

CHILD LABOUR IN INDIA: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

This paper is an endeavor to contribute in the awareness drive about child labour in India. Various researchers have tried to find out bases and consequences of child labour in different areas of India. In most of the researches the nature and consequences of child labour have been found similar, but the question arises when one has to look into the nation as a whole regarding this evil, one instantly gets the sense that we are still far behind to eradicate this blasphemy. This paper is an effort by the researcher to discuss various causes, practices as well as consequences of child labour not only region, area or state-wise but nation wise as a whole. As such child labour is known to everyone and is perceived on regular basis, but the question arises that what percentage of population are aware about the policies made by the government for prevention of child labour and what proportion of known population implement and ask for implementation of such fruitful policies. This paper will bring light in all these matters. Further this paper states how to contribute to in raising the government's awareness about the importance of issues related to child labour, education and their living condition.

Keywords: Child Labour, Poverty, Education

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Definition of Child worker (ILO):

"Any child who is overwrought to live like an adult in their childhood, who is exploited to work under physical and mental harmful environment on very low wages mostly away from home and for whom educational opportunities for bright future are denied". "Child labour" is, generally speaking, work for children that harm them or exploit them in some way (Physically, mentally, or by blocking access to education)

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.

(Source: <http://labour.nic.in/cwl/ChildLabour.html>)

Introduction

The problem of child labour stays to pose a challenge before the nation. Government has been taking various pro-active measures to tackle this problem. However, considering the magnitude and extent of the problem and that it is essentially a socio-economic problem inextricably linked to poverty and illiteracy, it requires concerted efforts from all sections of the society to make a dent in the problem. According to the Census 2001 figures there are 1.26 crore working children in the age group of 5-14 as compared to the total child population of 25.2 crore. There are approximately 12 lakhs children working in the hazardous occupations/processes which are covered under the Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act i.e. 18 occupations and 65 processes. However, as per survey conducted by National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) in 2004-05, the number of working children is estimated at 90.75 lakh. It shows that the efforts of the Government have borne the desired fruits. Way back in 1979, Government formed the first committee called Gurupadaswamy Committee to study the issue of child labour and to suggest measures to tackle it. The Committee examined the problem in detail and made some far-

reaching recommendations. It observed that as long as poverty continued, it would be difficult to totally eliminate child labour and hence, any attempt to abolish it through legal recourse would not be a practical proposition. The Committee felt that in the circumstances, the only alternative left was to ban child labour in hazardous areas and to regulate and better the conditions of work in other areas. It recommended that a multiple policy approach was required in dealing with the problems of working children. Based on the recommendations of Gurupadaswamy Committee, the Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act was enacted in 1986. The Act prohibits employment of children in certain specified hazardous occupations and processes and regulates the working conditions in others.

Objectives of the Study

- To study the situation of child labour in India
- To provide suggestions on the basis of findings of the study

Research methodology

- This research paper is descriptive in nature and is entirely based on secondary data that has been collected from various newspapers, Magazines, Journals, NGO reports, internet resources etc.

Child labour in India

Child labour is the practice of having children engage in economic activity, on part or full-time basis. The practice deprives children of their childhood, and is harmful to their physical and mental development. Poverty, lack of good schools and growth of informal economy are considered as the important causes of child labour in India. In consonance with the above approach, a National Policy on Child Labour was formulated in 1987. The Policy seeks to adopt a gradual & sequential approach with a focus on rehabilitation of children working in hazardous occupations & processes in the first instance. The Action Plan outlined in the Policy for tackling this problem is as follows:

- Legislative Action Plan for strict enforcement of Child Labour Act and other labour laws to ensure that children are not employed in hazardous employments, and that the working

conditions of children working in non-hazardous areas are regulated in accordance with the provisions of the Child Labour Act.

- Focusing of General Developmental Programmes for Benefiting Child Labour - As poverty is the root cause of child labour, the action plan emphasizes the need to cover these children and their families also under various poverty alleviation and employment generation schemes of the Government.
- Project Based Plan of Action envisages starting of projects in areas of high concentration of child labour. Pursuant to this, in 1988, the National Child Labour Project (NCLP) Scheme was launched in 9 districts of high child labour endemicity in the country. The Scheme envisages running of special schools for child labour withdrawn from work. In the special schools, these children are provided formal/non-formal education along with vocational training, a stipend of Rs.150 per month, supplementary nutrition and regular health checkups so as to prepare them to join regular mainstream schools.

In spite of all these valuable efforts made by the Government there is still a concerning quantum of children working in various hazardous condition while a little amount of wages .The table given below reflects the situation of Child Labour in various states of India .

NSSO(66th round of Survey) on Child Labour in Major States ,2009-2010(Age 04-14)

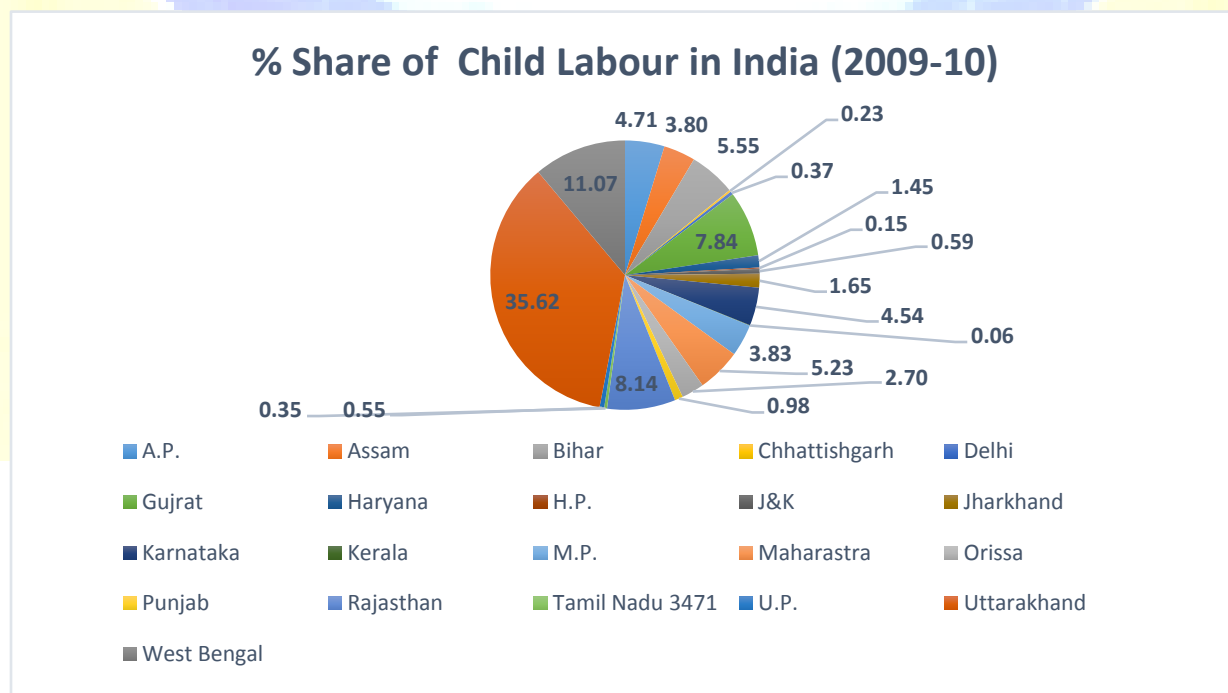
S.No.	State	Male	Female	All	% Share of Child Labour
1	A.P.	108923	125739	234662	4.71
2	Assam	156488	32666	189154	3.80
3	Bihar	235309	41213	276522	5.55
4	Chhattisgarh	4305	7321	11626	0.23
5	Delhi	18576	0	18576	0.37
6	Gujarat	166432	224255	390687	7.84
7	Haryana	50737	21459	72196	1.45
8	H.P.	4456	2942	7398	0.15
9	J&K	12413	16872	29285	0.59
10	Jharkhand	67807	14661	82468	1.65

11	Karnataka	110589	115908	226497	4.54
12	Kerala	1182	1583	2765	0.06
13	M.P.	149142	41875	191017	3.83
14	Maharashtra	120600	140073	260673	5.23
15	Orissa	90912	43651	134563	2.70
16	Punjab	32466	16370	48836	0.98
17	Rajasthan	136239	269697	405936	8.14
18	Tamil Nadu	3471	13880	17351	0.35
19	U.P.	18029	9342	27371	0.55
20	Uttarakhand	1160114	615219	1775333	35.62
21	West Bengal	389211	162373	551584	11.07
22	All India	3057998	1925873	4983871	100

Source: Derived from Unit Level Records of NSS, 2009-10

Interpretation:

The above table shows the number of child labour (gender wise) in various states of India. It has been found that Uttarakhand holds a large number of child labour i.e., 35.62 % as compared to other states. This table also displays that Himachal Pradesh holds a very small quantity of this i.e., 0.15 %.



Causes of Child Labour:

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The main causes of employment of child labour in India as identified are.

Poverty

Poverty is often stated as the single most important factor responsible for child labour. It works in two ways: first, a need for augmenting meagre family income often compels families to put their children to work. Second poverty also implies a lack of ability on the part of households to allocate necessary resource of education.

Illiteracy and lack of Education.

Illiteracy is a situation when a person is not able to read and/or write. This is when the person is not in a position to get even primary education. Lack of education is another aspect which is a result of illiteracy and lack of information. An uneducated person is one who is generally unaware of things which an average person is required to know. Such people are normally unaware of their human rights and the rights of their children too. The children of such people normally become child laborers around their homes.

Willingness of people to employ child labour for profit

Various sole proprietors and other people are very much willing to hire children as labour. It benefits them in various ways like labour at low cost, undue influence on them, making them work according to their will etc. Employers prefer children as they constitute cheap labour and they are not able to organize themselves against exploitation.

Lack of enforcement of legislation

Various policies made by the legislation are there on paper but when it comes to ground situation the implementation of such policies are rarely observed that makes prevention of child labour challenging.

Family Size

Even though there is considerable change in the attitude of the families norms, there has not been any majority change. The needs of family are dependent on the size of the family. When the needs goes up there is bound to be an increase in the expenditure. This leads to the burden of earning more which has to be borne by all the family members irrespective of age. Then this is when children get engaged in work.

Major Forms of Child Labour:

The child labour exists in the following forms.

- Domestic works like cleaning, cooking, and other chores to which Children are subjected to in almost all types and societies.
- Children engaged in subsistence activities which are non-domestic but non-monetary like engagement in farms, collection of fuel, water etc., in agrarian economies.
- Bonded labour is the most exploitative form of child labour.
- Wage employment is another type of child Labour where children are engaged in employment either as part of a family group or individually in agricultural worksites, domestic services, manufacturing and services activities.
- Child labour is also involved in marginal work, like work of a short term or irregular nature like selling newspapers, shoe shining, looking after cars, garbage collection

Consequences of Child Labour

- General child injuries and abuses like cuts, burns and lacerations, fractures, tiredness and dizziness, excessive fears and nightmares
- Sexual abuse, particularly sexual exploitation of girls by adults, rape, prostitution, early and unwanted pregnancy, abortion, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS, drugs and alcoholism
- Physical abuse that involve corporal punishment, emotional maltreatment such as blaming, belittling, verbal attacks, rejection, humiliation and bad remarks
- Emotional neglect such as deprivation of family love and affection, resulting in loneliness and hopelessness
- Physical neglect like lack of adequate provision of food, clothing, shelter and medical treatment
- Lack of schooling results in missing educational qualifications and higher skills, thus perpetuating their life in poverty
- Competition of children with adult workers leads to depressing wages and salaries
- Apart from the above, lack of opportunity for higher education for older children deprives the nation of developing higher skills and technological capabilities that are required for economic development/transformation to attain higher income and better standards of living.

Suggestions

➤ **Educating**

Prioritize primary education it is no coincidence that the countries where child labour is worst are those that spend least on primary education. Primary education should be free, compulsory, well-resourced, relevant and nearby. It is much easier to monitor school attendance than to inspect factories and workshops. Sponsoring a child doesn't solve this problem - it might make us feel good, but it only helps educate one child, isolating them from others in their community.

➤ **Awareness**

The most important and effective way of eradicating the roots of child labour is awareness about child labour. People around the nation especially rural areas must be made aware about child labour, what are its adverse effects, how it can be treated out. There are many such cases where even people don't know what child labour is, how can we expect implementation of various government policies through the hands of such people.

➤ **Earning during learning**

Understand that the root cause of child labor is lack of earning during learning. This leads to drop outs, unemployment and easy availability of cheap and vulnerable labour. In order to remove this, Government should not only make provisions for such sector of children but also see if these orders are strictly followed or not.

➤ **Eradicating corruption**

Appreciate the fact that lack of earning in mainstream education has overwhelmed the education systems and other fields, with corruption especially in our countries. Corruption is the root cause of every evil, it must be eradicated to make all efforts accountable.

➤ **Implementation of government policies**

Planning does not work unless and until it is properly implemented. All the policies made by government for the betterment of child welfare or prevention of child labour as discussed above must be implemented at the ground level. Mere formation of comprehensive policies is of no worth unless they are employed accordingly.

➤ **Employer-Employee Education**

Education of both the employers and the employees is the only remedy to eradicate child labor completely. Unless employers realize and recognize that employing children is unethical and goes against their fundamental rights they will not be deterred from employing

children. Similarly unless the parents of poor children are not made aware of the fundamental rights of their children they will not be deterred from sending their children to work. Let us hope and pray that good sense will prevail and both employers and parents of children will realize their mistakes and rectify them.

➤ **Strong Trade Unions**

Trade unions also play a crucial role in preventing and eliminating child labour. Adult workers who have the right to organize, negotiate and bargain for a living wage do not have to send their children to work. Where strong unions exist, child labour is diminished. Unions not only strongly oppose child labour on the grounds of social justice, they also resist the hiring of children at wages that undermine their own.

Conclusion

Child labour is a serious problem and a challenge for many developing countries. Many countries have enacted various laws and have taken serious initiatives to eradicate child labour, but still the problem is very widespread throughout the world. Child is the future of nation and nation is of every citizen. As various steps has been taken by the government to eradicate child labour there is still a number of cases where the effect of such steps can't even be seen. The problem of child labour appears in severe form and various factors are involved. The reasons for the incidence of child labour in India countries are complex and deeply rooted into the society. Poverty seems to be the main cause. In general poor children contribute to household income. Child labour can be found in 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. Study found children under the age of fourteen years are still engaged in economic activity in India. These children tend to work more consequently they are not regularly in school. However, besides poverty there are other causes such lack of schools, lack of regulations and enforcement, corruption, lack of awareness and rapid population growth.

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