views: informal discussion**

In interviews with police and city administration officials, we looked at beggars from their perspective and tried to get a sense of the nature of their engagement with this occupation. Feedback from them, as well as from journalists who have covered begging, is not always consistent.

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A seasoned reporter with an Urdu daily feels the media presents a falsely sensationalized picture on begging: there is no large organized network in begging. Family begging is organized and old/senior beggars do have some control over newcomers. Beggars have close connections with different organized criminal gangs and they are the main source of information for gangs. He says sex work through begging takes place in Royal Park and Badami Bagh truck station in Lahore.

Police deny that they support beggars, and that there is an organized crime mafia behind the work. They blame the traffic police, however, for taking cuts from beggars' earnings in return for allowing them to function on streets and intersections. The traffic police, on the other hand, say they know little about how beggars function, but insist that the mainstream police officers are making money off beggars. City administration officials, who recently had a campaign to clear out beggars from Karachi, say there is no collusion between them and beggars, but complain that the police is involved with perpetuating the phenomenon.

Police officers said there is a connection between begging and sex work. Officials observed that begging is often caste-based and not part of a large organized criminal mafia. There are many different types of beggars, e.g., seasonal beggars who visit the cities during Ramzan and Eid to make extra money; rural-urban migrant beggars (mainly from Southern Punjab) who join in the flow of thousands of migrants in search of work but who are professional beggars; and those urban-based beggars who are organized among themselves and have purchased prime begging locations in the city from the police.

Among the organized beggars, some interviews suggest that there is a mafia that kidnaps children, including the disabled, and/or maims them to use them as beggars. This system, under the organization of a criminal *patharidar*, may be on the wane due to police vigilance in recent years. Recently, a First Information Report was registered with Karachi police station regarding a missing child. The local police SHO suspected a beggar of being involved and observed him for a few days. They subsequently raided his house and found two kidnapped children, but not the one reported missing. The beggars had chained and locked the children in a room, sexually abusing them as well. During six days remand, the beggars confessed that they had kidnapped these children from Aslam Manzil. No FIR had been registered against their disappearance at the local police station. The beggar said that the captured children were to be sold to some mafia groups or else used as beggars after being maimed. He denied any knowledge of a gang involved in the sale of children. He insisted that begging itself is only organized on a small-scale, with beggars making arrangements among themselves about their work locations. The beggars have been charged, in the first such case at this police station, with criminal conduct.

### **Caste-based begging:**

The main castes or kinship groups involved are Bhatoo (Punjabi Muslim), Bhagri (Sindhi Hindu), Mirasi (Rajasthani-origin Muslim), and Mussali (or Muslim Sheikhs from the Punjab). These groups are to be found begging in all the large urban sites in Punjab and Sindh, as discussed in Section II above. In addition, Mussalis are to be found at the bus stop in Shahdampur and also in Singpura and China Scheme in Lahore. Mirasis were observed in Shaukat Park, Sargodha. Finally, in both the rural sites of village A in Punjab, where Musallis were identified as beggars, and in village C, caste-based begging is again in evidence.

Caste-based beggars do not live in isolation as the only beggars in their settlements. Rather, they live in settlements with other extremely low-income communities. They have a shared history with them of migration from rural areas to urban centres in search of work, although they may have arrived in the settlements at different times. Other than the Mirasis, who sing and play drums in return for alms wherever they may live, the caste-based beggars such as Bhatoo and Bhagris may have done other work when they lived in the rural areas, such as agriculture. They also tried to earn a living through other means while in the cities, but it appears that they resort to begging as their poverty increases.

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For example, in Ghazi Goth the **Bhagris** say they once lived in Hyderabad, Halla, Thatta and other cities in Sindh and used to farm. They came to the city to escape their indebtedness to landlords. About 25 of the Bhagri women are disabled; women use tobacco and hashish. Women migrants from southern Punjab (*Riasati*) who live in Ghazi Goth say the Bhagri women often go out and beg and also steal on buses and in the street. Bhagri women say they sell flowers, *mehndi*, balloons, and *muswa* (sugared sweet) on donkey carts. Their children are often with them when they go out to beg; older women and younger women seem to work at different times. Some 100-150 Bhagri women are beggars. They say they do not work as domestic servants because, as minority Hindus, they fear they will be accused of stealing things if they work in peoples' homes, so they think it is better to beg. They earn 30-150 rupees per day, and those informants who do other work have monthly earnings they did not disclose. The Bhagris work at the *mandi* and sell fruit, also put up *thelas* and their women (old and small who can get no other employment) beg. When someone comes to distribute meat or rations, the Bhagris are known to attack and take as much as they can.

In Star Gate, the Punjabi **Bhatoos**, who are also beggars by caste, are rural-urban migrants from areas around Khanewal in the Punjab. Women supplement their earnings with sewing and quilting (*rilli*) work from the home, while men and boys in the family have odd jobs in the bazaars or as labourers. Women earn 1200-1500 rupees/month and men 2400-3000, children 600-1000. The family functions as an income-generating unit, and begging is a major part of their efforts to make a living. Significantly, the Bhatoos say they resorted to begging after their men lost their jobs as load porters at the Karachi airport. This suggests that begging, even in those communities for which it is a traditional occupation, is an occupation of last resort.

The *hijra* community can be considered as a caste, although its members are not related through blood. The group includes hermaphrodites, transvestites and transsexuals, i.e., those who have undergone surgery to remove their male genital organs. Historically, *hijras* claim a spiritual lineage traced back to the famed composer Amir Khusrau. During the Mughal Empire they served in royal palace/harems as royal employees. Their traditional association with begging is through receiving *Log/Bhidai* (alms given by families on the birth of a male child), but over time it has ceased to be a sufficient means to earn a living. They have adopted a few additional sources of earning, i.e., dancing at weddings and private functions, sex work and street begging. In the red light area of Lahore, *hijras* have formed dancing groups and signboards of their groups are visible at the entrance of red light area. They rent rooms as an office for advance booking for functions and for an additional economic activity: they are expert in the design and embroidery (*zari ka kam*) of bridal dresses.

*Hijras* are very concerned that society does not regard them as full human beings. Even their own families ostracize them. This attitude compels a born hermaphrodite or transsexual to join the *hijra* community. One of the respondents from this community asserted that they do not behave so differently from the rest of society. He said that the *hijras* are notorious because of their involvement in sex work, but wondered why that should attract attention when thousands of men have sex with men in every city, neighborhood and street.

The **Mirasis** have their own combination of work and begging. In Shaukat Park, Sargodha, respondents have tried to get other jobs and, unsuccessfully, to make a living from their traditional singing and playing. They are very concerned that people believe Mirasis are an idle caste and cannot do any work. They quoted teachers saying, "Mirasis don't need to educate their children". None of their children were reported to be attending school.

Women and men go separately to the weddings where they play. Men play the *dhol*, large drums, and women play the *garwi* (brassware pots). Men go both during day and night; women only to the day weddings. Women can earn up to Rs. 500-1200, which they share amongst themselves. Weddings are held during six months of the year, leaving them with nothing to do for the other half so the women beg outside

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mosques and in the markets. During Ramzan and moharram, they sing *marsias* and *qawallis*, religious songs, and wake people up for Sehri during Ramzan.

**Case study: M**

M, 30, is illiterate and unmarried. He used to live in a village near Raiwind, where the men of his family had formed a group to perform at weddings. They used to make Rs. 100/wedding. In search of a better living, they moved to Raiwind, and then on to Lahore. In Raiwind, his family managed to set up a livestock business he considers proof that Mirasis can do different work. Nonetheless, their traditional work remains the main source of income. Now in Lahore, they have to move their *jhuggis* from plot to plot because they are illegally occupying land and regularly get evicted.

Weddings are their main target for begging and, usually, they beg 200-300 rupees for one marriage by making flattering remarks to the guests. Moharram and Safar are the off-months for marriages and they have to rely on other sources of income. Then his family depends on their livestock and he also sells artificial jewellery for 60-70 rupees daily. His younger brother does construction work during these months and earns one hundred rupees a day. Their income does not suffer during the month of Ramzan because the men wake the people up at Sehri time through singing and collect enough money on Eid as a reward, while women beg in front of mosques or at market places.

He complains that people pay less attention to them in weddings nowadays, and already know many of the songs and dialogues the men will recite because the guests are exposed to so much on cable television. Women Mirasis in Sargodha sing at weddings and play the *garvi*, a brass goblet, to earn in the daytime only. Some of their distant relatives have joined musical groups that perform in Dubai, and other men play instruments in the red light area of Sargodha or accompany dancing girls at their performances at private houses. They have formed their own musical group with the help of an organizer and singers from Lahore. They perform at different functions and can earn up to Rs. 12-15,000, of which a substantial amount remains for their pockets after they have paid the organizer and singers.

**Urban-based begging techniques**

The tactics of begging do not vary greatly across the country or on the basis of caste or kinship group, with the exception of the *hijras* and Mirasis, who are immediately recognizable.

**Combination begging**

In both Star Gate and Ghazi Goth in Karachi, beggars live in mixed ethnic and caste communities. They have in common a shared history of rural-urban migration, as recently as two years ago or as much as 25 years ago. They also share the manner in which they combine begging with other income-generating activities. For example, in Star Gate the women and children beg and also sell small items like dusters or newspapers, and cards (explaining their request for charity). Some men have sacks of fruit and do labour. Some women do sewing and most do *rilli* and work on buses and signals with cards and dusters. They buy the cards from *mazars*, readymade. People read the cards and sympathize by giving money. Their best earnings are through these cards. They usually do not beg from fixed spots, although there are some areas they frequent: Guru Mandir, Kapra Market, Bohri Bazaar, Fazal Abad, Dohraji, and Bahadurabad. They say they do not have to give a cut to any middleman, but manage to keep all their daily earnings for their families.

**Case study: F at Star Gate**

F is a beggar from Khanewal. Her husband lost an arm in a land dispute. She has one son, married and educated, another unmarried, and one daughter who teaches the Quran in houses in the settlement. Her son earns Rs. 2,000 from his job in a nearby showroom but that is not enough, so she begs and earns Rs. 40-50 a day. She begs on the streets, and in addition to cash sometimes gets *sadqa* meat (religious charitable offering). She also sews *rillis* and earns Rs. 100/month for that work. She is unhappy with her work and says her boys earned better when they had jobs at the

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airport, even though they had to give a cut to their contractor or *thekedar* (Rs. 50-100/month) they still earned enough. Recently, she has put her daughters to work at home-based sewing because she is afraid of their being kidnapped. They sew dusters that they sell at Bolton Market for Rs 13 for one dozen, or Rs. 2.5 for one. They also sell newspapers and get 50 paisas. She also worries about her sons being kidnapped while begging and sold for camel racing. She mentions a girl who was kidnapped and only escaped through the help of a teacher. The family income has been reduced because the girls are now sitting at home instead of begging.

In Ghazi Goth all families beg, with exception of the Afghani Pathans who are refugees and work as garbage-pickers. Additional work for the beggars involves selling fruit on *thelas* or making flower wreaths to sell. Respondents say that some men who do not beg work as guards or gardeners. Women also work as maids, and do embroidery work or sell balloons along with begging. Their children sell small items sitting on *charpais*. Most children also beg. One group of five houses in Riasti Baloch are apparently different in that their men beg and the women do labour, and they are not ashamed. But the other Muslims do not approve of this. Within the settlement, some of the Seraikis have land in their villages, and also beg in Karachi along with keeping other odd jobs. They compete among themselves to get more quickly to clients to beg for money. They also try to have more children to increase their earnings. For example, with only two people in a house who earn Rs. 30/day, the daily total is only Rs. 60. But in a house of ten, the daily earning can be Rs. 300.

#### **Case study of J in Ghazi Goth**

J, 35, has been married for ten years. She is a Marwari Hindu, whose family after migrating from India used to live in Tando Adam, Sindh. She has eight children. Her family came from India to Tando Adam, and later to Karachi. Her husband used to be a construction labourer, but unemployment brought him to Karachi in search of better opportunities that have not materialized. Now he makes flower wreaths and she begs. Her husband does not like her to beg, so they fight over it, and now she does it when he is not around. She takes four or five of her children with her to make it easier.

J makes 40-50 rupees a day, and her husband makes Rs. 80-90 a day selling flowers. He always brings a little home even on a bad day, but she has to beg for the household needs. She can earn through this work without spending anything herself. She started four years ago, and only goes in front of the Karachi University to beg because she is not familiar with routes and other parts of city. She only goes out to beg in the afternoon, and is afraid of her husband seeing her.

J has brought her eight year-old niece, P, from Tando Adam to beg here also, as she feels it is better than her sitting at home with nothing to do and no food to eat. P earns well, up to Rs. 60 a day. She gives it to her aunt who saves almost all of it for her so that she can take it back to her parents in the village. She also wants her niece to take advantage of the *zakat* and ration distributed in the locality during Ramzan.

When J goes to beg with her children she fears that her husband may see them. She also is frightened of crossing the road with them, in case of an accident. She would prefer to keep her children out of begging but now they have got into the habit and they even go out to beg without their mother. She suspects they enjoy it. Whatever they get, they spend on themselves, so J thinks it is better to keep them with her to keep control over the money.

Ten people live in J's *jhonpri*. They own two *charpais*, some bedding, a box, a fan, a radio, and an urn for water. Their kitchen is a kerosene stove in the ground. The washroom is made of wood and bamboo covered by cloth. A fan and light-bulb run on electricity. They long for a clinic.

At **Badami Bagh** community in Lahore, the Bhatto women beg in the daytime, while the men beg in the evening. They beg for food and other commodities from lower middle class residential areas. Thursday is the most lucrative day for them and all age groups, male and female, go out to beg. They use different

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begging techniques. Young females beg through cards and are involved in sex work, old females and children beg without cards. Males beg on Thursdays by pretending to have a disability.

The Bhatoo women and men who beg from street corners are not limited to certain areas. Women have been begging at the Badami Bagh bus stop for the last three years. One male respondent said, disingenuously, that drivers, mechanics and shopkeeper know that these women beg and they give alms when the girls come to them. (see Begging and Sex Work discussion below) Respondents acknowledge that they may have to pay a nominal fee to the traffic police to be allowed to beg at certain intersections. Young men apparently want to quit begging and do different work.

Combination begging can be found in rural settings as well. For example, in Maqsoodo Rind, a woman beggar can be found who sells bangles for a living by day and goes to the nearby road to beg in the evening. These earnings pay for her food, and she has been doing this since childhood and says it is now a habit. Other women leave their village, often with their daughters in tow, to beg for the whole day. They also sell the wheat they get as charity to make some cash.

### **Bus stops and bus-based begging**

A common begging technique employed within and between urban centres appears to be exercised by female beggars from castes such as Bhattoo or Bhagri. More research is needed to confirm how much this is organized by kinship group or by outside parties. This practice involves a woman asking for charity by showing a stranger a card, on which her case (usually in need of medical funding for an ailing family member) is written. Some interviews show that these cards can be purchased from Mazars in Karachi, ready-made, for beggars to use in their work. Thus, the stated case need have no relevance to the beggar's life. There appears to be some collaboration with the bus conductor who possibly takes a cut from the beggar's earnings.

#### **Field researcher's observation journal entry, on Karachi buses**

Bus W11 on the way to Jahangir Road. A Mazar is nearby. A girl wearing a *burqa* boarded to beg, but no one gave any alms. The girl said "My brother and sister are hungry, I have no father, etc." She got off, and then two minutes later three girls, wearing the same bags around their necks, boarded. They spoke to each other. The face of one girl was burnt. She gave cards to the passengers but no one gave any money, so she got off after a while too.

On the way to Sohrab Goth, on a bus to Hyderabad bus JA-7441 the conductor, who had been standing near the bus door, took the hand of a 12-13 year-old girl and said something to her. She didn't try to loosen his hand but seemed upset; she had a bag around her neck too.

Karachi to Hyderabad – private bus – from Sabzi Mandi a 20-22 year-old girl boarded. She carried a cloth bag on her arm, took out her cards and only gave them to men. At that time there were 25 men on board and only eight of them gave money, which must have been only about 15 rupees. She sat close behind the conductor and a small Makrani boy asked the driver, "Do you want to marry her?" and he answered, "There's nothing special about her, forget it." On the excuse of getting change for a Rs. 100 note, the conductor started to ask her for two fifties. She took out Rs. 200 and gave him the change. When she was about to get off the bus, the conductor stood at the door in such a way that she could not disembark without touching him, but he said to her to be careful and not get herself killed, but she didn't reply. She boarded another bus going in the opposite direction. If she got the same amount on the way back, in half an hour she would make Rs. 30. (This undermines their claim to make that much in a whole day.)

Card-based techniques are also used by beggars approaching people on the streets or, more often, at bus stops.

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### **Field researcher's journal entry, Hyderabad bus stop**

Near the Civil Hospital in Hyderabad, at the bus stop for travellers to Shahdadpur, a group of women, stand holding slips of paper requesting medicine. This is a long-standing phenomenon. They say "We have a sick relative in hospital and need medicine." Or else they say "We are sick ourselves." These people live on the footpath nearby and at night they keep their bundles under their heads and sleep there. These women beg at different times and go in different wagons for this purpose as well. Some also beg on rickshaws and buses, but do not go far from the area. The whole day they can be seen at different times. They come turn by turn. When they retire for the evenings on the footpath, men who have tied a turban on their heads, wear some gold jewellery, nice clothes and rings or watches come and take all the money from these women. They may be relatives; it would require regular observation to know.

### **Drugs and begging**

Links between drug trade/use and begging were observed in Karachi and Lahore. At the Abdullah Shah Ghazi Mazar, for example, the heroin addicts are the main beggars at the site. They sleep on the roadside and in the adjacent field, and can be seen openly injecting themselves at all times of day, often within a few feet of police officers. This implies that the Mazar is a place to buy and sell drugs, attracting addicts to come and stay, and to beg if necessary. At Badami Bagh bus stop, children sniff Samad glue, a cheap drug that is highly addictive. This is a prime location for beggars, sex workers and, possibly, drugs dealing as well.

These situations illustrate the close links between certain kinds of activity. Drug addicts beg to support their habit. At the bottom of the social and class hierarchy, income-generating activities are increasingly illicit and criminal, and involve high risk for women and the young in particular.

### **Begging and sex work**

Informal interviews with authorities and observations in beggar communities revealed a strong link between sex work and begging. This is most apparent in the *hijra* community. However, sex work is also a means of generating income among women beggars in numerous sites. One police officer even suggested an additional link with domestic service. Women who combine begging and sex work (such as the caste-based beggars) may quit begging if they get a good domestic service job, but continue with the higher paid sex work.

The fieldwork identified begging combined with sex work among the Bhagris in Ghazi Goth and Bhatooos in Star Gate, Karachi, and in Lahore among the Bhatooos in Badami Bagh and the Khokar beggars in China Scheme. It was not observed among Mirasi women. Runaway women, who had fled their homes in rural Pakistan and come to the cities, were found to be engaged in a combination of begging and sex work at Data Darbar shrine in Lahore and Abdullah Shah Ghazi shrine in Karachi. The Badami Bagh truck-stop was the site of begging/sex work, as described in the journal extract below.

### **Field researcher's observation journal extract, Badami Bagh truck-stop, Lahore**

I found a number of beggars in that area. I was surprised to see that 95% of the beggars were young women moving in groups of two or three. They were in neat and clean but not expensive clothes. My informant told me that all these female beggars have a good memory and remember who gave them how much money. They know very well that it is better to move in groups to get maximum money. They make a sex deal very quickly and try to spend minimum time with the client. They do not waste time chatting. Their trucker clients take them in their truck. They are very expert and satisfy their clients within five minutes. Usually they charge Rs. 100-150 for one client in a trucking station.

Shopkeepers are the permanent clients for these beggars and only selected girls come to their shops, while truck drivers and conductors are the open market for beggar/sex workers.

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After half an hour, two good-looking girls came to my informant's shop and asked for money and gave a smile. They said, "Milli is not around today so give us money. After all we are her relatives." He gave them ten rupees and one of the beggars said with a big laugh, "Milli is coming behind us." After few minutes a very pretty girl entered and sat on a chair. The shopkeeper said in a loud voice, "Oh, my princess has come." I understood that she was Milli.

They started chatting, mostly about sex. My informant asked the reason for her delay. She said that she was busy with a few truckers and their trucks were far away. He told her he had no money at the moment, and she taunted him that he always talked about the shortage of money. She did not notice me and was talking very frankly. She asked how much money he needed, he replied whatever she had. She put her hand in her bra and took out a handful of hundred rupees notes that added up to Rs. 1,760. She said that was her total income in 3 ½ hours. She had three more hours for begging. He returned her money. She left the place because she had another appointment.

My informant said all the women here are involved in sex work. They do sex work with truckers on Saturday and set the time with mechanics and shopkeeper for the other days of the week. Once the police tried to take action against them but all the people from this market opposed the idea and contacted union leaders and local politicians to stop it. People in this market come early in the morning and go back to their home late at night, twenty percent of mechanics and shopkeepers are migrant and they stay here at night. He said that these girls are the only source of entertainment for this market.

In Badami Bagh, Lahore, Bhatoo beggars said that the red light areas of Lahore and Hyderabad are the ideal places for their women and families. Pretty girls love to engage in singing and dancing in the red light area, they said. The final stage of this process is sex work. Men said there are two ways to "cash in" their daughters. One is to marry them off and get a certain amount in one installment. The groom's family has to pay money to the bride's family. They sold their daughters at the age of 16. The bride's parents call all the family members and the interested party (mostly from the red light area) offers a certain amount for the girls. Rates depend on the prettiness, complexion and figure of the girl. Sometimes there is an open auction and the party that bids highest gets the girl. The divorce level is very low among this community because the bride's family has to return the money to the groom in case of divorce. Widows come back to their parents and get resold.

The second way to "cash in" a daughter is to send her to the red light area, a more long-term source of income. Some families with beautiful girls shift to up-market areas of Lahore and Hyderabad where their girls work in the red light areas. One man has three daughters who are working in the red light area and does not hesitate to admit this. Now he visits Badami Bagh in his new Pajero.

The documented instances of castes whose women are engaged in begging and sex work are not exhaustive, however. In the main urban research sites, such as Ghazi Goth and Star Gate in Karachi, for example, beggars from different communities were sometimes quick to deny that their own women have any link to begging or sex work, while they are swift to accuse another begging community of engaging in both. There is strong evidence of caste-based begging/sex work among different groups of poor residents of the same communities, and among destitute women from varying backgrounds who have fled to the city.

### ***Hijra* community begging**

*Hijras* earn money singing, dancing, door-to-door begging and begging from markets, shops and traffic intersections. Their labor and payment arrangements are different in Punjab and Sindh. In the Punjab, all the money earned through begging, sex work and dancing at private functions is divided into three shares. The *guru* gets 50 percent; 25 percent goes for household expenses and the remaining 25 percent is equally divided among all group members. *Hijras* often get loans from other fellow *hijras* or their *guru*.

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In Sindh *chellas* have to turn over their full day's earnings to their *guru* who keeps 75 percent and returns 25 percent to the *chella*. Household expenses are born collectively. Non-resident *chellas* are supposed to come to their *guru*'s home to pay a fixed amount and receive commodities on a monthly basis.

A small number of *hijras* were found engaged in different additional income-generating activities. For example, *hijras* in Lahore have formed dancing groups and signboards of their groups are visible in the red light area. They have rented rooms and use them as offices for their group and do embroidery work there also. They remain busy with their embroidery work in daytime and in the evening they perform in weddings and other private functions. They are experts in designing and embroidery (*zari ka kam*) for bridal wear.

The *hijra* community is heavily involved in sex work. All types of *hijras* are said to have sex as frequently as they can. Many homosexual men from mainstream society want to have sex with *hijras*, and some have permanent relationships with them. One can observe *hijras* in the evening at different sidewalks and intersections in urban centres. They openly invite clients for sex. Roadside *hijras* enjoy the least respect in the *hijra* community and are called *chaloo*.

### **g) Forms of coercion, bondedness and harassment**

There is extreme exploitation of labour in this sector, and beggars are exposed to harassment, coercion and outright danger. Beggars' own perceptions of their vulnerability, as well as the researcher's perspectives, are discussed below.

#### **Caste-based begging**

Caste-members mention repeatedly that they beg because "this is what our people do". For them, begging presents itself not as a first option for income-generation, but as the fall-back profession of easy resort. Mirasis beg only when their singing does not bring in enough income. Mohommad Shoukat in Shaukat Park said that it is impossible for them to leave their ancestral work. "We are known as Mir Alam and society wouldn't accept us in another profession," he said. Unfortunately, not just singing, but begging, is associated with their caste.

Bhatoos and Bhagris beg when their odd jobs, agricultural work, or small shops do not earn enough to support the family. *Hijras* have increasingly turned to begging and sex work because their role as performers in social festivities has been curtailed in recent years. The decision-making process among these families, compelling them to migrate to the cities and to beg for a living, is therefore different than that of other impoverished communities. Also, their status remains begging, lower than that of other communities whose members may well be begging, but who are not known for it.

A disturbing observation was the possible role of local landlords in forcing lower caste Hindu women, who may otherwise turn to begging, to convert to Islam. The reason was that they had sexual relations with these women, and frequented their homes. Since eating or drinking at Hindu homes by Muslims is not considered socially acceptable, these women are said to be pressured into converting. One field researcher noted that such families expressed an interest in leaving the area but are blocked by the landlords, who have also "adopted" some of the households with young and beautiful daughters, and bear all their expenses.

#### ***Hijra* community**

Among the *hijras*, the *guru* controls the group. There are two types of status of *hijras*, permanent and temporary. Temporary *hijras* are free to join any group or *guru*. They stay for an indeterminate period in a group. Such *hijras* enjoy little respect and are often humiliated by the community for not having a fixed *guru*. A newly initiated *hijra* must invite the community for a feast and give a dress/golden ring/golden earrings to his/her *guru* at the party to become a disciple.

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The *guru* has to pay a certain amount to get a *hijra* from another *guru*. Such *hijras* have no right to object to this selling and transferring. *Hijras* are sold in an open auction and the party that bids highest gets the *hijra*. Rates of *hijras* depend on their type, quality, age, behavior, beauty and so on. An *aqwa* may be purchased at amount of Rs 35,000 to 50,000 but the worth of a *nirban* may be more than Rs.200,000. If a *chella* wants to leave a *guru*, she must pay the amount that *guru* spent on her purchase. The *chella* and the *guru* mutually decide the repayment schedule.

If any purchased *chella* escapes and joins another *guru* without any agreement, then the *guru* who accepts her will have to pay standard market amount for that *chella*. If any *chella* becomes disobedient to the *guru* and does not share her earnings through begging with that *guru*, then she will be warned, or expelled. In worst cases, she will be forced to have her head shaved, the *guru* will declare her as abnormal and she will be a pariah in their community.

### **Fears and threats of kidnapping**

Begging communities in urban centers live in fear that their young girls will be kidnapped and sexually abused/exploited against their will. If they decide to put their girls into sex work, it is acceptable to them, but not if their girls are exposed to others who wish to use them for the same purpose. For example, Star Gate girls used to go out for begging, until two or three girls were kidnapped. Since all members of the household are needed to earn, these fears have reduced family incomes. Also, two boys were almost kidnapped, adding to the stress. The women claim that the boys were being taken to the airport for trafficking to Dubai as camel boys.

### **Vulnerability of children and youth**

Some parents expressed a fear for their children's safety on the roads. In Ghazi Goth, J takes her children with her rather than allowing them to beg alone, because she is afraid they may be injured in traffic on the main roads.

There are further areas of vulnerability of the young. Drug addiction and sex work are discussed separately in this section. Further, the caste-based nature of much begging means that children face a pre-determined line of work with limited options. This is especially dangerous for girls who find themselves used as sex workers by their families to supplement their income.

The young are thus exposed to sexual violence and disease outside the home<sup>6</sup>, but also used by their own families to bring in more income. Parents in begging communities, even those who do not engage in sex work, expressed a wish to have many children so as to generate more daily income through begging. In Badami Bagh, Bhatoo, women interviewed revealed that all their girls have to beg after one month of marriage. There are a few cases in which girls first refused to go out to beg. Respondents said there are two ways to behave with girls who do not cooperate. One is to exercise social pressure and isolation and the other is violence. These methods compel girls to start begging. The bride's family has no right to interfere in such issues.

*Hijras* are also a vulnerable group, particularly the young *hijas*. They are under pressure to become *nirbhan*, or castrated sex workers. We do not yet know at what age this operation is considered ideal and

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<sup>6</sup> For other research on risks faced by children in the streets see: Ali, Akhtar, et al. "Geographic and Social Mapping of Sexual Practices Among Street Children," presented at 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Population Research Conference, 19-21 December, 2002, Islamabad; and Hussain, Anusheh. 2001. "Dilemmas in Researching Male Child Prostitution," in *Body, Mind & Spirit in Sexual Health*, National Conference Report. Karachi: Aahung.123-131.

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under what conditions it is performed. Preliminary findings suggest that *hijras* secure their income and higher rank of their community after this operation, but the surgery is performed at considerable risk to the life of the individual.

Finally, the maimed and disabled children used by *patharidars* as beggars, who are possibly encouraged to become drug addicts as they grow up, are the most blatant examples of the exploitation of the young in organized begging. Preliminary reports suggest that some of these children may be born without any physical disability at all, and are subsequently kidnapped, maimed and used in the streets. This is no doubt the most serious violation of children's rights documented in the RA.

### **Harassment from the authorities**

Because beggars live in illegal settlements in urban centers, the security of their homes is dependent on patronage from people in authority. In some cases, *madrassa* owners encourage them to live under their protection in return for a cut of their earnings, but in other cases they find themselves without effective protection. In Singpura, Lahore, residents complain of police harassment. They also say that Railway authorities regularly come to destroy their shanties. They will take Rs. 20-30 for each *jhuggi* so as not to destroy it. In Shaukat Park, Sargodha, some members of a family were arrested during recent police action against beggars and they had to pay Rs.3,000 per person to the police for their release.

The same problem takes on a different form in rural areas. For example, in village A, a Musalli, said that his landlord often demands *wangar*, i.e., labour in return for settling on his land. "He sends us to his friends in other villages. We do the assigned work. The host arranges for our food only. We never get anything for *wangar* except fodder for our animals. The landlord thinks that it is his right to use us as he wants, because he has given us land to live on." They are compelled to obey the landlord, or face physical violence or social pressure.

### **h) Conclusion**

This RA provides us with insight into the begging sector and its linkages with other occupations at the bottom of the economic ladder. Beggars weave their begging work into other income-generating activities, such as stitching, flower-selling, singing or sex work among the women, and physical labour, small-time shop-keeping, singing/drum-playing, or sex work (for *hijras*) among the men. Rural-to-urban migrants who come from agricultural backgrounds, in which they may well have been bonded to their landlords, resort to begging in the cities if their other skills – of which they have few – cannot support them.

There are several issues raised by this RA that merit closer investigation. First, the relationship between caste background and begging is only partially exposed in this preliminary assessment, and needs to be understood more clearly. Caste background may predispose an individual to begging, but we find that beggars of such backgrounds predominantly combine it with other types of income-generating activities, and rely on their begging income only if they have no other options. It would be useful to try to determine under what circumstances certain castes, such as the Mirasis, emphasize certain income activities rather than others, and to see under what conditions it would be possible for them to enter into a higher-status set of occupations.

Second, this RA establishes the link between the above cluster of income-generating activities and the phenomenon of rural-to-urban migration, but further research is required. It appears that in some circumstances a migrant to the city, particularly a single woman who has fled her home, is rendered more vulnerable to sexual exploitation, drug addiction and other forms of abuse, and, thus, turns to begging due to lack of other options. In other cases, the move to the city is an improvement from exploitative situations, particularly those suffered by *haris*, or dwindling economic options in small towns. Begging sometimes represents an increase in income for these migrants, and yet, for others, it is a last resort when other options

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prove insufficient. It would be valuable to study more closely the conditions under which rural-to-urban migration takes place for these beggars, who belong to the lowest rung of the socio-economic ladder even in the rural areas.

Third, the vulnerability of women and children beggars to sexual exploitation and sexually transmitted diseases has been established, not only through this RA but also through other recent studies on high-risk behaviour for transmission of STDs in Pakistan. This RA confirms that begging and sex work are closely interlinked. Interventions in the sex sector must consider expanding their frame of reference to begging as well, since new entrants – particularly young girls – seem to emerge from begging work and long before they settle in the red light areas.

The begging sector cannot be viewed in isolation from the other labour sectors that engage the poorest of the poor in Pakistan. We should examine how opportunities can be created, not just to allow beggars to engage in other, less exploitative income-generating activities, but also to permit them to break out of this inter-linked nexus of occupations that perpetuate their poverty and constrain their options for generations.

#### **Chapter Four: CONCLUSION**

The preceding chapters provided a comprehensive sector-wise account of the findings of the rapid assessment. It is useful to bring together some key findings from across the sectors in order to gain some comparative insights. This chapter provides a brief cross-sectoral discussion of three recurrent themes of the study: first, the *peshgi* system; second, caste and social networks; and third, vulnerability to violence and abuse. The chapter ends with a section that attempts to summarize the implications of our findings for future research and policy.

##### **The *peshgi* system**

The received view on bonded labour is that it is a system based on the interlocking of labour and credit arrangements. In addition to the transaction in the labour market, a worker also transacts with the employer on the credit market, repaying the debt by working for the creditor. The employer-creditor enjoys monopolistic power vis-à-vis the worker-borrower, and is able to impose exploitative terms and conditions in both transactions. The worker is considered a bonded labourer if the terms faced on either or both markets are extraordinarily exploitative, and allow no exit from either or both sets of contracts.

This abstract model of bonded labour finds an apparently straightforward empirical counterpart in the *peshgi* system that prevails in many informally organized sectors in Pakistan (and south Asia in general). In the *peshgi*, or advance payment, system, a worker-borrower contracts a cash or kind advance – in the case of agricultural tenants the advance is in the form of a production credit – from the employer-creditor. The worker-borrower then works on a piece-rate or wage-rate basis, and a part (in some cases all) of earnings goes to repay the advance. The worker-borrower cannot change employers or locations as long as the loan remains unpaid unless the new employer takes over the loan, thereby becoming the creditor. The role of the *peshgi* system is thought to be crucial in the understanding of bonded labour in Pakistan.

The sectors covered in our rapid assessment yield fresh insights into the workings of the *peshgi* system and its possible relationship with bonded labour and other coercive labour arrangements. The *peshgi* system was found to exist in domestic service but not in begging. Domestic work showed cases of coercive *peshgi* contracts between employers and employees in rural areas, and between urban employers and employees of a common rural background.

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Although labour bonding through *peshgi* is absent in the begging sector, we found some labour arrangements that come very close to outright slavery.

It is possible to sum up this discussion of the *peshgi* system with three observations:

First, the precise economic role of *peshgi* in an inter-locking labour-credit contract is not straightforward. The classic account of labour bonding under inter-locking labour and credit transactions is neither an exclusive nor a sufficient model for understanding the diverse forms of coercive labour arrangements in Pakistan. In some cases, it is not even clear whether the employer or the employee is the real creditor in economic terms. There are many contracts, for example, where a worker is remunerated towards the end of the contract period. Even if she now takes an advance from her employer, in strictly economic terms she might still be a net creditor.

Second, dispensing with the idea of inter-locking labour and credit contracts, it is possible to hypothesize that *peshgi* provides a lever or a legitimizing mechanism for employers to exert control over workers. This interpretation of *peshgi* also requires qualification. Workers who are socially much weaker than their employers – either because they belong to social groups (or caste-based communities) at the lower end of the social hierarchy (such as the Musalis in Punjab, or the Odhs in Sindh) or because the employers enjoy a local monopoly of socio-political power (such as the *sardar*-contractors of Balochistan) – are vulnerable to coercion and abuse under the *peshgi* system. But these workers are vulnerable to abuse even in those situations where the *peshgi* system is not prevalent. Other workers, who enjoy greater social parity with their employers (such as the glass bangle workers), are less vulnerable to abuse even when they take *peshgi*.

Third, in virtually all sectors, both workers and employers face uncertainty and insecurity in the enforcement of contracts. Workers in the “freest” segment of the labour market – say, daily wage-rate construction labourers – fear that their employers (in the shape of contractors) might renege on payment for services rendered. Many of the employers, on the other hand, fear a high probability of worker default, and cite this as a reason for not advancing loans to workers.

These observations give rise to an alternative, potentially powerful, interpretation of the *peshgi* system – that it represents one way in which workers can secure advance payment for their services, which they fear might go unremunerated if their accounts were settled only at the end of the contract period. In conditions where the general contractual environment is insecure, workers who are socially weak compared to their employers are likely to be fearful of employer default. Workers who enjoy similar levels of social power to their employers are likely to be more confident of recovering their arrears.

The *peshgi* system, according to this view, is not a credit arrangement designed to ensure labour supply. Rather, it is an assurance device that allows workers to enter a contract in an otherwise insecure contractual environment. Those workers who are vulnerable to employer default are the socially weak, and therefore also vulnerable to other forms of coercion and abuse. The key to ending bonded labour – according to this interpretation – lies not in improving poor people’s access to credit, but in improving the overall contractual environment and reducing social hierarchy.

### **Social hierarchy and social networks**

The issue of social hierarchy – either in the generalized sense of “high” and “low” castes, or in the localized context of the political monopoly of an individual employer – is important in all instances of coercive and abusive labour arrangements. The social hierarchy in terms of caste/kinship community is important in the rural areas in both Punjab and Sindh in the extraction of unpaid labour, physical and verbal abuse, vulnerability to sexual exploitation, and the danger of bondedness. An inter-sectoral perspective allows some insights into the significance of caste and social grouping in this regard.

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Caste or social grouping, and networks are important features of the labour market in all sectors, regardless of the existence of hierarchy or abuse. For example, a large proportion of the people involved in marginal activities such as begging are identified by specific ethnic, caste and kinship identities. Groups such as the Bhatoo or Bagris, for example, have a significant presence in the begging sector across cities and provinces.

Caste and kinship-based social networks, therefore, were found to be crucial in the operation of labour arrangements in general. The manner in which these group identities operate in various sectors and for various people, however, differs. In some sectors and in some labour arrangements, there is no strong social hierarchy in the relations between employers and employees. Caste or kinship-based social networks either appear to be one more form of organization without any added significance in the employer-employee relationship, or these networks generate some level of solidarity between employers and employees.

Instances where the social distance between employers and employees is wide, however, are those where the danger of coercion and abuse is the highest. There are a number of groups -- such as the Musalis and Masihis and other *kammi* castes of Punjab, or Bheels, Odhs, and Bagris of Sindh, or the “nomadic” Riasatis (from south Punjab) in Karachi – at the margins of economy, society and polity. These groups are vulnerable to abuse across sectors, across contractual arrangements, and even across locations. In some cases, a group that is “socially weak” in one location appears to be relatively “strong” in another – for example, the Odh/Rangar of Punjab appear stronger than their Odh counterparts in Sindh. A clearer understanding of the systematic nature of coercion and abuse, therefore, requires a great deal of attention to social as well as economic relations.

A final observation is due on the issue of social networks. In-built cultural mechanisms may exist whereby individuals belonging to a particular social group remain associated with a particular type of economic activity. Social perceptions – even if not based upon empirical evidence – can lead to the reproduction of social hierarchy. If employers generally perceive people from a particular group to be suited for certain types of jobs, individuals from that group will be largely excluded from other jobs. The social perception might also become a self-fulfilling prophecy if the group in question acquires and maintains special knowledge and ability with respect to that particular job. Individual members of the group may themselves believe their economic options to be limited to the jobs assigned them in social perceptions.<sup>7</sup> This form of adhesion by a social group to an economic activity might well be regarded as a form of bondedness, characterized by a psychological dependence, particularly if the job in question is a low-paid, hazardous and unpleasant one. Examples of this dynamic abound in the sectors examined, suggesting that interventions in sectors characterized by traditional caste involvement would have to address these cultural and social issues.

### **Vulnerability to violence and abuse**

This study has identified certain areas of extreme vulnerability among workers in the different sectors. First among these is the linkage between the begging sector and sex work, and the risk this brings of sexual violence and sexually transmitted diseases. Young unmarried girls, in particular, are used by their families in a combination of begging and sex work. Second, children work in all the sectors we have examined, which is in obvious violation of their basic human and developmental rights. In begging and domestic work, children work on the streets or in homes away from their families, with no protection from violence or other risks. We have also seen families using their children to beg and work as servants in an effort to pay off their debts or increase the family’s combined income. In domestic service, children start working for landed families very young, with the result that their opportunities for education and the chances of their protection from abuse are almost nonexistent from the start.

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<sup>7</sup> We are grateful to Dr Aliya Khan for suggesting this problem of “internalisation of roles” at the presentation of an earlier version of this report.

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Finally, domestic service takes place in private homes, increasing the vulnerability of domestic workers and making access to information more difficult. For children, who are often put to work by their families to pay off debts or increase family income, their work is undocumented by monitoring agencies and their opportunities for protection or compensation through the law are almost nil.

### **Implications for future research and policy**

We have discussed the implications for future research and policy with respect to individual sectors covered by this report. We end by reiterating some of those points as well as making some new ones that are based on a cross-sectoral overview.

### **Sector-wise picture**

The rapid assessment shows that some extreme forms of bonded labour and other coercive and abusive labour arrangements exist in some of the sectors but not others.

Such arrangements were found in domestic work and begging. In the case of domestic work, the rural hierarchy has transplanted itself into urban areas through the dependent migration of workers with their employers. The extent and severity of such arrangements requires further research. The rapid assessment of begging leads to many new questions about the different activities and communities involved in begging and related activities. More in-depth research is warranted on the connections between begging, sex work and other marginalized activities. The rapid assessment also enables us to ask some questions about particular communities – such as the Hijras – that otherwise appear under a veil of mystification. It indicates that it is both possible and necessary to conduct further research on these communities to avoid sensationalism and yield insights into conditions of life, work and bondedness.

### **Cross-sectoral issues**

There are some general and cross-sectoral conclusions that might also be drawn.

First, both policy and future research needs to pay greater attention to the issue of social networks and social hierarchy. Bonded labour – if defined to include the most extreme forms of coercion and abuse -- is not only related to particular sectors, technologies or contractual arrangements. It is also closely related to social relations and social hierarchy. Some groups are systematically vulnerable and it would be a mistake to continue ignoring this finding in future research or policy. By way of a preliminary example, a social survey that is able to count the number of Musalis, Masihis and other socially marginalized groups might provide a fairly accurate indication of the population that is vulnerable to bonded, coercive and abusive labour relations.

Second, it is important to pay greater attention to the precise structure and functioning of labour markets in general, before formulating research or policy on bonded labour in particular. Bonded labour and coercive and abusive labour arrangements exist within the context of the general structure of labour markets. Closer attention to labour markets can also alert future research and policy making to emerging issues such as new forms of worker dependence under tightly-run contractor systems within certain sectors.

Third, there are sufficient grounds now at least to challenge the dominant economic view of bonded labour as the outcome of interlocking factor markets. This view is largely responsible for the wide popularity of micro-finance and other credit market interventions as ways of dealing with bonded labour. If, as we have suggested here, the *peshgi* system has something to do with the insecure contractual environment faced by socially weak workers, other types of policy interventions – such as those that address social hierarchies or the rule of law -- might also be relevant. This issue warrants further conceptual and empirical research.

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Finally, we see an inter-linkage between the sectors covered in the different rapid assessment reports. The sectors are predominantly those that attract the poorest and most socially vulnerable workers in Pakistan - mining, agriculture (as sharecroppers), carpet-weaving, brick-kilns and the two sectors covered in this report. Our rapid assessment suggests that socially distinct groups, such as Musalis and other low-caste groups, are born with a cultural and economic set of pressures to enter these areas of work. But beyond this, and possibly equally significantly, they move laterally between these sectors. For example, workers in agriculture or brick-kilns migrate to the cities, where domestic service presents a somewhat better option. Others, less lucky, turned to begging, with men doing casual labour. Workers may move between these sectors seasonally or whenever better options present themselves, such as women doing piece-rate work instead of begging. The next issue to explore is under what circumstances they can cease to move laterally between these low status sectors and move to higher-status and more secure work environments.

It appears that research and policy measures are, thus far, inadequate to address the complexity of labour arrangements and lack of opportunities in these sectors. Policy-makers run the risk of focusing too much on legislative measures and higher-profile sectors without looking at the wider social or ethnographic portrait of Pakistan's labour force. Voiceless workers, children, lost women migrants in the cities, and countless others are difficult to track through programmes and even research, yet their numbers are swelling as the pressures of poverty increase in this country. Future research and policy/programmes must start to demonstrate a flexible and nuanced understanding of the labour conditions in Pakistan, for which intensive field study and experimental programme interventions can provide valuable opportunities to explore the possibilities for change.

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## **Annex 1 – LITERATURE REVIEW**

This literature review is an attempt to review secondary data on bonded labour in begging and domestic work. While the geographical focus is Pakistan, a few relevant other publications were also reviewed. The coverage of this review includes academic and research publications, reports produced by NGOs and the print media. By and large, there is a lack of serious and academic work in the above mentioned sectors with reference to labour arrangements.

### **1. Domestic Work**

As such, debt-bondage has not been reported in any of the research studies, or in print media. However, the element of exploitation -- in a wider sense of the word -- has been mentioned in almost all studies. While some work has also been done on foreign domestic workers in Pakistan, there is little on the scene of domestic work in rural areas. As there are no statistics on the domestic workers in the labour surveys and census reports, it is not possible to estimate the size of this sector using secondary data. Similarly, there is little or no data on the wages of these workers.

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Narayan, D. (2000). Domestic Workers and Maids. Voices of the Poor: can anyone hear us? Washington, The World Bank.

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## **2. Begging**

There are very few publications on this sector devoid of hype and exaggeration. However, it should be noted that a few cases have been objectively documented where debt-bondage and/or forced labour was found in begging. Through secondary data, it is difficult to assess the size and extent of begging in Pakistan. It is also extremely difficult -- probably impossible -- to determine the status of debt-bondage in this sector using available studies. Most of the print media publications have focused on the way beggars operate in a mafia-like style. This has not been mentioned on any of the research studies on street children, and on child labour.

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Dawn (1999). Beggary Growing into a Profession in Karachi. Dawn 6 October 1999. Karachi.

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Mehkri, I. A. (2000). It's a Beggar's Life. The Review, Dawn 7 December 2000. Karachi.

Nation (2002). 3,000 Beggars Arrested in City. Nation 6 December 2002. Karachi.

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- No. 1 Bonded Labour in Pakistan, by Aly Ercelawn and Muhammad Nauman, June 2001.
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- No. 4 Défis et opportunités pour la Déclaration au Niger : Identification des obstacles à la mise en œuvre des principes et droits fondamentaux au travail et propositions et solutions au Niger, by Moussa Oumanou, August 2001.
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- No. 11 Annotated bibliography on forced/bonded labour in India, by Mr. L. Mishra, December 2002.
- No. 12 Minimum wages and pay equity in Latin America, by Damian Grimshaw and Marcela Miozzo, March 2003
- No. 13 Gaps in basic workers' rights: Measuring international adherence to and implementation of the Organization's values with public ILO data, by W. R. Böhning, May 2003.
- No. 14 Equal Opportunities Practices and Enterprises Performance: An investigation on Australian and British Data, by Prof. V. Pérotin, Dr. A. Robinson and Dr. J. Loundes, July 2003
- No. 15 Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining, a study of Indonesian experience 1998-2003, by Patrick Quinn, September 2003
- No. 16 Gender-based occupational segregation in the 1990s, by Richard Anker, Helinä Melkas and Ailsa Korten, September 2003.
- No. 17 Normalised and Disaggregated Gaps in Basic Workers' Rights, by W.R. Böhning, November 2003
- No. 18 Forced Labour: Definition, Indicators and Measurement, by Kanchana Ruwanpura & Pallavi Rai, March 2004.
- No. 19 Pay equity, minimum wage and equality at work: theoretical framework and empirical evidence, by Jill Rubery, November 2003

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- No. 20 A rapid assessment of bonded labour in Pakistan's mining sector, by Ahmad Salim, March 2004.
- No. 21 A rapid assessment of bonded labour in hazardous industries in Pakistan: glass bangles, tanneries and construction, by the Collective for Social Science Research in Karachi, March 2004.
- No. 22 A rapid assessment of bonded labour in domestic work and begging in Pakistan, by the Collective for Social Science Research in Karachi, March 2004.
- No. 23 A rapid assessment of bonded labour in the carpet industry of Pakistan, by Zafar Mueen Nasir, March 2004.
- No. 24 Unfree labour in Pakistan – work, debt and bondage in brick kilns in Pakistan, by the Pakistan Institute of Labour Education & Research, March 2004.
- No. 25 Bonded labour in agriculture: a rapid assessment in Punjab and North West Frontier Province, Pakistan, by G.M. Arif, March 2004.
- No. 26 Bonded labour in agriculture: a rapid assessment in Sindh and Balochistan, Pakistan, by Maliha H. Hussein, Abdul Razzaq Saleemi, Saira Malik and Shazreh Hussain, March 2004.