

The Invisible Burden, A Qualitative Study of Inflation's Impact on Children in Low-Income Families

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INTRODUCTION & AIM

Inflation is the biggest growing concern which not only make daily commodities expensive for people it also impacts their social and psychological well-being. Karachi is the biggest metropolitan city of Pakistan, that houses around 20.3 million, according to the 2023 census. Nearly 70% of the city is troubled with inflation. This study aims to explore multifaceted effects of inflation and economic instability on emotional and psychological well-being and prospects of children in low-income families in urban slums of Karachi, using a dyadic parent-child interview design.

METHOD

- **Approach:** Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis
- **Design:** Qualitative Case Study
- **Analysis:** Thematic Analysis
- 25 households across multiple slums in Karachi.
- Semi structured in-depth interviews conducted across all sites.
- 50 respondents, a parent and a child interviewed, a dyadic perspective to capture both perspectives.
- Thematic coding of variables include; household composition, income, earning members, child labor, school enrolment, family dynamics and access to utilities.

FUTURE WORK

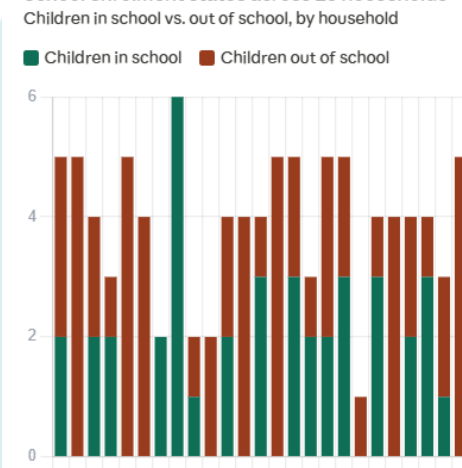
- Longitudinal tracking of same households to assess medium term developmental outcomes.
- Quantitative validation of psychological distress indicators using standardised instruments.
- Comparing experiences of boys and girls within same households.

REFERENCES

- *Bridging the equity gap: Addressing out-of-school children in Pakistan.* <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/bridging-equity-gap-addressing-out-school-children-pakistan-2026-unesco-gem-report> (accessed 2026-05-26).
- Riaz, S.; Matloob, S. *Lived Experience Of Middle-Class Families In Inflation.* *Annual Methodological Archive Research Review* **2026**, *4* (3), 369–386.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

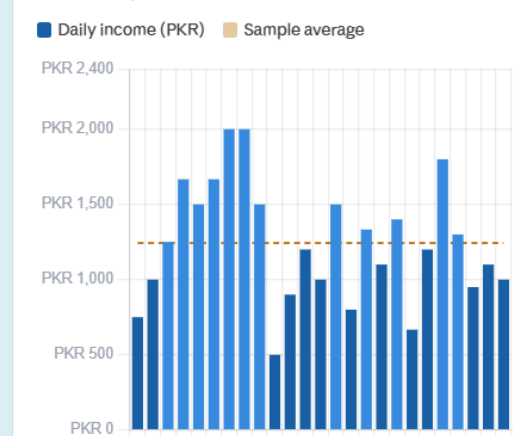
School enrolment status across 25 households



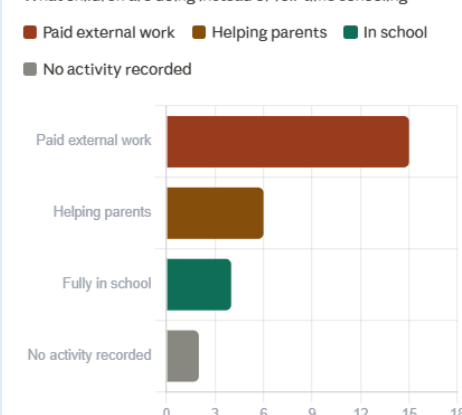
The bar indicates most of the children out of school, which indicates the major crisis of out of school children in Pakistan.

Average household income is PKR 1253 per day (4.5 dollars per day).

Daily household income distribution



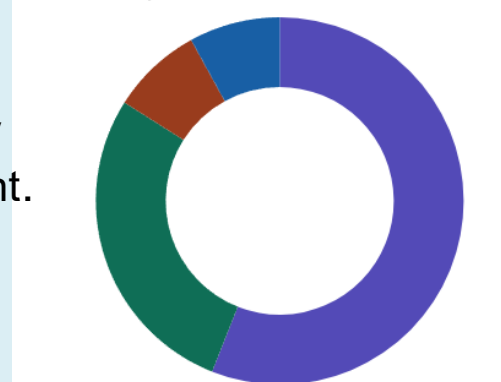
Child activity by household



To support the families, mostly oldest students were seen out of school, working from an early age of 8 or 10 to support their families. External work at a young age showed signs of psychological and emotional distress amongst the interviewed children.

The occupation donut shows 56% of parents rely on informal service, while only 8% in any formal or healthcare employment.

Parental occupation categories



CONCLUSION

The study concludes that inflation imposes a profound, visible and multi-layered burden on the children in Karachi's low-income communities, one that extends beyond material deprivation into the domains of psychological safety, educational attainment, physical health and social development.

- First and the oldest child bears all the burden of providing for the family.
- Zero regular health check ups and no access to proper nutrition.
- Household conflict, physical punishment and emotional withdrawal are structurally produced outcomes of economic pressure and not just failures of parenting.