

Educational Empowerment of Gypsy Communities in Chakwal: The Jhuggi School Project Initiative

Farida Yunas*

Abstract

This paper explores the Trust for Awareness, Information and Knowledge (TAIK) Welfare Society's Jhuggi School Project in Chakwal, Pakistan, aimed at improving the socio-economic status of the gypsy community through education, health initiatives, and vocational training. The project, established in 2014, focuses on addressing issues like lack of education, poverty, and inadequate health and hygiene practices in the gypsy communities (population 780, sample 189). Key outcomes include increased school enrolments, improved health conditions, and community engagement in alternative livelihoods, marking a significant shift from traditional begging practices.

Keywords: *Gypsy Communities, Education, Socio-Economic Development, Health Initiatives*

Chairperson at "Trust for Awareness, Information and Knowledge (TAIK) Welfare Society" Tehsil & District Chakwal faridayunas@gmail.com

Introduction

One of the most neglected groups in different communities are gypsies (Kılıçoğlu & Kılıçoğlu, 2018; Falagas & Zarkadoulia, 2008)). According to Gazdar, Masood and Naqvi (2013) Pakistani society have many flavours of ethnic groups which has tendency of social exclusion as many diverse groups live here importantly gypsies being more neglected. Pakistan's gypsy population, estimated to be over seven million, remains largely undocumented and invisible in official records. It is said by Suliman et al. (2016a) that gypsies in Pakistan have to face many challenges i.e. they don't have access to basic education, improper health facilities are provided to them. They are facing problems of identification as they are landless people. They also struggle for their identification in political, social and economic spheres. This is indicated by Suliman et al. (2017) that being marginalised groups in Pakistan, "they are poor, landless, marginal, isolated, socially, and politically excluded from the mainstream society. They do not have access to clean drinking water, water for bathing, access to health and economic opportunities. They are mostly found in marginal and sparsely populated areas lacking the basic needs of life".

There is also lack of documentation of gypsy population McFadden (2016). This lack of documentation has rendered the gypsies almost stateless within their own country, particularly evident in the Chakwal region where they have resided as a community for over 25 years. Despite their status as Pakistani citizens, gypsies are often marginalized, facing public ostracism and state neglect. This community mostly resides in the poor neighbourhoods, and they go through a harsh and unhygienic conditions. In that case, their misery, feelings of isolation aggravate. The problem of their marginalization can be traced back to the lack of birth registration among the community members which in turn deprive them the access to obtain Computerized National Identity Cards (CNICs) which should be one of the most important tricks to ensure the access to various civic rights and services (Suliman et al., 2016b).

Education, a fundamental right, remains a far-off dream for the children from Gypsies in Chakwal. The existing socio-cultural

beliefs and the non-recognition of governments are the reasons behind the fact that some generations are illiterate and excluded from formal education systems because this is a cyclical phenomenon. In response to this educational void, local philanthropists initiated two significant projects in October 2014: these projects have been in the Jhuggi School and the Jhuggi School Centre. It indicates a conscious move by community to end the circle of poverty and illiteracy. The objective is to integrate not only Roma kids but any individual who needs education and empowerment into the normal life and society.

Literature Review

Trust for Awareness, Information and Knowledge (TAIK) Welfare Society, founded in 2006 and duly registered as Society under Act XXI of 1860 by the Government of Punjab, has been serving the marginalized in the Chakwal district since its inception. Being a not-for-profit organization, its major priority is to better the environment, health medicine, and education. It is dedicated to empowering those in the community who are often known to be less privileged people so that they can eventually receive the basic human rights in its operational zones.

One of the vital educational projects of TAIK is KRG school centre launched in 2014 in constantly fast-growing gypsy colony in Mohalla Kazamabad, Chakwal. Concerning the financial aspect, the initiative will be supported by individual philanthropists. The overall goal is to change the lives of the children who are known as Roma by providing them with the skills and knowledge which enable them to become fully-fledged citizens and do away with the exploitation of the various forms of a child. The approach of the project is based on a comprehensive framework, which includes various strategies like networking, lobbying, advocacy, service provision, and capacity building, with the main target being to develop protection mechanisms and referral channels. Apart from that, it also targets adult community members such as mothers and fathers by leading them out of begging and onto sustainable occupations like domestic work, traditional embroidery and for the male members and to do jobs such labour and security services.

The charitable organization called The Jhuggi School Project, whose focus was on primary education, has turned itself into a miraculous torch for Jhuggi Bastees of Kazimabad, Anwarabad, Mohalla Sargojra, Faisal Colony, Sukh Chain colony and Dhakoo road. Significantly, the number of the students who are enrolled in schools increased. The project aids cover all aspects that promote a well-balanced and holistic approach to our children, which include the uniform, stationery, lunch, transportation, library access, sports facilities as well as a playground. Fried helps students to spend more time outdoors: he often takes educational excursions to local parks and organizes picnics with students. To all the students, this creates an atmosphere of joyful discoveries.

An amazing feature is the incorporation of the Smarter Learning Classroom System (SLC), marking a new standard in the way learning environments are designed. Not only so, but the food packages per month and year make it possible for them to have the necessary nutrition, but the free medical camps have been an amazing help in health protection. The project not only focuses on building the cases but also adds environmental education to the students' curriculum, who will be taught to separate the materials such as plastic bottles and shopping bags. The courses shall be topped up by extracurricular activities like sports, karate, drawing, painting and calligraphy. Continuous awareness programs are conducted on significant themes like sanitation, education is key, abuse of children, underage marriages, nutrition and hygiene, COVID-19, morality, and the prospects of life away from begging. A centre for embroidery and stitching has started functioning. It deals with skills for vocation

The achievements of the Jhuggi School Project are significant. A total of 1673 individuals have directly benefitted from the initiative. Key accomplishments include the installation of a water pump in Kazimabad Jhuggi Bastee and successful collaboration with NGOs to raise awareness about the importance of CNIC for the gypsy community, leading to a substantial number of individuals obtaining their identity documents. In terms of educational impact, 424 children were recently enrolled, with all students receiving uniforms, books, and other essentials. The project has also been

successful in integrating children into mainstream education, with some students now attending high school. The health initiatives have seen wide participation, with 1251 individuals benefiting from medical camps. Notably, quite a sizeable proportion of the community has taken part in the monthly awareness sessions, which has resulted in an adoption of good sleeping hygiene standards. The project has created the spirit of communal feelings and active routine daily operations involving students who participate in a range of events and activities.

Statistics and Current Situation

During 2014, the Jhuggi School Project was launched in the Gypsy Belonging to Mohalla Kazamabad Chakwal, situated in the town of Chakwal. Financial aid came mostly from philanthropic donations. The Jhuggi colony of Mohalla Kazamabad, Chakwal depicts a clear demographic profile which spells out the woes of the group that is always in the margins and struggles with socio-economic challenges. This community of 143 people illustrates not only how our society disregards difference, but also how it pays attention to expenditures that do not benefit the larger public. Most of this population, which is 93 in all, and hasn't any children going to school are the ones in the educational void. This situation is also observed in the ignorance and unhygienic habits present in the community which further deepens the situation, unfortunately. The living conditions faced by them are extremely hard – all 27 families live in tents, situated in huge, abandoned areas of Pakistan Railway land. It is obvious that the whole community is dependent on basking. The members of this community, which mostly comprises people from the southern part of Punjab who have settled here more than 27 years ago as well as a family from Sindh, personify such that a community desperately in need of a rescue and support agenda purpose made for it, caught in the middle of that poverty and social exclusion.

The colony faces several critical challenges, including:

1. **Lack of Basic Amenities:** The community has a very limited supply of clean water fit for drinking, toilets and sewers.

2. Socio-Economic Struggles: Poor people crawling along the streets, a smile and a handout for alms, or occasionally working as laborers when they find a job is their day-by-day existence.
3. Documentation Issues: The existence of childbirth registration and access to CNIC for both boys and girls is proving to be a problem. Social and Cultural Issues: The colony experiences early-age marriages and a lack of basic religious, moral, and social values.
4. Health Concerns: Multiple health issues are prevalent among the residents.
5. Child Welfare: There are instances of child abuse, and children often accompany adults in begging.

Scope of Work

The initial phase of our intervention focused on the establishment of a Jhuggi Centre within the community, targeting early childhood education for children aged 4 to 9 years. This initiative aimed to prepare these children for subsequent enrolment in formal schooling systems.

Variables of the Study. This study focused on two main variables, gypsies, and educational empowerment.

Gypsy communities. according to McFadden et al. (2016) “individuals from different socio-cultural backgrounds including Romany (English) Gypsies, Irish Travelers, Scottish Gypsy/Travelers and Eastern European Roma communities”. In this study, gypsy communities of Chakwal region in Pakistan were focused.

The Jhuggi School Project. It was inaugurated in 2014 within the Gypsy Colony of Mohalla Kazamabad, Chakwal. Financial support was garnered from philanthropic sources. Key statistics collected by the implementing organizations reveal that it is helping the community persistently marginalized and grappling with socio-economic challenges and lack of educational provisions.

Statement of the Problem

Pakistan is a developing country and target population of this land needs special attention in education. There are many special groups among those gypsy communities are important. Gypsies are a separate ethnic group

living in Pakistan and some other countries as well. They have different types of lifestyles as compared to other common people, as they always keep migrating from one place to another. So, their educational needs are equally important as they also need to be educated and productive part of the society. Children from this community also needs to transform their lives by equipping them with the skills and knowledge necessary to become productive and responsible citizens, thereby aiming to eliminate various forms of child exploitation. This project encompassed a range of strategies including networking, advocacy, lobbying, service provision, and capacity building, particularly focusing on developing protection mechanisms and referral services. Additionally, it encouraged adult community members, especially parents, to transition from begging to more sustainable forms of livelihood such as trained domestic work or traditional embroidery, and for male members to engage in occupations like labor and security services. So, this study was conducted for “Educational Empowerment of Gypsy Communities in Chakwal: The Jhuggi School Project Initiative”.

Objectives of the study

The primary objectives of the Jhuggi School Centre are two-fold:

1. To broaden the educational opportunities for these marginalized communities, facilitating their integration into mainstream society as productive and engaged citizens.

RQ1: What are the best ways of promotion of educational uplift of gypsy children by mainstreaming them in schools?

To promote, protect, and safeguard the rights of Gypsy children, ensuring their well-being and access to basic educational rights.

Research Methodology

This study used survey, and it was descriptive in nature.

Research Design

This study employed mix-method research design in which exploratory sequential design was used. Intervention was also given to gypsy students in terms of educational facilities and making them part of mainstream education. The initial phase of our intervention focused on the establishment of a Jhuggi Centre within the community, targeting early childhood education for children aged 4 to 9 years. This initiative aimed to prepare these children for subsequent enrolment in formal schooling systems.

Population, Sample and Sampling Technique

The population was comprised of 156 gypsy families from 05 locations which constituted 780 gypsies from Chakwal district. Sample comprised of 189 gypsy children. Sample was selected purposively. Following is detail of population and sample:

Gypsy Locations	Gypsy Families	Population	Sample
Kazim Abad	48	240	83
Sargojra	16	80	18
Khanpur	19	95	18
Dhumman	38	190	38
Dhudial	35	175	32
Total	156	780	189

Source:

<https://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files/population/2017/results/04023.pdf>

Research Instruments

In this study, interview was used as a tool to record the success stories of participants. Intervention was given in terms of tool. This was carefully developed tool in the light of literature and field observation. It contained open ended questions. Its language was Urdu. It was validated by experts which indicated its appropriate face validity for this research.

Demographic Sheet

This was used to tabulate the demographics of participants for quantitative analysis which contained participants' consent along with their details of age, gender, location, mainstreaming details. Following is the detail of different phases of tool utilization/intervention implementation:

Phase-I:

In the first phase, a Jhuggi Centre within the community was established in which early childhood education was designed for children aged 4 to 9 years. Key components of this phase included:

Intervention to Improve the Situation: Intervention was given to gypsy students in terms of educational facilities and making them part of mainstream education. The initial phase of our intervention focused on the establishment of a Jhuggi Centre within the community, targeting early childhood education for children aged 4 to 9 years. This initiative aimed to prepare these children for subsequent enrolment in formal schooling systems.

Provision of Educational Materials: Children were provided with uniforms, books, and essential learning resources at no cost to ensure an unimpeded learning experience.

Nutritional Support: Daily refreshments were served to the children to support their physical well-being and enhance their learning capacity.

Expansion of Educational Facilities: Encouraged by the initial success, four additional schools have been established in and around Chakwal city. As a tangible outcome, 13 out of 49 registered children successfully transitioned to a nearby primary school.

However, broader challenges such as birth registration and acquisition of CNIC for parents, along with health and hygiene issues, remained unaddressed. These overarching concerns led to the conceptualization of a more comprehensive Jhuggi School for the socio-economic rehabilitation of these children.

Phase-II:

In the second phase, following critical areas were undertaken:

Establishment of a Jhuggi School: To provide a structured and stable educational environment for children.

Citizenship Documentation: Facilitating the process of birth registration and CNIC acquisition for both parents and children to ensure their legal rights and access to state services.

Health and Hygiene Improvement: Implementing programs to enhance the health and hygiene standards of the entire community.

Education and Nutrition: Focusing on basic education coupled with nutritional support to address both intellectual and physical development needs.

Employment and Vocational Training: Encouraging adult male members of the community to seek employment and offering vocational training to women, aiming to shift the community from a reliance on begging to sustainable livelihoods.

Legal Rights and Child Protection Awareness: Educating the community about legal rights, child protection, and ways to prevent child abuse and exploitation.

Data Collection

Data was collected through face-to-face teaching and interviews.

RESULTS

Following section describes the results of this project:

Table 1

Overall Mainstreamed Gypsy children in Schools

S No	Location	Families	Population	Enrolment
1	JhuggiBasti Kazamabad	85	1097	133
2	Jhuggi Basti Sargojra	20	89	8
3	Jhuggi Basti Khanpur	14	65	12
4	Jhuggi Basti Duman	17	70	19
5	Jhuggi Basti Dhudial	32	150	39
6	Jhuggi Basti Anwarabad	39	510	76
7	Jhuggi Basti Faisal Colony	26	305	38
8	Jhuggi Basti Near Emporium	28	403	53
9	Jhuggi Basti Dhakoo Road	42	427	46
	Total	303	3116	424

This table tells us the detailed overview of this project that up to now, a total of 303 gypsy families have benefited educational provisions. Out of 3116, a total number of 424 students have been mainstreamed in formal schools which is a big achievement.

Table 2

Total Scenario of Mainstreamed Students.

Scenario of Mainstreaming	Students
Mainstream	104
Migrated	96
Left after completion one year	86
Continue	138
Grand Total	424

This table elaborates overall students' profile who were mainstreamed in schools. Their retention rate is elaborated. Out of 424 students, total 104 students remained mainstreamed. 96 migrated from schools, 86 students left out due to their personal reasons. Right now, 138 students are those who continued their education in the schools.

Table 3

Promotion of Educational Uplift of Gypsy children by Mainstreaming them in Schools.

JSP Locations	Families	Population	Enrolment	Mainstream
Kazim Abad	48	240	83	41
Sargojra	16	80	18	2
Khanpur	19	95	18	3
Dhumman	38	190	38	-
Dhudial	35	175	32	-
Total	156	780	189	46

This table shows the achievement of this project. Out of 156 families, there were 780 gypsy students. The enrolled students were 189 and total 46 students were mainstreamed to formal schools which was a big success of this project. With a focus on primary education, the Jhuggi Bastees of Kazimabad, Sargojra, Khanpur, Dhumman and Dhudial were focused, and a notable number of children have been registered and are actively enrolled in the schools. The project provisions are comprehensive, including uniforms, stationery, nutritious lunch, transportation, library access, sports facilities, and a playground. Outdoor activities are frequent and varied, including educational trips and picnics in local parks, fostering a sense of joy and exploration among the students.

Findings and Discussions

Here is the description of qualitative data in terms of success stories obtained from students of this project. The transformative effect of JSP on the lives of individuals in the targeted Jhuggi Bastees is remarkable. Here are some compelling narratives:

Success Stories

Bali Rani's Journey: Once a habitual beggar in Jhuggi Bastee Sargojra, Chakwal, and a victim of early-age marriage, Bali Rani's life took a turn after her divorce and the birth of her two sons. JSP intervened, on condition that she will be given a Pink Riksha and a month's training in collaboration with PLAN Pakistan. She didn't look back and she is now on

her own as a single mother who lives in a rented house. She works relentlessly to educate and support her sons who are in primary school.

Mohammad Mehboob's Transformation: Initially, Mehboob was a disenfranchised beggar who was obliged to care for three children all on his own when his spouse passed on. However, after his involvement in the awareness sessions conducted by JSP, his outlook changed the character then refuses to beg anymore and JSP hires him on a job as a security officer. His children are now attending school at kindergarten and the first level now.

Nisar Hussain's Educational Uplift: For starters, he was discovered as a street kid identified by JSP being in front of the mall and urged him to join his class. Showing his knowledge and intellectual way of understanding that he is now a proud student in class five attended closely by his mentors with higher education ambitions.

Mujtaba's New Direction: Mujtaba, who was discovered on the roads lying unconscious and neglected, has become the envy of his friends and he is now in class five and learning Islam at the neighbourhood Madrasa.

A Second Chance for Mohammad Mehboob's Family: In a mixed case when another individual Mohammad Mehboob was involved, JSP's interference brought out the maximum changes. The story of his family started from their situation marked with sick people and a daughter who died early because of marriage problems. Now the family is transported to the other end of the situation. Through JSP support Mehboob was lucky to buy a rickshaw, and now he is a part of the project too, for he transports students. While his sons are in high school, his oldest daughter is learning stitching, and the youngest one is an up and comer JSP.

Bohar Ali's New Skills: When Alvi Sharif, a father of eight, decided to bring the curtain down on his begging days and took a driving class, he proved to be the second story of skill development and independence.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, following is concluded:

- It is the preaching of the Jhuggi Schools Project that in and around Chakwal, has become a noticeable achievement by the timetable results and success in the first semester mainstreaming of several children in formal education. They not only show what the initiative achieved but also identify the next steps required during the implementation of global citizenship courses.
- The main reason of the Jhuggi School Project (JSP) victorious is that we have found the responsible sponsorship from well-off local philanthropists who donated significant sum of money to us. Such

funds donations are so helpful to us. The Trust for Awareness, Information and Knowledge (TAIK) Society genuinely conveys its gratitude to this support and intends to pursue different sources of funding to sustain as well as extend the advantageous impacts of the mission.

- The Jhuggi School Project Stories doubling proved the Jhuggi School Project success factors which are supersensitive in matters which include education, hope, dignity, and the belief that things can get better.

Future Plans

Throughout the process, the project participants have explored the different creative avenues they have. Moving forward, we aim to reach and influence more people. This comprises the setting of more educative platforms finalized putting into practice vocational and business training specifically improving the economic status of women who reside in Jhuggi Bastis. Rather, we are striving to foster a setting where enrolment encompasses constituencies around the district as often as possible. This is a purposeful strategy to educate and moreover to empower the new generation, who has all the needed knowledge and prospects to fashion a more prosperous future for both themselves and their society.

References

- Falagas, M. E., & Zarkadoulia, E. (2008) Factors associated with suboptimal compliance to vaccinations in children in developed countries: a systematic review. *Current Medical Research and Opinion*, 24(6), 1719-1741. DOI: 10.1185/03007990802085692
- Gazdar, H., Masood, S. Q., & Naqvi, H. (2013). Bottom up or top down? Exclusion and citizenship in Pakistan, Karachi: Collective for social science research. <http://www.researchcollective.org/>
- Kılıçoğlu, G., & Kılıçoğlu, D. Y. (2018). The Romany states of education in Turkey: A qualitative study. *The Urban Review*, 50(3), 402-429. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-017-0439-4>
- McFadden, A., Atkin, K., Bell, K. et al. (2016). Community engagement to enhance trust between Gypsy/Travellers, and maternity, early years' and child dental health services: Protocol for a multi-method exploratory study. *International Journal of Equity Health*, 15, 183. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-016-0475-9>

- Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. (2020). <https://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files/population/2017/results/04023.pdf>
- Suliman, M., & Açıkgöz, R. (2022). A comparative analysis of gypsies' access to employment opportunities and health services in Pakistan and Turkey. <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/2829364>
- Suliman, M., Shah, M., & Ullah, A. (2016a). Nomads: The politically marginalised segment of Pakistani society on the basis of ethnic prejudice. *Journal of Exclusion Studies*, 6(1), 18-29. Doi: 10.5958/2231-4555.2016.00002.4
- Suliman, M., Shah, M., Ullah, A., & Jamal, H. (2016b). Ethnicity based social exclusion of nomads in Khyber district Malakand, Pakhtunkhwa-Pakistan. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies*, 3(1), 11-19. <http://dx.doi.org/10.29333/ejecs/41>
- Suliman, M., Shah, M., & Ullah, I. (2017). Addressing the issue of nomadic communities' children educational exclusion through mobile tent schools in Malakand, Pakistan. *Imperial Journal of Interdisciplinary Research (IJIR)*, 3(3), 540-546. <http://www.onlinejournal.in>

Citation of this Article:

Younas, F. (2023). Educational empowerment of gypsy communities in chakwal: the jhuggi school project initiative. *International Journal of Literacy Theory and Practice*, 1(2), 1-14.