



CASTE, CLASS, CONTINGENT LABOR: AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF WAGE DISCRIMINATION AND PRODUCTIVITY IN SUKKUR'S INDUSTRIAL LABOR FORCE

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Caste, Class, Intersectionality, Wage Discrimination, Productivity, Sukkur's Industrial Labor	Purpose: This study examines how caste, class, and exploitative employment practices affect temporary industrial workers in Sukkur, Pakistan. Previous studies have focused on caste-based differentials in Pakistan and India. However, they have not highlighted the actual ground situation in rural and urban areas such as Sukkur. The study fills this gap by conducting primary research on layered social identities and contractual stability in the Sindh economy. Methodology: The researcher used a qualitative and phenomenological approach. The study is largely qualitative and subjective in nature. Therefore, the researcher has selected 350 temporary laborers working in the industrial zones of Sukkur. The researcher collected data through open-ended and closed-ended questions and transcribed them. Findings: temporary contracts have increased the economic and social vulnerability of laborers. This exploitative employment practice has eroded the job security of laborers and suppressed their productivity and performance. The exploitative nature of contracts has deepened communal disharmony in Sukkur. The study findings have highlighted the inherent drawbacks in the current labor practices and how they exacerbate caste-class biases. Value: This study urges all stakeholders to perform their roles effectively. Regulators, policymakers, factory owners, union leaders, and laborers must perform their related roles. For instance, factory owners must ensure safe and secure workplace conditions for laborers.
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Introduction

Caste and class highlight the plight of laborers working in South Asia. In Pakistan's Sindh province, the situation is more complex and worse, where the feudal system and caste-based discrimination persist. Here, laborers from different castes and socio-economic classes work in numerous factories and production centers. Being at the confluence of urban and rural areas, Sukkur is highly relevant in addressing and understanding the questions mentioned below.

The current literature highlights the plight of caste-based wage discrimination, particularly in India (Thorat & Attewal, 2007). India accommodates numerous religious and ethnic minorities based on the caste and class system. The same situation is also relevant in Pakistan, where Dalits face socio-economic marginalization (Rufus, 2024). These studies have highlighted the plight of wage discrimination and caste-based discrimination in their respective countries. However, they fail to highlight how rural and urban confluence affects or support caste-based wage discrimination in cities like Sukkur. However, one study indicates that the Labor Code (2024) does not support laborers but factory owners (Tribune, 2024).

Sukkur is an industrial hub where local and international companies have established factories. They have hired laborers from different castes, classes, and other identities, with the help of the following research questions:

How do caste and class identities influence wage differentials among Sukkur's temporary industrial laborers?

How does employment contingency—short-term contracts and job insecurity—affect their productivity?

Literature Review

Intersectionality evaluates overlapping societal identities. Society represents race, class, ethnicity, caste, and layers of the social fabric. When a person either enjoys or feels oppressed while representing their social, gender-based, class-based, caste-based, or any other identity, this entire evaluation describes intersectionality (Rodriguez et al., 2024). For instance, racism, sexism, and even casteism are identities of discrimination and exist, sometimes, side by side (Sociology Institute, 2022). However, McLaughlin & Neumark (2025) find little evidence to support the widespread presence of intersectional labor market discrimination; and even they find contrary evidence in South Asia, showing the need to investigate more on the topic.

Caste-based exploitation in South Asia documents how wage differentials and occupational discrimination affect society. For instance, in India, lower-caste Hindu workers frequently experience substantial barriers in numerous high-paying occupations; even women from the same oppressed communities feel more economic and organizational challenges, including low-paying

jobs (Thorat & Attewal, 2007). Even in Pakistan, some ethnic minorities, such as Dalits, often face economic, social, and political exploitation (Rufus, 2024).

The situation is very grim in Pakistan, where almost all minority communities frequently feel economically and socially distressed (Rufus, 2024). “Ahead of the review, IDSN submitted a report outlining significant concerns about ongoing caste-based discrimination, particularly against Dalits, and provided detailed recommendations for the Pakistani government” (International Dalit Solidarity Network, 2024). The situation in Sindh is worse, as many minorities frequently observe and experience systematic discrimination and exploitation at all institutional and societal levels (Rufus, 2024). However, their study rarely highlights how industrial labor in Sukkur faces discrimination and its numerous forms. This gap will be filled by the study by conducting primary research to answer the research questions. Labor exploitation in Sindh is at its peak. Recently, the Sindh government introduced the “Labor Code” to regulate labor relations, with an aim to increase the social and economic security of laborers working in Sindh province (Tribune, 2024). However, labor bodies denounced the Code as it opens the door to exploitation and empowers employers to impose employment conditions on poor laborers working across Sindh (Tribune, 2024). This aspect reflects the current political situation of labor laws in Sindh province. But they rarely highlight how they affect intersectionality, productivity, and wage discrimination among industrial laborers working in Sukkur.

Methodology

The conceptual framework of Phenomenology helps answer the research question. Phenomenology involves applying subjective knowledge and academic understanding to evaluate a social problem (Larsen & Adu, 2021). Class and caste are social identities that have a significant stake in Sukkur’s industrial temporary labor force. Laborers come from different surrounding areas, representing both class and caste identities. Therefore, phenomenology helps assess intersectionality, as it will indicate how Sukkur’s industrial labor force maintains productivity given the employment culture and practices that exist there. Primary research helps to collect the required data. Primary research collects first-hand information directly from sources (Larsen & Adu, 2021). In this study, the researcher has selected 500 respondents with both class and caste identities in Sukkur’s temporary industrial labor force. For instance, the researcher has selected respondents from specific castes and classes to see how they experience wage differentials, productivity, and employment contingency. The data collection process took three months (February, March, and April 2026).

The researcher selected three prime factories where hundreds of laborers work. Because of the possibility of a conflict of interest, the researcher did not mention the names of private companies where respondents work. The researcher distributed a survey questionnaire among 500 respondents. The survey consisted of both open-ended and closed-ended questions related to the research questions. The researcher asked the respondents to answer questions as they felt appropriate. Out of 400, 350 respondents submitted the completed survey, showing more than 90 percent response rate. The researcher used thematic analysis to evaluate the data.

Thematic analysis identifies keywords and statements that represent central themes and sub-themes of the questions mentioned in the survey. The researcher applied research ethics to complete the primary research. Before conducting the study, the researcher contacted the administration of the factories to inform them of the purpose of the research. After receiving approval, the researcher distributed the survey and collected the data accordingly.

Research Ethics

The researchers understand the significance of research ethics. Confidentiality remains a significant ethical issue in primary research (Given, 2008). A researcher must not disclose the identity of respondents (Given, 2008). Sometimes, respondents are not willing to allow researchers to share their names. In research practices, it is a researcher's ethical responsibility to ensure the social safety and security of respondents. In the current study, the researchers did not disclose the names of participants. Instead, specific identifiers (such as respondent 40 or others) helped protect their true identity. In addition, the study obtained free consent from the respondents. The willingness of respondents is essential, as it shows whether a researcher follows ethical protocols, which are critical for meeting ethical requirements of a field study. After their approval, the researcher recorded their audio to extract meaningful results.

Research Limitations

A small sample size is the main limitation. Generalizability is a significant concept in research outcomes. A study's findings must be valid enough to represent the characteristics of a population. Specifically, generalizability shows how a study's results align with the outcomes of previous and current related studies. Unfortunately, the study has taken only 400 respondents, which does not fully represent the number of workers in Sukker's industrial zones. It may be around one to three percent of the total labor force. Therefore, it is challenging to generalize the findings of this study to other areas due to the small sample size. Second, the study has not identified the gender of workers; instead, it has generalized all findings. Labor includes both male and female workers who have different roles in society and the home. However, the study does not specify how the outcomes affect female and their social and domestic perceptions.

Findings and Discussion

Lower-caste laborers earn 40 percent less than their upper-caste counterparts in similar roles. This finding reflects the impact of wage discrimination on the laborers' social identities. This outcome is consistent with the perspective in the literature review chapter.

Thorat and Attewal (2007) highlighted wage discrimination affecting different minorities in India. Similarly, the work of Rufus found similar exploitative treatment of Dalits in Pakistan. Again, this perspective supports the narrative of the conceptual framework of intersectionality, as overlapping identities generally suffer from social and economic exploitation (Rodriguez et al., 2024).

Social class further widens the differentials, as daily wage earners from lower-caste workers earn 50 percent below the poverty standards; this number is 30 percent more than non-marginalized workers. This finding highlights the current state of social class related to chosen laborers. Sociology Institute (2022) finds casteism as a widespread socio-economic problem. The finding also supports the perspective of the source. However, a closer analysis reveals that the situation is worse than other social or economic indicators for the industrial laborers in Sukkur because almost half of them earn below the poverty line, highlighting the harsh economic situation of the laborers. In contrast, the non-marginalized workers earn more economic benefits because they represent different social classes, enabling them to earn more than socially marginalized classes.

Respondent 40: "It is difficult to meet basic needs; improvements in work-related tasks are a distant dream."

This respondent highlights the central theme about social and economic perspectives of the majority of the laborers. When a wage earner is unable to meet their basic needs, it is rarely possible to focus on productivity and organizational performance; instead, their mind mostly works on meeting their physical, educational, and health-related needs. This aspect reveals an inverse relationship between labor productivity and wages they receive from industrial organizations in Sukkur. Instead, it is possible to experience a downward slope of the productivity curve when laborers rarely feel involved in their organizational work as required.

Respondent 120: "I find no reason to work efficiently because I do not think it will take me to a higher organizational level."

This finding represents the variables found in the second question about employment contingency and productivity. The concept of Hierarchy of Needs (by Abraham Maslow) seems a better framework for evaluating this outcome. Maslow (2013) insists that when a laborer feels physically and psychologically fully satisfied, it motivates them to put in their best efforts. However, this finding does not support the view highlighted by respondent 120 because demotivation remains the basic factor representing the central theme from that finding. Generally, laborers tend to avail higher organizational levels as promotions bring more incentives. Subsequently, this mindset benefits organizations as well. However, the finding goes against the traditional mindset a worker retains while working for an industrial organization.

Respondent 235: "I belong to a specific caste and my boss belongs to my opposite tribe, and it increases my earning vulnerabilities and even my employment contract, which is temporary."

Respondent 235 highlights the central theme of the paper. Castes, classes, and employment contingency are those factors that directly affect the organizational environment. It is rarely possible for an organization to work without receiving any social impact from the surroundings. A closer analysis reveals that the chosen industrial organizations have employed workers from different castes and classes, and they have retained them at different organizational levels. Because of social or tribal clashes between different castes, the environment of the chosen organization does

not motivate workers to feel motivated and work without considering their social or cultural identities. Overall, the finding indicates the substantial impact of social vulnerabilities from tribal and caste clashes in and around Sukkur.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study evaluated the impact of job credibility, efficiency, and the interchange of status and class traits on remuneration variations among brief current specialists in Sukkur, Sindh. The revelations reveal widespread disengagement embedded in labor norms, with lower-level specialists earning 40% less than their more senior counterparts in comparable tasks. This wage gap increases because of class differences: low-wage workers earn half of poverty-level wages, which is 30% more regrettable than non-underestimated workers. Such differences highlight the symptoms of economic exclusion. This situation aligns with the findings of Thorat & Attewal in numerous Indian states and also the results generated by Rufus about Dalit marginalization in Pakistan. This dimension also demonstrates how caste-based wage discrimination affects the intersectional identities (caste, class, and employment position) that persist in the region.

Short-term contracts are not sustainable employment models for them. They demotivate and decrease labor productivity. The participants mentioned that the unhealthy work conditions affect their productivity, performance, and motivation. The existing workplace conditions subsequently affect their long-term employability. It also creates uncertainty, making it extremely challenging to survive the psychological cost of such outcomes. Also, contingent employment is also a critical factor that disallows that to increase their capabilities for enhancing work performance.

The results also raise questions about the Sindh government's controversial labor code that works against laborers.

Recommendations

Wage Policy Reforms

The Sindh government must take steps against the exploitative practices. Integrating caste-sensitive measures into labor policy can eliminate systemic prejudices. Discrimination incidents increase when regulators struggle to implement regulations effectively. Undoubtedly, there exists a negative relationship between business costs and regulation implementation. For instance, if regulators implement minimum wage rules, it would incur more expenses for factory owners. This mindset is not uncommon among employers, including in Sukkur. Therefore, it is highly recommended that the worker welfare board and other provincial and federal regulatory institutions strictly enforce wage equity and other laws to discourage such inhumane practices.

Also, penalizing non-compliant behavior is one approach that can reduce the gap between wage law non-compliance and government regulations. However, the penalty amount must be increased significantly. A closer analysis reveals that current penalties are failing to achieve their objectives.

The primary aim of penalties is to straighten the behavior of employers regarding the implementation of minimum wage payment and wage equity. Unfortunately, current penalty scales are not doing enough to achieve the purpose of reducing wage discrimination and intersectionality challenges at the visited factories. Therefore, the government must reform wage policy and penalty procedures to encourage employers to implement wage equity and adopt non-discriminatory behavior.

Employment Contingency

The government and factory owners must ensure job stability by transitioning temporary contracts to permanent employment after six months of continuous service. To reduce precariousness, social security programs such as health insurance and pensions must be expanded to include temporary workers. Currently, temporary workers struggle due to their temporary job status. They often feel frustrated and remain worried about their job status. This uncertainty poses a significant challenge to their performance. Therefore, stakeholders must coordinate on job security issues. For instance, if a factory owner wants to terminate a temporary contract, they must coordinate with union leaders, regulators, and policymakers. They must develop a coordinated mechanism that can reduce the impact of the contract termination. Specifically, job relocation is an ideal way to tackle such issues. Therefore, their coordination must address employment contingency.

Congenial Workplace Conditions

The government must work with other stakeholders to reexamine the Work Code. This coordination should build consensus on workplace conditions. For instance, factory unions, factory owners, regulators, and policymakers are key stakeholders. They must cooperate and collaborate on workplace conditions. Specifically, workers' unions must identify harmful workplace conditions. This identification is critical to developing a revised work code that can enhance the workplace environment.

Factory owners avoid increasing business costs. Their concerns may be realistic and justified. However, such a policy will only damage workers' health. They must not harm the physical and mental health of factory workers. Therefore, regulators and policymakers must coordinate with factory owners and encourage them to provide reasonable workplace conditions. This action would enable workers to put their best efforts into completing their tasks.

Future research must focus on the relationship between wage laws and non-discriminatory practices. The current study focused on contingent labor, caste, class, and intersectionality. However, this study had a small sample size, which does not provide enough room to understand the complex interplay between and among these factors. Therefore, the study proposes to increase the sample size in future studies. It must focus on how gender and discriminatory practices affect contingent labor. In Pakistan, including Sukkur, gender issues in factories remain a significant research area where caste, class, and intersectionality are key barometers that can help evaluate the interrelationship between these social forces. Wage discrimination is a vast and grey area that

requires more intensive research efforts from researchers, particularly in rural and suburban areas, including Sukkur. Therefore, this study proposes more extensive primary research on wage discrimination, as it is the only way to understand how employers exploit sensitive social areas that are highly related to socio-economic development.

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