



CHILD LABOUR IN INDIA: CAUSES, CONSEQUENCES AND SUGGESTIONS

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Abstract

Child labour is a serious problem from many decades and a challenge for many developing countries. It has existed over the centuries not only in the impoverished areas of developing countries but also in developed countries until the beginning of the 20th century. Many countries have enacted various laws and have taken serious initiative to eradicate child labour, yet still the problem is very widespread throughout the world. The problem of child labour appears in severe form and various factors are involved with it. The causes for the incidence of child labour in India are complex and deeply rooted into the society. Poverty seems to be the main cause. Child labour can be found in both urban and rural areas. However the vast majority of child labour occurs in rural areas since poverty is more rampant. Although many poor rural families struggle for a better life in urban areas, this pushes families to force their children to work in order to increase the family income and ensure survival. The present article examines the causes and consequences of child labour in India and giving measures and suggestions to control and eliminate child labour.

Key words: *Child labour, developing countries, Society, Factors, Poverty*

Child Labour: Meaning & Defining

According to International Labour Organization (ILO), the term ‘child labour’ is often defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development.

It refers to work that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and interferes with their schooling by depriving them of the opportunity to attend school; obliging them to leave school prematurely; or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work. Child labour has been defined differently, and therefore, no universally accepted definition of child labour is available at present.

In India, the definition of child labour in terms of age; differed from year to year under different legislations. The Factories Act, 1948 prohibits children below the age of 14 years from working in any factory. The minimum age in the Mines Act, 1952 is 15 years. It is 12 years in the Plantations Labour Act, 1951.

It hasn't always been easy to conceptualize a universally applicable definition of child labour. In India, designating a child is more complicated because different legislative instruments aimed at children's welfare have varying age criteria. The Plantation Labour Act of 1951, the Motor Transport Workers Act of 1961, the Apprentices Act of 1961, the Beedi and Cigar Workers (Condition of Employment) Act of 1966, the Dangerous Machine Act of 1983 and the Minimum Wage Act of 1984 have set the age. Child Labour means when children are made to work in a way that takes away their childhood, potential, and self-respect.



It includes work that is dangerous or harmful to children's physical, mental, social, or moral well-being. It also includes work that stops them from going to school, either by not allowing them to attend or by forcing them to leave early.

Whether a particular type of work is considered child Labour depends on factors like the child's age, the kind and hours of work, the conditions in which it takes place, and the rules set by each country. The definition may vary from country to country and even within different industries within a country. The Child labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986 defines a child as any person who has not completed his fourteenth year of age. Part II of the act prohibits children from working in any occupation listed in Part A of the Schedule, which include among others, domestic work, dhabas & hotels, catering at railway establishments, construction work on the railway or anywhere near the tracks, plastics factories and automobile garages. The act also prohibits children from working in places where certain processes are being undertaken, as listed in Part B of the Schedule, which include among others, beedi making, tanning, soap manufacture, brick kilns and roof tiles units. These provisions do not apply to a workshop where the occupier is working with the help of his family or in a government recognized or aided school.

Child labour in India

Throughout the world child labour has been an area of lively debate for about a decade with much different view point on the issue. However for the economic historians, sociologists, and anthropologists, child labour is not merely a contemporary phenomenon. Development economists also argue that such withdrawal was facilitated by substantial improvement in the socio-economic condition of the people in the industrial economies.

Child labour continues to be a major concern in India despite the implementation of various policies and programmes aimed at its eradication. This study investigates factors that influence child labour in India with a focus on regional differences.

Child labour remains a critical issue worldwide with around 160 million children as it poses a serious challenge to children's wellbeing (ILO & UNICEF, 2021). Child labour is often defined as employment that deprives children of their childhood, potentials, and dignity, and that is detrimental to their physical and mental development (ILO, 2017). Therefore, eliminating child labour is a major priority, globally. Even in the Sustainable Development Goals – 8.7 (SDG), the aim is to end child labour by 2025.

Children's work has a negative association with their well-being. Children are vulnerable in a variety of ways and childhood is a time in life when additional attention is needed. Child labour is a major source of concern because it frequently interferes with children's ability to attend and perform well in school (Anker, 2000, Basu and Van, 1998, Dash et al., 2018). Child labour encounters both time and wage exploitation because child labourers are more obedient, less demanding and less likely to complain about working condition and their treatment (Hazari & Mohan, 2021). Therefore, working children are frequently subjected to abuse and exploitation (Anker, 2000).

According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), there were 152 million children involved in child labour worldwide belonging to the age group 5–17 years in 2016, of which 114 million were in the age group 5–14 years, accounting for 75% of all child labourers. The Census of India – 2011, reveals that 10.1 million of 5–14 years children were working in India. However, as of 2020, 5.8



million children of 5–17 years are working in India (ILO, 2020, Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation).

Facts and Statistics of Child Labour in India

Total child population (5-14 years) in India: 259.6 million (Census 2011).

Working children in India: 10.1 million (3.9% of the total child population) as “main workers” or “marginal workers.”

Out-of-school children in India: more than 42.7 million.

Child Labour decreased in India by 2.6 million between 2001 and 2011.

The decline is more visible in rural areas, while the number of child workers increased in urban areas, indicating a growing demand for child workers in menial jobs.

Causes of Child Labour

Poverty

Poverty is the single biggest cause of this issue in India. Children from poor families often have to work to help support their families financially. They may work in factories, on farms, or in the informal economy.

Lack of access to Quality Education

Many children in India do not have access to good schools. When children do not have access to quality education, they are more likely to work instead of going to school.

Growth of the Informal Economy:

The informal economy is made up of small businesses and self-employed workers. The informal economy often employs them because it is difficult to enforce child Labour laws in the informal sector.

Lack of Awareness

Most parents are unaware of the physical, mental, and psychological ill consequences of this issue.

There are many other factors that contribute to the problem, such as social norms, cultural beliefs, and discrimination.

Consequences of Child Labour

The consequences faced have a far-reaching impact on the child, society, and the nation as a whole:

Child Consequences

Health Risks: This exposes children to hazardous working conditions, physical and mental abuse, and long hours of Labour, which can result in injuries, illnesses, and developmental issues.

Education Deprivation: Working children are often denied access to education, leading to a lack of basic literacy, limiting their future opportunities, and perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

Stunted Development: It disrupts normal childhood development, depriving children of playtime, social interaction, and emotional well-being, hindering their physical, cognitive, and emotional growth.

Societal Consequences

Undermining Human Rights: It violates the fundamental rights of children, denying them the right to education, protection, and a safe and healthy environment.

Poverty and Inequality: It keeps families trapped in a cycle of poverty, as children's earnings contribute minimally to the household income and hinder their long-term economic prospects.



Social Disintegration: It disrupts family and community dynamics as children are forced into work instead of receiving proper care and education. This can lead to a breakdown in social structures and intergenerational poverty.

National Consequences

Economic Implications: It deprives children of education, leading to a less skilled workforce, reduced productivity, and limited opportunities for economic advancement.

Human Capital Loss: It results in the loss of potential human capital as children are denied education and skill development. This diminishes the nation's capacity to compete globally and achieve sustainable development goals.

Social Welfare Burden: The physical and psychological consequences lead to increased healthcare and social welfare costs for the nation. Governments must allocate resources to address these issues, diverting funds from other critical areas.

Solutions to the Issue of Child Labour in India

Addressing the issue of child Labour in India requires a comprehensive approach involving various stakeholders.

Strengthening Legislative Framework: Enforce and strengthen existing laws, such as the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, to ensure comprehensive protection for children and stricter penalties for offenders. Amendments should align with international standards.

Access to Quality Education: Ensure universal access to free and quality education for all children. Implement and enforce the Right to Education Act, focusing on reducing dropout rates and increasing enrolment in schools.

Poverty Alleviation: Tackle the root causes of child Labour by implementing poverty alleviation programs, providing economic support to families living in poverty, and promoting livelihood opportunities for parents.

Awareness and Sensitization: Conduct widespread awareness campaigns targeting parents, communities, and employers about the detrimental effects of child Labour on children's physical, mental, and educational development.

Rehabilitation and Social Protection: Develop and implement comprehensive rehabilitation programs for rescued child laborers, including access to education, vocational training, healthcare, and psychological support. Establish social protection schemes for vulnerable families to prevent children from entering the Labour force.

International Cooperation: Collaborate with international organizations, such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and UNICEF, to access expertise, technical assistance, and financial resources to combat child Labour effectively.

Empowering Local Communities: Involve local communities, including parents, teachers, and community leaders, in preventing child Labour. Empower them to identify and report cases of child Labour and provide support for rehabilitation and reintegration efforts.

It is important to recognize that addressing child Labour is a complex and multifaceted issue that requires sustained efforts, collaboration, and the commitment of all stakeholders to create lasting change.



Child Labour: Suggestions for Improvement of Conditions

First of all the major responsibility is for we the people to live in the society. It starts in your home. Never make any servant do work underage. Give some financial help to the street boys. Unite people who want to help them. Make welfare groups. Give children education and give them shelter and food. If we all work from our own place as far as we can, then it is possible to have a result. Never put any child to hard and heavy work in an industry. Boycott the people who are doing this and raise your voice against them. Make them know the law of crime like child labour. Raise awareness to the people. Come forward and take your own responsibility and make your own judgments.

Secondly, governments can play a huge role. First of all they can make the proper law against child labour and enforce them strictly against people who are putting the children to heavy work. Governments also should assure shelter, food, education and all basic needs for children. A child should be as free as he is in heaven. Remember, children are also a tool for criminal to their crime. Governments of a country should be aware and take necessary steps for that. Lastly, we are living in an era of globalization. The various international organizations can take steps to raise awareness to the people to stop child labour. They can help children financially by giving them free education at education for all programme and putting pressure on the government to enforce the law to provide necessary elements for the welfare of children. The combination of the above bodies will make it easy to eradicate children's ill health. Children are the sign of innocence and purity. Your heart should melt in tears when you see them sleeping in the street with a hungry belly if you are a real human. We the youth raise our voice. Make this world a better place for the upcoming generation.

Conclusion

It is evident that incidence of Child Labour is decreasing in India over the recent past. However, still 40 million children are out of school of which 6 million are working outside home. Major problem is the presence of a large mass of Nowhere Children, who are neither working nor going to school. If we look at the plausible determining factors, poverty emerges to be a necessary but not a sufficient condition for thriving of child labour. While poverty is instrumental in keeping the children out of school, it does not necessarily drive them into the labour market. It is only the presence of other complementary factors like lack of educational infrastructure that appears to play a much more crucial role in pushing children to work. The physical component of educational infrastructure is no doubt important in this respect but the humane factor is emerging to be more important. Educational infrastructure is also observed to play a very important role in this regard and therefore spatial expansion of educational infrastructure with more emphasis on elementary education would be very useful in eradicating child labour. An emerging idea regarding educational infrastructure is that at the aggregate level we have to some extent overcome the stage where there was acute shortage of physical infrastructure viz. lack of school buildings etc. It is believed that now the bottleneck arises mainly in terms of the human component, namely availability of teachers. The main task therefore is to ensure that the schools are adequately staffed and teachers have ample time to take care of individual students. Addressing and eliminating child Labour is crucial for the well-being of children, the progress of society, and the sustainable development of a nation. It requires concerted efforts, comprehensive policies, and the active involvement of various stakeholders to ensure the protection of children's rights and their holistic development.



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