# A Gender-Sensitive Analysis of Social Integration Challenges. Evidence from the Pakistani Diaspora in Germany

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**Abstract**

*European Union (EU) countries are confronted with the integration challenges of an increasing number of immigrants from non-EU states who intend to stay because they find better economic conditions and quality of life. Poor integration creates problems for both, immigrants and the host society, policymakers are committed to fostering appropriate conditions. This requires sound databases to explore the situation. Our article contributes to that by considering the integration challenges of the Pakistani diaspora in Germany. It applies a gender-sensitive analysis as males and females face different forms of integration challenges. Our survey among 264 Pakistani immigrants revealed that English language competencies; interaction with other nationals; and the welcoming attitude of the host society are the most significant determinants of integration. The results are relevant beyond the narrow empirical context of the country focus considered here.*

**Keywords:** *Integration challenges; Pakistani Diaspora; gender-sensitive analysis*

## Introduction

Social integration of migrants into host societies is one of the major areas of migration research in the 21st-century (Maliepaard & Schacht, 2018; Laurentsyeva & Venturini, 2017; Loch, 2014; Depalo *et. al.*, 2006). As such, it is a fuzzy and multi-layered concept referring to lived experiences, harmony with states' normative programs, and migrants' adaptation (Erdal, 2013; Ager & Strang, 2008). It includes questions related to how migrants adopt the hosts' cultures and intermingle with citizens; how states want to integrate migrants by offering benefits, including citizenship; and what are their everyday experiences with the local inhabitants (Erdal, 2013). Furthermore, Erdal (2013) emphasizes that practical integration experiences of migrants and state policies about the integration of immigrants play a significant role in the integration process of migrants. For immigrants, social integration means developing a sense of belonging to the host society, i.e., accepting the cultural norms, acting according to these norms, building up corresponding social capital, and participating in social life and cultural activities (Laurentsyeva & Venturini, 2017). For natives, it is defined as considering and accepting the migrants as members of society (Laurentsyeva & Venturini, 2017).

Over the 21st century, the number of Pakistanis in Germany has steadily increased, as more and more enter for education, employment, family reunification, and asylum seekers. Until

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2020, the total number of Pakistani immigrants officially residing in Germany reached 124,000, among them 33% were females. 35.5% of the total were those who did not experience migration but were born in Germany (BAMF, 2020).

However, poor integration, especially among Pakistani females, causes multiple problems for themselves as well as for the host society. Hence, to augment the benefits from in-migration the country is striving to shape appropriate policies. Worries related to the social integration of Pakistani migrants across the European Union (EU) are calling for research, and there is a dire need to investigate the persisting challenges, in the interest of all the stakeholders involved. For that purpose, a sound data and information basis are required, and in particular, a gender-sensitive approach is required because evidence suggests that men and women are subject to different living conditions in the host countries. This article contributes to the knowledge basis by considering the integration challenges of the Pakistani Diaspora in the EU, with a special focus on Pakistanis residing in Germany, especially females. The findings are useful for shaping policy measures and relevant beyond the country focus considered here.

## Theoretical framework, concepts, and state of research

We built our theoretical framework on David Lockwood's (1964) theory of social system to refer to the concept of Pakistani immigrants' integration in Germany. Since the early days of research about social integration, sociologists consider it one of the most important components of social peace in society. Lockwood's theory introduces two different types of integration: "system integration" defined as "…the form of integration in a system that works independently for the motives, goals, and relations of individuals, and frequently against their motives and interests";  and "social integration" which is "the inclusion of new individuals in a system, the creation of mutual relationships among actors and their attitudes to the social system as a whole" (Lockwood, 1964, cited by Sardinha, 2009:33). "Social integration is a generation's lasting process of inclusion and acceptance of migrants in the core institutions, relations and statuses of the receiving society" (Heckmann, 2006:18). Within this concept, Pakistani migrants are actors who are creating their relationship with the host society in Germany and trying to understand its social system; this context is the focus of our research.

Erdal (2013) and Ager & Strang (2008) presented social integration as the willingness of a state to integrate migrants by offering them benefits and supporting their adaptation to the local culture and their interaction with the locals. Employment, housing, education, and good health facilities were used as key markers. Several studies found that the level of education, length of stay in the host society, and intensity of interaction with other nationalities are positively related to integration (Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2018; Mahmood, 2015; 2017; Haque, 2012; Dalgard and Thapa, 2007). The success of migrants' efforts to socialize with locals and to be accepted as a member of the host country's society on a basis of equality depends on the positive reception of the local population. This is a debate on social inclusion and exclusion which is also relevant to understanding social integration (IOM, 2021; Bass, 2018). Herda (2021) stated that the indigenous population of various host countries, including the USA, Britain, Germany, France, Spain, and Italy, showed widespread ignorance and misconception towards the number of immigrants in their country and their legal status, and this misconception may lead them to support anti-immigrants' policies. The attitude is different and more positive towards legal immigrants. Herda also investigated the number of immigrants' friends to check the acceptability of immigrants and found a positive relationship

between integration and interaction with the host society (Herda, 2018; 2021). Doerschler & Jackson (2018) stated that the public policy agendas decisively contribute help to shaping the immigrants' integration and social inclusion.

Further reviews were collected about Muslim immigrants in general with a special focus on Pakistanis in different countries. Olwig (2011) found that, while members of the Pakistani diaspora in Western Europe preferred endogamy and it is allowed and appreciated in Pakistani culture to marry the person of their parent's choice, this is considered as forced marriages arranged by parents by Danish locals (Erdal, 2013). In Norway, referring to their achievements in education, employment, health, and housing Pakistani migrant communities outperform locals mostly; especially the second and third generations were high achievers. In Norway, dual nationality did not show a significant strengthening of loyalties and integration into the host society of Pakistanis (Erdal, 2013). Integration among females proceeded mainly in the domain of employment, education, and marriage (Butt, 2019, Amjad, 2017; Erdal, 2013).

Mohiuddin (2017) identified religion as one of the significant markers of the identity of people of Pakistani origin, and the debate around integration also involves ideas of religious identity and multiculturalism. Furthermore, Bass (2018) discussed the ban of minarets (mosques) in Switzerland and the partial ban of the veil (full face covering of Muslim females) in certain areas of France, Denmark, Austria, and Belgium. Both are religious practices of Muslims and because of these bans they feel excluded from the mainstream. In a gender-based study, Borchgrevink & Birkvad (2021) discussed the Islamic discouragement of interest payments on the bank loan and how this affects the house ownership of working Muslim women. Mostly, Muslim immigrants preferred to follow their religious obligations, instead of taking opportunities like loans for housing. This applied especially to working women which somehow restricted their integration. In their study related to the integration of Muslim immigrants in Europe and North America, Liebert *et al.* (2020) found that successful integration depends on equal employment opportunities, support in religious practices, and social inclusion.

Chaudhary (2018) considered the organizational infrastructure of Pakistani immigrants' non-profit organizations in London and New York City (NYC) and found that the Pakistanis were more integrated into London because Pakistan had been a British colony. In the USA, they need to increase their sense of belonging, while that is already achieved in London. Investigating the integration pathways of Pakistani male immigrants in Finland, Ayub & Nawaz (2021) found that those with work-based visas were better integrated than those holding student visas. Focusing on Iranian, Afghani, and Pakistani migrants in Germany, Haque (2012) revealed that their migration was motivated mainly by political and religious reasons. Approximately 75% of the Pakistanis wanted to interact more closely with the native Germans, and the majority of them were residing in the neighbourhood of Germans. 75% of the Pakistani stated that they had more frequent contact with Germans both in their daily life as well as referring to friendships. While, Zakar *et al.*, (2012) measured intimate partner violence against women and its related immigration stressors in Pakistani immigrant families in Germany and found that most female respondents were the victims of psychological violence which they afterward linked with their domestic responsibilities, childcare, and social isolation that can be the indicators of integration.

Based on previous theoretical and empirical findings, we consider gender, religion, language competences, the frequency of meeting with native Germans, and other nationals, and the friendly attitude of the host society as integration variables.

## Methodology and database

We collected our empirical data through face-to-face interviews among 264 Pakistani individuals, above 18 years of age and living in Germany for more than three months on the legal status, using a structured questionnaire with open-ended and close-ended questions. 50% of the respondents were females. In the light of the research objectives, we focused on information about the respondents' personal background, their educational attainments, and lived experiences of their stay in Germany. The intensity of their felt integration challenges was inquired on a five-point Likert scale. The major indicators we used were freedom in following religious rituals; feeling loneliness, practicing and knowledge of German and English languages; and social interaction with Germans, Pakistanis, and other nationals. These variables were cross-tested with various personal characteristics, such as education, skills, age, marital status, having children, and employment.

The respondents were selected via snowball sampling. Key and resource persons - especially religious leaders and the embassy and Consulate General of Pakistan in Germany - were approached for building up confidence in the community. All respondents were contacted personally in different cities of Germany with a significant number of Pakistani immigrants, including Frankfurt am Main, Munich, Kassel, Darmstadt, Stuttgart, Ilmenau, Dortmund, and Göttingen. The required sample was achieved after great efforts and input of time and money, as it was not easy to find Pakistanis who were ready to be interviewed. It was challenging in our field research to find and approach Pakistani female immigrants (Mahmood, 2015). Especially the female respondents, of whom there are fewer in Germany, were difficult to find, and also it was hard to convince them to participate in the survey, and they only agreed to that with the prior permission of their male family members. They wanted to hide their identity as well, and the researcher ensured them that the data will be used only for the research purpose.

Although the data collection was conducted in late 2015 and early 2016, the results related to the addressed problem are still relevant as few studies referring to the integration challenges of Pakistani immigrants in Europe, especially in Germany can be found. It took a long time of almost 18 months to collect the genuine face-to-face survey data which was a daring task. We checked the differences between male and female respondents with the help of cross-tabulation which revealed a clear picture of gender perspectives. We applied an Ordinary Least Square (OLS) regression model to find the relationship between our focus variable and several independent variables[6]. As a dependent variable, we chose the interaction of Pakistani immigrants with the host community while gender, education, having children, duration of stay, English and German language competencies, friendly attitude of the host society, informal meetings with other nationals, and Pakistanis were the independent variables.

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[6] The descriptive and inferential statistics were applied by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS-22) and STATA-14.

# Results

*Personal characteristics*

Table 1 shows the respondents' personal characteristics, including age, marital status, visa type, duration of stay, education, and staying with family. Less females than males were holding study visas or job permits, with *female-to-male (f/m)* values of 0.2 and 0.5. The f/m ratio for a family reunion visa is 7.8 and for a permanent visa 4., i.e., women were in majority. 16.7% of the females and 11.4% of the males had dual (Pakistani and German) nationality with a 1.5 f/m value.

The majority of our respondents were between 24 and 35 years old. 88% of the women were married and living with family, which was the case for just 44% of the males. Similarly, Mahmood (2015) found that the majority of those in "single" and "living alone" status were students and males. Overall, 39% of the females and 60% of the males had stayed in Germany for less than 5 years whereby women tended to stay longer than men, which is connected to the fact that a larger share of the males was students, while more women were housewives and also holding German citizenship or a permanent residence permit or family reunification visa. The majority of the immigrants had passed higher secondary education; with an f/m-value of 2.7 females were more than double in this category. The respondents who had passed graduation (14 years of education) and masters (16 years of education) from Pakistan showed an f/m-value of 0.6 and 0.7 respectively, i.e., the share of males was higher in these categories. This demonstrated that women typically had a more basic education while males were stronger in higher education which emphasizes a gender bias.

**Table 1.** Personal characteristics of the respondents (N=264)

| Personal characteristics | Category | Female F (%) | Male F (%) | F/M* (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Type of Visa & Nationality | Student | 15 (5.68) | 80 (30.3) | 0.2 |
| | Family reunion | 39 (14.77) | 05 (1.89) | 7.8 |
| | Work permit | 05 (1.89) | 10 (3.79) | 0.5 |
| | Permanent residence | 29 (10.98) | 7 (2.65) | 4.1 |
| | Dual nationality | 44 (16.67) | 30 (11.36) | 1.5 |
| Age (in years) | 18-23 | 07 (5.3) | 03 (2.3) | 2.3 |
| | 24-29 | 32 (24.2) | 54 (40.9) | 0.6 |
| | 30-35 | 36 (27.3) | 33 (25.0) | 1.1 |
| | 36-41 | 20 (15.2) | 17 (12.9) | 1.2 |
| | 42-47 | 17 (12.9) | 12 (9.1) | 1.4 |
| | $\geq 48$ | 20 (15.1) | 13 (9.9) | 1.5 |
| Marital status | Single | 16 (12.1) | 62 (47.0) | 0.3 |
| | Married | 116 (87.9) | 70 (53.0) | 1.6 |
| Living status | Living with family | 117 (88.6) | 58 (43.9) | 2.0 |
| | Living alone | 15 (11.4) | 74 (56.1) | 0.2 |
| Duration of stay (years) | $\leq 5$ | 51 (39.4) | 80 (60.6) | 0.6 |
| | 6 – 15 | 37 (27.3) | 27 (20.4) | 1.3 |
| | 16-25 | 31 (23.5) | 15 (11.4) | 2.0 |
| | $\geq 26$ | 13 (9.8) | 10 (7.6) | 1.3 |
| Education | $\leq$ Higher secondary | 51 (38.7) | 19 (14.3) | 2.7 |
| | Graduation | 43(32.6) | 68 (51.5) | 0.6 |
| | Masters | 18 (16.6) | 20 (25.0) | 0.7 |
| | $\geq$ M.Phil. | 10 (7.6) | 10 (7.6) | 1.0 |
| | Schooling from Germany | 06 (4.5) | 02 (1.5) | 3.0 |

* Female/Male

### Social integration

The majority of the respondents strongly agreed that a lack of German language competences is a barrier to their social adjustment; with an f/m value of 1.1, this was almost the same for both genders. Most found that they can easily perform their religious practices in Germany. The majority - a higher share of the females than males - expressed feeling lonely. More females (46.2%) than males (34.1%) experienced Germans as being friendly towards themselves. However, almost 14% of females and 20% of males disagreed with this statement. The acceptance by the host society is essential for the successful integration process.

**Table 2.** Indicators of social integration

| Statements | Levels* | Female F (%) | Male F (%) | F/M (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The lack of German language competences restricts my interaction | 1 | 107 (81.1) | 95 (72.0) | 1.1 |
| | 2 | 09 (6.8) | 25 (18.9) | 0.4 |
| | 3 | 05 (3.8) | 06 (4.5) | 0.8 |
| | 4 | 10 (7.6) | 03 (2.3) | 3.3 |
| | 5 | 01 (0.8) | 03 (2.3) | 0.3 |
| I can easily practice my religion in Germany | 1 | 105 (79.5) | 96 (72.7) | 1.1 |
| | 2 | 19 (14.4) | 26 (19.7) | 0.7 |
| | 3 | 05 (3.8) | 04 (3.0) | 1.3 |
| | 4 | 03 (2.3) | 03 (2.3) | 1.0 |
| | 5 | 00 (0.0) | 03 (2.3) | 0 |
| I am feeling lonely in Germany | 1 | 33 (25.0) | 25 (18.9) | 1.3 |
| | 2 | 42 (31.8) | 31 (23.5) | 1.4 |
| | 3 | 17 (12.9) | 26 (19.7) | 0.7 |
| | 4 | 26 (19.7) | 26 (19.7) | 1.0 |
| | 5 | 14 (10.6) | 24 (18.2) | 0.6 |
| I found Germans friendly towards immigrants | 1 | 32 (24.2) | 23 (17.4) | 1.4 |
| | 2 | 61 (46.2) | 45 (34.1) | 1.4 |
| | 3 | 20 (15.2) | 37 (28.0) | 0.5 |
| | 4 | 15 (11.4) | 17 (12.9) | 0.9 |
| | 5 | 04 (3.0) | 10 (7.6) | 0.4 |

*1-Strongly agree, 2-agree, 3-neutral, 4-disagree, 5-strongly disagree

Few respondents, and more the male ones, interacted with the German community on a daily basis or very often. The majority stated that they were working and staying here, so more frequent contacts are obvious. The majority of the females rarely, or even never, interacted with Germans or had German friends. They explained this by being busy with household chores at home, so they did not find time for such interactions. Also, they felt, that everyone in Germany is so busy in his/her life that informal interaction is not easy. Around one-quarter of all respondents sometimes interact with the host community, whereas, 31% of females and 18.2% of males rarely have an informal meeting with the host community. Almost 29% of females and 49% of males were frequently interacting with people from other nations. The frequency of meeting with Pakistanis has been observed higher: 82% of the females and 88% of the males met them very often and often, f/m being 0.8 and 1.3 respectively. Overall, Pakistani males turned out to be more integrated than females. The reason may be found in the religious and cultural bonding; domestic responsibilities of females, and - above all -in the fact that most of the females were not participating in the labour market, so their interaction with the outside community was rather limited.

**Table 3.** Frequency of social contacts with different communities

| Indicators | Levels* | Female F (%) | Male F (%) | F/M (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Frequency of social contact with German friends | 1 | 7 (5.3) | 23 (17.4) | 0.3 |
| | 2 | 26 (19.7) | 47 (35.6) | 0.6 |
| | 3 | 35 (26.5) | 32 (24.2) | 1.1 |
| | 4 | 41 (31.1) | 24 (18.2) | 1.7 |
| | 5 | 23 (17.4) | 6 (4.5) | 3.9 |
| Frequency of social contact with friends from other nations | 1 | 08 (6.1) | 24 (18.2) | 0.3 |
| | 2 | 38 (28.8) | 65 (49.2) | 0.6 |
| | 3 | 33 (25.0) | 29 (22.0) | 1.1 |
| | 4 | 41 (31.1) | 14 (10.6) | 2.9 |
| | 5 | 12 (9.1) | 00 (0.0) | 9.1 |
| Frequency of social contact with Pakistani friends | 1 | 63 (47.7) | 82 (62.1) | 0.8 |
| | 2 | 46 (34.8) | 34 (25.8) | 1.3 |
| | 3 | 13 (9.8) | 12 (9.1) | 1.1 |
| | 4 | 09 (6.8) | 04 (3.0) | 2.3 |
| | 5 | 01 (0.8) | 00 (0.0) | 0.8:0 |

*1-very often, 2-often, 3-sometimes, 4-rarely, 5-never

Our results demonstrate the strong social bonding among the Pakistani community residing in Germany.

**Multivariate analysis**

The multivariate analysis helped us to check the joint effect of different variables. As a dependent variable, we chose the interaction of Pakistani immigrants with the host community, i.e., the frequency of informal meetings with German friends in the host community. The results showed significant gender differences, as being male can increase a 13.4% change in integration than being female. Having children bring 10.2% positive change in the model. Many of the parents emphasized that they cannot provide their children with better education and socialization without interacting with the host community. Unexpectedly, educational attainments, duration of stay, and German language competences remained non-significant. However, self-assessment of German language competences was difficult as most respondents were not experts in the German language. English language competencies, in contrast, proved significant, with a strength of 12.2%. As the students were able to get along with English, they were not bound to learn German which also was not obligatory for most of them. As most of the females were housewives and engaged in domestic responsibilities, they did not feel the need to improve their German language skills. Pakistanis who feel comfortable while interacting with their German friends were more likely to integrate and interact more frequently, as demonstrated by the beta value of 0.491. Informal meetings with other nationals are associated with a standardized β of 0.371. A significant relationship with a coefficient of 0.076 was found with regard to the friendly and welcoming attitude of the host community. The adjusted $R^2 = 0.676$ showed that there is an overall 67.6% variation in "Y" which is explained by the independent variables given in this model with $F = 30.606$ with the *p-value = (0.000***)* which is highly significant (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Determinants of the integration of Pakistani immigrants in Germany

| Regression results | |
| --- | --- |
| **Dependent variable:** Informal meetings with German nationals | |
| **Independent variables** | **Standardized β** |
| Gender (0,1) | 0.134** |
| Having Children (0,1) | 0.102** |
| Educational attainments of the respondents (In categories) | 0.099 |
| Duration of Stay (In year-wise categories) | -0.118 |
| English language Competences (Likert Scale) | 0.122** |
| German language Competences (Likert Scale) | 0.009 |
| Feeling comfortable with German friends (Likert Scale) | 0.491*** |
| Informal meeting with other nationals (Likert Scale) | 0.371*** |
| Informal meeting with Pakistani immigrants (Likert Scale) | 0.022 |
| Friendly attitude of host community (Likert Scale) | 0.076** |
| R | 0.836 |
| R² | 0.699 |
| Adjusted R² | 0.676 |
| F | 30.606 |
| p-value | 0.000*** |

*Significant at 10% level; ** significant at 5% level; *** significant at 1% level;

## Discussion

Academic publications about global international migration generally emphasize that the integration of immigrants constitutes a challenge referring to language skills, social capital, human capital, citizenship, working documentation, and acceptance of the host society (IOM, 2021; Bass, 2018). Erdal (2013) and Ager & Strang (2008) suggested promoting immigrants' adaptation to the local culture and their interaction with the locals as is also found in our research too. Numerous studies found that the level of education, length of stay in the host society, and intensity of interaction with other nationalities are positively related to integration (Wessendorf & Phillimore, 2018; Mahmood, 2017; Erdal 2013; Haque, 2012; Ager & Strang, 2008; Dalgard and Thapa, 2007). The results of our study are supporting these findings; language skills, labour force participation, welcoming attitude of the host society, and interaction with locals and other nationalities turned out to be significant.

Several pieces of research back our results that religion is a significant indicator of Pakistanis' identity as Muslims (Borchgrevink & Birkvad, 2021; Liebert *et al.*, 2020; Mohiuddin, 2017). Even though the majority of the respondents in our research stated that religion is important for them and they can easily practice their basic religious obligations in Germany, like prayers and fasting. The respondents also positively discussed the role of "Islamic cultural centres" in Germany. Herda (2018; 2021) compared the data from the six countries including the USA, Great Britain, France, Germany, Spain, and Italy regarding ignorance and misconceptions about the number of immigrants and their legal status. They asked the local population about their number of immigrant friends and almost everywhere the share in the category of "few immigrant friends" was high, 59% in Germany which is the third-largest share after France and Spain. We found similar results regarding their interaction with the host society. Previous research as well as our own findings suggest that the interaction of immigrants and the local community can ease the process of integration and foster public tolerance.

In our study, English language competences, interaction with German friends and community as well as being male and having children showed a positive relationship with integration. There is a lack of studies about the integration challenges of Pakistani female immigrants around the globe, especially in Europe. The studies that were done mainly focused on their mental health and psychological distress (Hjellset & Ihlebæk, 2019; Syed *et al.*, 2006) and intimate partner violence against women which leads to psychological stress (Zakar *et al.*, 2012). Haque (2012) studied the integration challenges of Iranian, Afghani, and Pakistani migrants in Germany at a minor level and found that approximately, 75% of the Pakistanis wanted to interact more closely with the native Germans, and the majority were residing in the neighbourhood of Germans. Almost similar results were found in our results (Table 3). We built our theoretical and conceptual framework on David Lockwood's (1964) theory of social system to refer to the concept of Pakistani immigrants' integration in Germany. Acceptance of immigrants in the core institutions and roles can increase their integration into the host society. The interaction with the host community is more beneficial in addition to their interaction with the Pakistan diaspora in Europe.

## Conclusions and recommendations

Integration is not the part and parcel of a single individual. There are several stakeholders in this process including immigrants, their families, the governments of host and sending societies as well as the local community at the destination. Being male, having children, having better English language competences, the friendly attitude of the host society, and interacting with other nationals played a significant role in the integration process. Pakistani females appear to be less integrated because of their low interaction with the outside world because the norms and values of their home country perceive males as the breadwinner of the family and females to stay at home and take care of domestic affairs, and these traditions are followed by Pakistanis immigrants in Germany too. Although, the infrastructure is more supportive for women in Germany if they want to engage themselves in paid labour which can increase their interaction in the host community. Having children and their socialization process are also significant indicators of integration in our research. In order to become more integrated, females should enhance their level of education and skills which is not possible without the support of their families.

For a cohesive long-term integration into the German society, German language proficiency appears indispensable and their activities in the outside world can strengthen the need for German language competences. For that purpose, the Pakistan government should offer them affordable language courses before their departure which can be an additional asset for their future too. The immigrants should avail these language learning opportunities in the host society also. In the future, it would be more interesting to study the different groups separately like students, housewives, employees, and self-employed because their characteristics and nature of challenges are different from each other. The problems of Pakistani children especially the second and third generations should be studied by considering different age groups.

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