

# Exploring The Physical And Mental Well-Being Of Female Tobacco Kiln Workers In Debt Bondage: A Sociological Study In District Swabi, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan

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## Abstract

This study examines the challenges faced by working women in Pakistan, particularly those employed in tobacco kilns. The research focuses on the impact of labour division and social disparities on female subjugation and economic independence. The objective of the study is to evaluate the financial dependence or independence of working women in tobacco kilns. Convenience sampling is used to gather information through interviews with women currently employed in tobacco-drying facilities. The collected data is analyzed using qualitative analysis, with a focus on identifying codes and themes. The findings reveal that women in these workplaces endure terrible working conditions and receive inadequate compensation for their labour. They are subjected to emotional and physical violence by male members both at home and in the workplace. Moreover, they are forced to borrow money and work against their will, resulting in their children sacrificing formal education. Additionally, they face significant barriers to healthcare and are unable to obtain social security cards due to their background. The study concludes that educating working women about the challenges they face can empower them to overcome these obstacles and improve their socioeconomic status, ultimately leading to more dignified lives. The study recommends implementing measures to address gender inequalities, improve working conditions, and provide support systems for working women in Pakistan.

**Keywords:** Kilns, Tobacco, Women, Division of labour, Emotional & physical violence, debt bondage, Swabi, Pakistan

## Introduction & Background of the Study

Women in Pakistan are socially vulnerable due to the fact that they labour long hours for little wages while overcoming social and cultural obstacles to acquire productive employment in Pakistan. Despite being a violation of human rights, forced labour among women is a regular occurrence throughout the world. It is a form of slavery in which one person is enslaved by another via power, hegemony, and authority (Bales, 2001). Without it, slavery becomes a dogmatic system in which the

powerful master marginalizes and subjugates the controlled individual. The community in which slavery becomes apparent recognizes the marginalization of slaves. The mainstream imperials are pushed to the limits and officially recognized as a separate category destined to be on a subhuman level by the clique. Moreover, slaves are denied access to their fundamental human rights (Zeldin, 2016).

Debt servitude or forced labour is a global societal issue that affects people in various ways. It is one of the societal ills that need appropriate care. "Bonded labour or debt bondage is likely the least well-known form of modern slavery, yet it is the most common method of enslavement" (Anti-Slavery International, 1996). The amount of debt that cannot be repaid within a reasonable timeframe. The debtor offers to labour for the creditor in exchange for repayment of the debt. If the given services are insufficient to pay off the debt, the bonded labour is tightened and expanded (Jordan, 2011). This frequently places the debtor in a lifelong debt obligation. It is often observed that poverty, bad living conditions, and prior obligations frequently cause debt to pass from one generation to the next. A person is bonded in debt when they are unable to provide for their family's necessities, which frequently occurs when a person enters slavery (Malik, 2016). Their psychological mechanism is under extreme pressure, causing them to develop a confused identity. By threatening them with violence, abuse, and bodily and mental torture, the labourer is obliged by nature to recognise his commitment to repay the loan.

Pakistan's traditional feudal structure is dominated by landlords with joint families who own thousands of acres of land. Peasants are forced to work hard and live-in destitution. Landlords control a significant portion of the land and use agricultural resources for their benefit. Landlords also influence the judiciary and police, leading to a corrupt power structure. Families of landowners hold positions of power in commerce, industry, and the bureaucratic structure of the country and exercise absolute authority over the peasantry (Nawab et al., 2022).

Bondage of labour is prevalent in Pakistan's tobacco kilns, agriculture, carpet weaving, and steel manufacturing industries (Malik, 2016). The Peshgi (advance) system is a system in rural areas where male family members borrow money from the landlord, and workers and their families are obligated to labour for the lender until he repays the loan. Women workers are particularly precarious as they must execute their jobs without regard for their health, so they encounter verbal, physical, and sexual abuse from the lender and lose their chances of marriage. The affected women's socialisation process is flawed, and they are often oblivious to social ideals and standards (Jordan, 2011).

Women are subjected to assault, sexual harassment, and mistreatment in debt bondage. Research shows that women are forced to perform physical labour in kilns to assist their families in repaying debt, and are exploited in a variety of ways, including sexual abuse, verbal abuse, physical abuse, and daylong labour.

Although the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act of 1992 prohibits debt bondage in Pakistan, it continues to be studied. Numerous tobacco kilns are located in a region where women are frequently subjected to servitude.

The limited income of the lower class forces them to resort to debt in the event of marriage or illness. Therefore, to repay the debt owed to the employer, the families of labourers continue to work

for years. Ercelawn (2004) and Iqbal (2006). Moreover, these labours are frequently subjected to a variety of physical abuses by creditors. In the rural districts of Pakistan, rape of female indentured labourers is prevalent (The News, 2013). Women held in servitude endure unique suffering. They are subject to double exploitation as a result of being dependents on male slave labourers. According to an interview conducted by Human Rights Watch/Asia, bonded labourers were either born into servitude or "inherited" an insurmountable debt from their parents (Iqbal, 2016).

In the field of agriculture, it is feasible to differentiate between profits derived from traditional practises of slavery, debt bondage, and migrant labour. In the former scenario, the labourers typically receive minimal or no wages, and the entire family is engaged in providing extensive working hours for crop cultivation or animal herding to later sell the produce at market prices. Accommodation and sustenance provided to these landless families are often of low quality, resulting in minimal intermediate expenses and substantial profits. Debt bondage has been extensively studied in South Asia, where recruiters exploit poor landless farmers by promising wage advances that are eventually used to coerce additional labour and lower compensation (International Labour Organization, 2014).

Bonded labour is a form of forced labour in which labour is performed in exchange for borrowed money. In the Swabi district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, the problem of debt bondage among women was discovered to be at its highest level. Female labourers in this region have been working in secret due to their families' inability to pay off debts. This study examines the origins and effects of debt servitude on female labour, as well as their perceptions of bonded labour's encroachment on their independence in the sampled areas of district Swabi.

This study aims to provide a comprehensive examination of the causes and consequences of women's forced labour in tobacco kilns, as well as their personal perspectives on the matter. By conducting this research, the study intends to support the efforts of social protection organizations and institutions that strive to alleviate poverty among these labourers and help them secure alternative employment opportunities. Moreover, this research will make a valuable contribution to sociological knowledge and existing literature on the topic.

The significance of this study lies in its objective to bring attention to the various social factors that contribute to the existence and perpetuation of bonded labour. It will specifically highlight the gender bias and dominant control exerted by debt lenders over the lives of women involved in such labour practices. Additionally, the study will shed light on the labour market dynamics and exploitative behaviours that target women in Pakistan, with a particular focus on the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region.

### **Research Questions**

- i) What are the factors that affect the physical and mental health of the debt-bondage of female tobacco kiln workers?
- ii) What are the effects of debt bondage on female tobacco workers on their social and personal life who are subject to debt bondage?
- iii) How do bonded women perceive the current condition of affairs?

### **Review of Literature**

Women in Pakistan contribute significantly to the economy by working in the family kiln. They are responsible for cultivating tobacco and performing household chores such as preparing meals,

gathering firewood, obtaining water, washing clothes, and preparing fodder. They also care for the ill or elderly family members and are subjected to sexual harassment when a man departs a tobacco oven. The ILO has reported sexual assaults, torture, and beatings in tobacco kilns (1998). The high number of families, budgetary limitations, and lack of educational facilities in or around tobacco kilns compromise the physical, mental, intellectual, moral, and psychological development of children. According to Bale, the operational system of tobacco kilns introduces additional dangers and problems even under optimal working conditions, with every tobacco-growing household making a payment to the kiln owner. This debt is particularly harmful to young people, as the stove owner sometimes holds them hostage and forces them to remain and labour (Bales, 1998). Thus, Mitha et al. (1989) determined that pregnant women work and "work prior to birth."

Bonded labour is believed to have originated from earlier systems of land ownership, such as those based on castes or secured by individual duties. Tobacco workers are from a variety of castes, including "Masalia," "Odd," Christian, and Afghan, all of whom are impoverished and have a low social position. This connected labour structure has been consistent with the subcontinent's sociocultural divisions of work since time immemorial. Ercelon (2004) termed this conduct "underfoot labour." Significant contributions to the "pawn" system have been made by (Mitah et al., 1989; Jamadar Institute, Hamid, 1993; Kemal, 1994; Bales, 1998; ILO, 2001 & Ercelon, 2004). In addition, they are the primary source of connected labour and "land" to which connected workers have access.

"Regarding the abolition of indentured labour, it is commonly considered that affordable credit weakens the link between debt and labour. This strategy permits workers to become established in agriculture, fishing, carpet weaving, or skilled production. According to Ercelon and Mitah, climate change will be mitigated by implementing current labour restrictions, such as the Minimum Wage Regulation, the Bonded Labor System (abolition), and industry regulations. Despite this, they stress the need to organise linked labour and urge NGOs to play an active role in eradicating and reestablishing linked labour. The Association of Tobacco Kiln Owners, on the other hand, examines replacing tobacco personnel with shaping machines.

### **Dangerous Health Consequences**

Occupational risk factors are one of the primary causes of respiratory illnesses, chronic lung diseases, and asthma on a global scale. A product of agriculture is tobacco. Before the 1960s, the United States dominated worldwide tobacco production; however, China, Brazil, and India currently produce more tobacco than the United States. A substantial amount of US tobacco production has been outsourced to developing countries. 125 countries, including Argentina, Guatemala, Indonesia, Italy, Kenya, Pakistan, Poland, Thailand, Turkey, and Zimbabwe, presently plant tobacco. The use and production of tobacco are public health hazards that violate human rights. Globally, proprietors of kilns are exposed to extremely hazardous working conditions. Employment in tobacco kilns has immediate and long-term implications for the labour force. The manufacture of tobacco is dangerous for all age groups. Children and women who labour in tobacco kilns may be exposed to lacerations, leaf cutting, leaf baking, harsh weather, and extended work hours. Due to their poverty, they are malnourished. Due to their stage of development, children are particularly susceptible to the adverse effects of working in kilns. Green tobacco sickness poses a grave threat to the health of young tobacco farm workers. This disorder is induced by the absorption of nicotine through the skin from tobacco plant

leaves. It is a form of nicotine toxicity made worse by wet or humid working conditions (Ramos, 2018).

Ramos reported that farm and kiln workers have a higher risk of occupational disease due to exposure to pesticides, fumigants, and other chemicals. This includes vertigo, headache, nausea, vomiting, insomnia, and chronic diseases such as cancer, reproductive health difficulties, and neurological damage (Health Hum Rights, 2018).

India is the third-largest tobacco grower in the world, employing over 1.2 million people in tobacco production, treatment, and processing, and 5,000 involved in the sale and distribution of tobacco. Bidi rental is one of the most significant businesses in India's unorganised sector, employing a significant number of women. It is important to improve the working and living conditions of tendu leaf growers and unorganised sector workers and to assist two working women in securing decent employment and income possibilities. (Hemananlini, 2016).

According to a survey, conducted in Industrial Estate Peshawar, poor wage is a significant concern for industrial labourers. It has a tremendous impact on the lives of workers' families. Although there is a stated minimum wage regulation, it is not being implemented. Due to poor earnings, industrial workers feel insecure, frustrated, and confined. Even when they are hungry, they are unable to offer a sufficient and balanced diet for their children. They used to eat the same dish several times a week. They are in financial difficulty and are victims of inflation. Overtime is required to receive full remuneration. The minimum wage policy must be carried out in its entirety. To make overtime a paid job, corrective actions must be implemented. Wage increases with time, as well as inflation, must be taken seriously. Fair wages are established through the setting of a minimum pay mechanism (Jalil et al., 2020).

A study conducted in the districts of Mardan and Sawabi examined the socioeconomic backgrounds of respondents and the consequences of smoking on their health. The findings showed that 96% of respondents earned less than the federal poverty threshold and supported their families by working in the tobacco industry. 3% of dropouts were due to instructor discipline, while 1% cited disinterest in school. The study recommended that the government pursue development activities in the project region to eradicate poverty and improve the socioeconomic standing of the targeted population (Ali & Jan 2014).

## **Methods**

The researcher used the qualitative technique for the investigation. Qualitative research methods are more effective for uncovering in-depth and comprehensive information. The researchers used primary as well as secondary data as a data collection tool and utilize the thematic analysis method. The thematic analysis determined the initial and emerging themes and those themes have emerged into major themes. In this study, the in-depth interview was based on 10 participants. The researcher examined their different perspectives on the topic, and relate them with its themes. People ranging in age from 10 to 18 were there. The vast majority of sources had just finished elementary school, with only a few having no formal education at all.

The researcher began by developing an interview protocol to achieve all of the study's objectives. The researcher struck up a friendly chat with the people he would be interviewing. Before the interview began, the participants' confidentiality was ensured, and they agreed to record an audio

transcript of the conversation. After gaining the respondents' trust, the researchers asked more in-depth questions to collect more insightful data. Following the transcription of each interview, the collected data were subjected to a thematic analysis.

## Results & Analysis

The researcher conducted interviews with women from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Swabi to explore the effects on the participants' emotional and physical health. The purpose of these interviews was to obtain more detailed information regarding the topic at hand. The interview transcripts revealed several themes, which are listed below. Emerging themes and related topics were extracted using thematic analysis, and then these concepts were consolidated into major themes. Tables, figures, and narratives can all be utilised to view an overview of the most significant facts

**Figure 4.1 Major Themes**

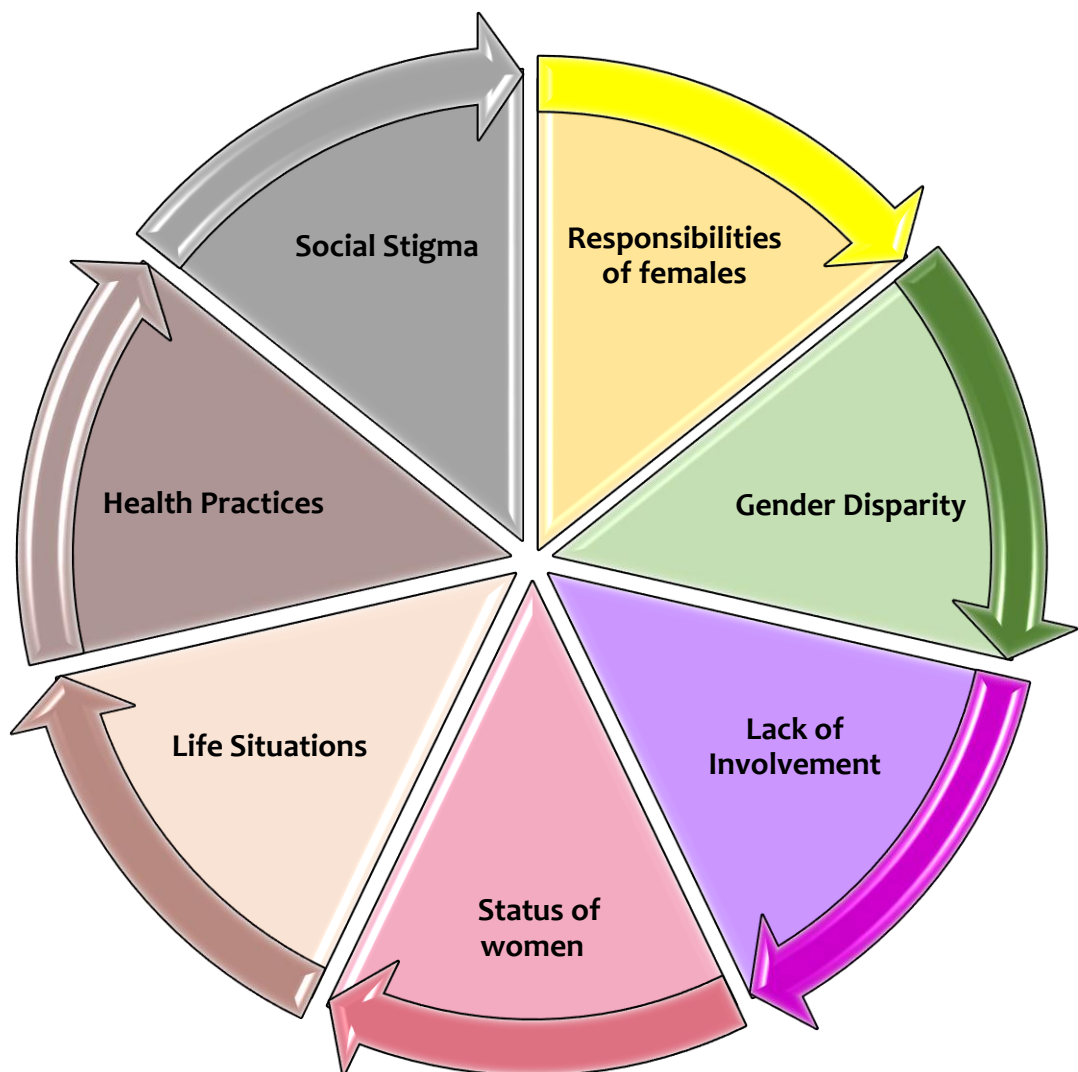


Figure 1 portrays the major themes extracted from the thematic analysis

**Table 1.1**

<b>Major Themes</b>	<b>Connecting Themes</b>	<b>Emerging Themes</b>
<b>Responsibilities of Females</b>	Field Tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Perform fieldwork in the morning;</li> </ul>
	Household chores	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ clean the home and clothes;</li> <li>▪ prepare meals;</li> <li>▪ care for children and/or adolescents; and</li> <li>▪ look after the elderly.</li> </ul>
<b>Gender disparity</b>	Unequal work distribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Women do twice as much as males</li> <li>• Women earn less</li> </ul>
	Unequal pay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Women work until dusk and earn less</li> <li>• Men earn more for equal effort</li> <li>• If you work on a contract basis, you should receive equal compensation</li> <li>• male always torched their wives</li> <li>• more societal pressure on females</li> <li>• gender stereotypes about females</li> <li>• females consider as submissive</li> <li>• domestic violence</li> <li>• male domination</li> </ul>
<b>Lack of Involvement</b>	At Workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work as an employer</li> <li>• Lack of decision-making authority</li> <li>• Lack of significance given to decisions</li> <li>• Compel us to accept their decisions.</li> <li>• Women have no say in choices;</li> <li>• we are never promoted;</li> <li>• our salaries are not increased, and our requests are given no consideration.</li> </ul>
	At home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No one listens to women;</li> <li>• Men do whatever they want;</li> <li>• Women must sometimes comply with their commands and decisions.</li> </ul>
<b>Status of women</b>	Courageous role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aware of their rights</li> <li>• Familiar with the laws and bills pertaining to sexual harassment in the workplace</li> <li>• Authoritative role</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spending money at their discretion</li> <li>• Assertive role</li> </ul>
	Lack of access to services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do not have a bank account</li> <li>• Make payments</li> <li>• Receive bank receipts</li> <li>• Lack of facilities</li> <li>• Lack of transportation</li> </ul>
	Lower socio-economic status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Difficulty surviving</li> <li>• Due to inflation, encountered difficulty meeting basic demands</li> <li>• A lower level of living</li> <li>• Less pay for more work</li> <li>• No land, no property</li> </ul>
<b>Life situations</b>	Personal life circumstance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a loss as opposed to any advantage</li> <li>• My life was ruined.</li> <li>• Working in such a tough atmosphere darkens the skin</li> <li>• get unwell</li> <li>• Exhaustion</li> <li>• Losses outweigh gains</li> </ul>
	Family life circumstances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All parties assume this responsibility</li> <li>• To achieve the consolidation of rights.</li> <li>• women restrain their needs</li> <li>• Attempt to work in solidarity to conceal our marital status from others.</li> <li>• No one can even eat correctly.</li> <li>• Youngsters also get ruined in the streets.</li> <li>• problem is still unresolved</li> <li>• financial crisis</li> <li>• poorer socioeconomic status</li> <li>• difficulty surviving.</li> </ul>
	Social life condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of time for social networking</li> <li>• Social connection with family members</li> <li>• Meeting new individuals</li> </ul>



<b>Health practices</b>	Mental/Psychological Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anxiety for future</li> <li>• stress</li> <li>• Frustration</li> <li>• Angriness</li> <li>• Feelings/ thoughts of Hopelessness</li> <li>• Mentally disturbed</li> <li>• Sad</li> <li>• Don't take an interest in daily routine</li> <li>• Sleep disturbance</li> <li>• Silent all the time</li> <li>• A negative attitude toward family</li> </ul>
	Physical Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dizziness</li> <li>• Monitor fever and blood pressure</li> <li>• Vomiting</li> <li>• Headache</li> <li>• Fever</li> <li>• Typhoid side effects</li> <li>• Pain in eyes</li> <li>• Allergy</li> <li>• Fainted</li> <li>• Paralyzed</li> <li>• Accident side effects</li> </ul>
<b>Societal stigma</b>	Social Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Struggle/ hardworking</li> <li>• Criticism by people</li> <li>• Social burden</li> <li>• People make fool</li> <li>• Marriage bond affected</li> <li>• Difficult to face society</li> <li>• Social pressure</li> </ul>

The primary, connecting, and emergent themes from the second focus group are distinguished and explained in Table 1.1. The results demonstrated that women were expected to work and care for their families. Even though the vast majority of their work is of high quality, it is underpaid as a family already committed to debt bondage. They must contend with gender inequity, do not receive raises, and do not receive requested raises. Being physically present at work and home is insufficient. They must only adhere to the decisions made by the men in the group. Since Pakistan is by nature a patriarchal and male-dominated country, women's perspectives are not even considered when settling critical issues. A woman's viewpoint is solicited but not regarded during workplace decision-making. Examining their relationship with their significant other reveals that it is comparable to our own. Because they collaborate and make decisions based on mutual understanding and agreement. Both

are financially self-sufficient. Despite their crucial role, women do not have access to the resources and services to which they are legally entitled due to their low socioeconomic status. This is the case even when women are informed of their rights. However, this person's social, familial, and private lives are all affected. Due to the economic crisis, they work day and night, putting their health at risk, neglecting their children, and being unable to meet their most fundamental demands. They have little time to meet new people or expand their social network because they are so busy.

**Figure 4.2 Major & Connecting Themes**

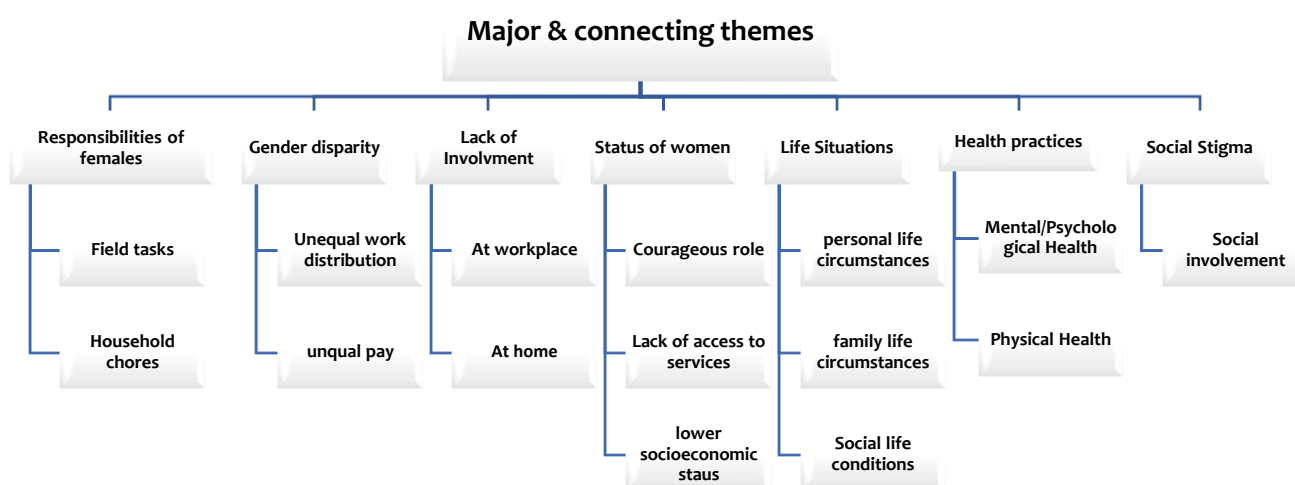


Figure 2 depicts the major themes along with connecting themes extracted from thematic analysis

**Discussion**

A qualitative study was undertaken to understand more about the demographic factors that influence the physical and mental health of females working at tobacco kilns due to debt bondage.

As the concept of "women's responsibility" became an increasingly prominent topic of discussion. In addition to their home responsibilities, women must assist in the fields. In addition to caring for their husbands and children, wives are required to work alongside men in the fields.

One of the responders advised the researchers to conduct their fieldwork first thing in the morning after hearing "We used to go in the morning."

A second source stated, "On a typical morning, we depart around six and return at 10."

Men and women perform identical tasks in the workplace.

Women are socialized to exert greater effort than men. Because they are at home throughout the day, they perform housework and/or watch the children. The house and clothes must be cleaned, meals must be prepared, children and/or adolescents must be monitored, and the elderly must be cared for.

We believe guys participate as well, but women contribute more "remarked the response

Another member of the group observed that women typically perform more housework and yard maintenance than men. This is the reason why women typically work harder than men.

The disparity between the sexes was an additional crucial concept. Women are compensated less than males while making comparable contributions to an organisation. They must contend with sexism in the workplace and their salary. mostly because they labour harder than men for less pay. Men earn twice as much as women. While men care for the medicinal gardens, women tend to the vegetable gardens. It is not surprising that women work in the field until evening and then perform housework; nonetheless, it is stunning that they get paid less than men for performing the same activity. When contract labour is performed, men and women are compensated equally for identical work.

A member of the group stated, "We labour more than the males."

One respondent believed gender equality could be attained if women just had less money than males. Men earn between 300 and 400 rupees per day, but women receive only 100 rupees. Our proprietors pay the men who work for them 5,000 rupees each month.

A further member of the group commented, "If they both work under a contract, then our compensation will be identical."

However, "Lack of Participation" was mentioned by the researcher as a significant issue. In Pakistan, a patriarchal nation, women are grossly underrepresented in all sectors of society, including the workplace, domestic duties, and politics. Men and women do not share the same rights. Men have established the norms and regulations that must be followed. Most men do not bother to inquire why their female friends choose a particular movie or restaurant. They do not need to take matters into their own hands, as the boys will disregard whatever decisions they make regardless. Regardless of whether the man in question is their supervisor, spouse, or dad.

When asked again, the responder stated, "Women are not involved in decision-making, and even if we ask them to increase our pay, men will not heed their suggestion."

Another respondent stated, "The landlords did not request our opinion, and we did not offer it to them." Their actions are determined by their own criteria. Our perspective on these activities may or may not resonate with the general public, but rest certain that it will be disseminated.

Rather, "they describe it as rising or not rising," a second respondent explained. We requested a pay increase to keep up with inflation, but our request was denied.

Egalitarian attitudes emerged as the fourth major issue of discussion. The findings of the study provide an intriguing fresh perspective on the issue. Given the double workload, gender imbalance, and the small number of female participants, the absence of discrimination is noteworthy. Due to their mutual care and trust, they may make decisions regarding domestic tasks and other matters jointly. The utilization of this money has been authorised by both parties.

Women serve crucial roles in society, yet they are economically disadvantaged and have less overall access to services. They play a bold role while being denied access to the resources to which they are entitled because of their perceived low rank. The economic and social stability of their neighbourhood is precarious. It is difficult to meet even the most basic demands. They are demanding, willing to spend money, cognizant of their rights, and versed with the workplace sexual harassment law. Their personality is courageous. Sadly, they have no access to even the most fundamental resources, such as automobiles or bank accounts; the only information they have about their finances beyond their salary comes from zakat accounts. Despite these advancements, the standing of women in society continues to decline. Their living conditions are well below the national average. Due to the fact that they work extremely hard for relatively little money. They are unable to meet even their most basic necessities because they have no real estate and the cost of living is always increasing owing to inflation.

One interviewee remarked, "Thank God, we have all the necessary information. Permit me to simply explain that males cannot be convinced to donate a percentage of their money to their spouses to protect women's rights. Consequently, each of us has an obligation in addition to our rights. undertakes.

In a similar vein, several participants agreed, stating: "No one seems to pay any attention to women. A man does what he desires. We are not permitted to treat other males in the same manner that we treat you in front of other women. Each man confines his conversations and actions to his domain.

Simply put, nearly no one accepts women's testimony in the local court "another participant stated.

The real response of the respondent follows: "We have no bank accounts or other financial resources. We have no means of transportation. Even though our residences are far from the office."

Here is what another participant in the conversation had to say: "I possess a zakat fund account. I used to receive it regularly, but that was two or three years ago, and I have not received it since."

Concerning inflation and its requirements, one responder said: "Keeping up with the rising cost of living in the current global economy, where unemployment and inflation are continual concerns, is practically impossible if we rely entirely on men. In an effort to make

ends meet, we contribute regularly to the household budget with the expectation that this will eventually result in a surplus.

Someone else stated it as follows: "If we don't work, we lose this privilege; if we do work, we get sick, earn money, and can use that money to get medicine and injections." Due to our insufficient cash flow, our expenses are disproportionately large.

The overall theme was the social, personal, and family life of an individual ended up on health practices and social stigma. Social, private, and familial aspects of women's lives are affected by their daytime and nocturnal labour in the fields and houses, respectively. They make little effort to maintain their health, so it is not surprising that overwork and sun exposure cause them to become ill. Due to their habits, they retreat from society. Insufficient time to spend with loved ones. As a result of domestic demands, women may suppress their female identities. It is considered that they have a difficult family life and come from a low socioeconomic background, or that, as good women, they put their husbands and children before themselves. However, the individual's entire social, familial, and private life is affected. Due to the economic downturn, they are obliged to work long hours, putting their health in danger, missing precious moments with their children, and failing to meet even their most basic demands. They are so focused on their profession that they have little time to expand their social circle and meet new people.

The reply stated, "Yet mind can do a great deal, but over time it becomes less effective." We are unable to give this issue our full attention due to time constraints, hence it remains unsolved. The subsequent morning will begin with the same timetable as this morning. No one is capable of accomplishing it. Also, check your diet. When children are permitted outside, they also demonstrate undesirable behaviour. Our entire existence has been like this."

"Working outside contributed to my development of diabetes," stated a second worker.

Another person revealed having jaundice but being unable to take time off work due to it. If we leave the house, we do so to bring something back to the table, as only our own greed prevents us from staying at home and resting every day.

A second participant said, "There are too many problems, such as the fact that working outside all day leaves us fatigued, so when we return home and finish cooking, we want to rest." Our reserves are completely gone, and we just cannot continue. Everyone follows the same daily routine.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the thematic analysis and discussions, the findings of this study shed light on the challenging realities faced by women working in tobacco kilns in Swabi, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In conclusion, this qualitative study explored the demographic factors influencing the physical and mental health of females working at tobacco kilns due to debt bondage. The discussions highlighted several key themes and issues that contribute to the challenging circumstances faced by these women.

Firstly, the concept of "women's responsibility" emerged as a prominent topic, indicating that women are burdened with multiple roles and responsibilities. They not only have to fulfil their household duties but also work alongside men in the fields. This unequal distribution of labour leads to increased workload and exhaustion for women.

Furthermore, the findings revealed a significant gender disparity in terms of compensation and decision-making power. Women are paid less than men for similar work, and their opinions and suggestions are often disregarded. The patriarchal norms and regulations in Pakistani society contribute to the marginalization of women and limit their participation in various sectors.

The discussions also emphasized the impact of women's work on their health, social life, and family dynamics. Overwork, sun exposure, and insufficient time for self-care contribute to their physical ailments and social isolation. The demanding nature of their jobs and the economic instability they face make it difficult for them to meet their basic needs and maintain a satisfactory quality of life.

Overall, this study highlights the complex interplay between gender dynamics, socioeconomic factors, and health outcomes for women working in tobacco kilns. The findings underscore the need for interventions that address gender inequalities, provide better working conditions, and ensure access to resources and support systems for these women.

### **Recommendations**

1. **Government Intervention:** The government should take immediate action to address the exploitative conditions faced by women working in tobacco kilns. This could include implementing and enforcing labour laws to protect the rights of workers, conducting regular inspections of kilns to ensure compliance, and establishing mechanisms for reporting and addressing abuse.
2. **Economic Empowerment:** Efforts should be made to provide alternative livelihood opportunities for women in the Swabi area. This could involve supporting skill development programs, promoting entrepreneurship, and facilitating access to credit and financial resources. By offering viable economic alternatives, women can be empowered to escape debt slavery and find more dignified work.
3. **Social Support and Awareness:** Social support networks and organizations should be established to assist women working in kilns. These support systems can offer counselling services, legal aid, and protection against abuse. Additionally, raising awareness about the rights and protections available to these women through media campaigns, community outreach programs, and educational initiatives can help empower them and prevent further exploitation.
4. **Strengthening Education:** Education plays a vital role in empowering women. Efforts should be made to improve access to quality education for girls and women in the region. This includes addressing barriers such as gender-based discrimination, poverty, and cultural norms that restrict female education. Education can equip women with knowledge about their rights, increase their confidence, and provide them with opportunities for better employment prospects.

5. Collaboration and Stakeholder Engagement: It is important to involve multiple stakeholders in addressing the issue of exploitation in tobacco kilns. Collaboration between government agencies, civil society organizations, the media, and other relevant stakeholders can lead to more effective interventions. Joint efforts can include advocacy, policy development, and the establishment of support mechanisms to improve the situation of women working in kilns.

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