

A SYTEMATIC REVIEW OF ECONOMIC GROWTH AND PERSISTENCE OF CHILD LABOUR IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Children of the world are innocent, vulnerable and dependent. They are all curious, active and full of hope. Their life should be full of joy and peace, playing, learning and growing. Their future should be shaped in harmony and co-operation. Their childhood should mature, as they broaden their perspectives and gain new experience. Abandoning the children, excluding good foundation of life for them, is a crime against humanity. The children cannot wait till tomorrow; they grow every day; along with them grows their sense of awareness about the surroundings. Tomorrow is no answer; the gal of their present care, protection and Rehabilitation is the need of the hour. We have already dealt with the Rights assured to them by the Constitution, the Directive Principles and the Convention on the Right of the Child. Child labor cannot be totally eradicated by legislation alone, unless supplemented by socioeconomic and educational upliftment of the underprivileged section of the society. Child labour impedes children from gaining the skills and education they need to have opportunities of decent work as an adult. Inequality, lack of educational opportunities, slow demographic transition, traditions and cultural expectations all contribute to the persistence of child labour in India. Age, sex, ethnicity, caste and deprivation affect the type and intensity of work that children perform. Agriculture and informal sector employment continue to be sectors where children end up working.

Key Words: Children, Harmony, Child Labor, Rehabilitation, Constitution, Society.

INTRODUCTION

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. Children are the greatest gift to humanity and Childhood is an important and impressionable stage of human development as it holds the potential to the future development of any society. Children who are brought up in an environment, which is conducive to their intellectual, physical and social health, grow up to be responsible and productive members of society. Every nation links its future with the present status of its children. There are many inter-linked factors contributing to the prevalence of child labour. Child labour is both a cause and consequence of poverty. Household poverty forces children into the labour market to earn money. Some perform child labour to supplement family income while many also are in it for survival. They miss out on an opportunity to gain an education, further perpetuating household poverty across generations, slowing the economic growth and social development.

The Constitution of India guarantees fundamental rights and the full freedom to enjoy childhood. In spite of that millions of children are being put to arduous work for short and narrow gains. By 1989, the standards concerning children were brought together in a single legal instrument agreed to by the international community. No doubt, it is a family where the child learns society’s values and norms and gets socialized. Since every child is his mother’s hope and father’s aspiration, all parents want to provide maximum facility to their children for their proper growth and development. The child learns behaviour from his immediate environment. The process of his learning and education thus starts from the family and continues in different situations. In the next stage, the child comes into contact with people in the neighbourhood where he observes different life patterns and conditions of different people. He also gets numerous opportunities to interact with people and observes various objects. The personality of the child begins to reflect the spirit, level of social consciousness and the behavior pattern prevailing in his immediate society, a non-formal centre of learning.

Child labour is a global phenomenon and a harsh socio-economic reality. The only difference is that in some societies it has become more vexed and wide-spread and Indian society is one among them. Historically, it is found that practice of child labour is very old in India. It has been existing since the time immemorial in one form or the other. Traditionally, parents and other members of the family took help of child in their routine and family occupations. His employment was accepted for economic reasons. It also provided an opportunity for learning a trade, which would be ultimately his source of living. The increased income helps the parents to provide proper meals to the child and meet his other needs. This practice took strong roots, because in those days schools and training institutions were not available. The family was the only institution where the child

could learn to work. Therefore children worked with their parents, family members in their villages or in the relative's houses to learn the skills of the trade which they would pursue in their life.^[1]

Industrial child practice first appeared with the development of domestic system. In this type of production entrepreneur bought raw material to be put to the homes of workmen to be spun, sewn or handled in some other manner. This permitted a division of labour and degree of specialization among various families, and it was children who were used extensively at whatever task they could perform. Child labour was an accepted part of the economic and social behavior till the 18th century. Children used to work along with their parents doing both domestic and non-domestic work in the agrarian as well as in the cottage industrial sectors. There were no social taboos to their working along with their parents. It was accepted that the child would learn skills from his parents and thus get prepared for entry into the adult world. The history of India shows that the work by children is a part of socialization process and a means of transmitting skills from parents to child overwhelming majority work with their parents.

The industrial revolution brought about fundamental changes in the mode of production. With mechanization, agriculture itself became productive and capital intensive and those with smaller and not so economically viable holding were forced to give up their lands and join the rank of landless labourers. Many of these marginalized groups worked for the richer peasantry who could afford the capital required for intensive cultivation. But the agrarian sector was not able to absorb the mass of the unemployed proletariat, who then flocked to the cities in search of jobs. With the advent of industrialization, particularly after 2nd world war, the world has been actively engaged in amelioration of lot of children. Because of this reason the regulation of child had become an important social problem.

The prevalence of child labour has been more or less in all periods of time though varied in its nature and dimension depending on the existing socio-economic structure of society^[2]. The problem of child labor could be seen in the form of child slavery who were owned by the then rich class of people of doing low and ignorable work. The harsh reality of ancient Indian says that the children of slaves were born as slaves, lived as slaves and died as slaves unless the master was placed to monument them^[3]. The work of Kautilya and Sir Henry Maine similarly disclosed that the child slaves could be purchased and sold like commodities^[4]. The parents used to sell the services of their children employed in agriculture and domestic services. Child labour in medieval India too remained in existence in large scale. It is revealed that the children were exploited by the rich land owners and used them to help them in their economic activity. There were frequent evidence in 'Ain-i-Akbari' to the effect that children were always made to work for the well-being of rich class of the society^[5]. Slavery of the children was the order of the day.

The decree of Akbar in 1554 AB clearly ordained "A father or mother might if forced by hunger and extreme misery sell their child and afterward when they have means to pay, might buy back from servitude"^[6]. Emperor Akbar even did not discourage this practice. He simply suggested hypothecation of children. It was at the time of Jahangir, that an order was issued, that the child labour should be completely done away with. However, despite these ordain the position of child labour did not improve satisfactory. The supply of child labour was more and labour could be taken by force and paid whatever the master liked to pay. To epitomize the child labour in medieval Indian remained on a wider scale and the rulers did not endeavour to discourage it, the reason being that the rulers enriched themselves at their cost by traffic in child slave^[7].

However, the problem of child labour underwent a dynamic change in British era. The new economic forced unleash by capitalism destroyed the family based economy a large number of labourers in medieval Indian remained in existence were displaced due to mechanization of agriculture. The farmers were alienated from their home base work place. They became wage earning labourers^[8]. The extreme poverty made possible a situation in which a child had to be introduced in the labour market^[9]. Moreover, the uneven development of industrialization was that family based economy was destroyed and a large number of people were converted into wage earning labourers. As a result children were forced to earn wages not only for themselves, but also for their families. All this resulted ultimately to restrict their ability to grow and develop into a mentally and physically sound adult. Further the lack of regulation to control the behavior of the employers of the children gave a free hand to them to make free bargaining with child labour. With the result, the poor child workers were exploited by the employers for their benefit. To sum up all this ultimately resulted into a sheer kind of exploitation of the child labour and there was no end to this rule of exploitation.

Child labour welfare did not receive much attention in British era. There was not integrated approach about the well-being of child labour. They were touched incidentally in both civil and criminal legislation. There were no specific statutory measures for the care, protection and welfare of the child labour, and the consequences were that the employer exploited them on a wider scale to accomplish their selfish ends. There were however, a few instances where British Government enacted little protective legislation for child labour in India. The first attempt to regulate the employment of children and their working hours was made through Factories Act, 1881^[10]. It was the result of children and their working conditions which were very bad. Some enlightened employers who were really devoted to the cause of child labour welfare, besides the competitive

pressure generated by the foreign market, also paved path to bring Factory Act, 1891 in existence^[11]. As a consequence a factory commission was setup in 1890, which led to the passage of the children factories amendment Act 1891. It also failed to achieve its objectives and in turn prompted re-enactment of the Factories Act, 1911, which inter-alia provided prohibitory regulation for employment of the child labour in any factory who have not completed 14 years of age^[12]. In 1901, Mines Act was passed which prohibited the employment of the children under 12 years of age. The chief inspector of mines was empowered to prohibit the employment of children less than 12 years of age and also their employment to certain places. If he was satisfied that the employment's conditions were dangerous to children's health and safety he would not allow the child labour there. The existing act was considered inadequate; hence a new Mines Act was enacted in 1923. This act fixed working hours for above ground at 60 hours in a week and for underground work at 54 hours a week. The British Government paid a little more attention towards the eradication of child labour. It was with the objectives in mind that the British Government in India appointed the Royal Commission on labour in 1928. After very thorough study the commission in its report published in 1931, made general recommendation for amendment of labour legislation with respect to the plantation legislation in particular. The commission recommended the enactment of new laws dealing with recruitment emigration and proper administration of law. To give effect to these recommendations, the Tea District Emigration Act was passed in 1923. The only provision relation to children in the Act, was that no child below 16 years of age shall be employed and immigrated to the district unless accompanied by his parents or other relatives, on whom he is dependent^[13].

Further in 1933 one more step was taken to prevent the exploitation of children when children pledging of labour Act 1933, was enacted by the Government of India, on the recommendation of the Royal Commission of Labour. The main aim of this act was to eradicate the evil arising from the pledging of the labour of young children by their parents, to employer in lieu of loans and advances^[14]. It was in the similar spirit, that Indian Mines Act, 1923 was amended in 1935, regulating the working conditions and hours of the child workers in mines. The Amendment Act strictly prohibited the employment of adolescent i.e. the young between 15-17 years underground work except on the production of certificate of physical fitness issued by recognised medical authority. Further the British Government adverted its special attention towards the child labour welfare in 1938 and enacted the employment of Children Act, 1938 with the objective to weed out the evil of employment of children in workshop, which was not covered by the Factory Act. The said act was again amended in 1939, and prohibited the children under 12 years from working in workshop connected with beedi making, carpet weaving, manufacturing of cement, cloth printing, dying and weaving, manufacturing of matches, explosive and fire work, mica cutting and splitting^[15].

British Government enacted many child welfare legislations, but all these enactment failed badly to achieve the goal of the elimination of the evil of child labour. It is in this context that the labour Investigating Committee, in its report in 1946, highlighted that the main cause of the failure to arrest this social evil has been that the legislature could not imagine the nature and the depth of the child labour and hence every provision fell short to deal with the situation. The poor children were still working various hazardous occupations, which were injurious to their health, life and growth.

In 1948, the Factories Act^[16] was passed in which provisions were made to protect the child. After the independence the Government of India passed many acts to protect the child from exploitation. The merchant shipping act 1958, according to which employment of a child below the age of 15 years was banned^[17]. The Plantation Labour Act 1952 was passed according to which, children below age of 12 years are not permitted to work in plantation^[18]. The Apprenticeship Act 1961, was passed to provide for the regulation and control of training of apprentices in trade and matters connected there with^[19]. Recently the Child Prohibition and Regulation Act, 1986 was passed to prohibit the employment of child labour. The social evil of child labour is not confined to developing/under-developed countries, but, even in most advanced countries like England, U.S. A, Belgium, Germany, France etc. This evil was no less prevalent in these industrialised countries. In the early stages of industrial revolution, towards the close of the 18th century, pauper children from London and other towns were put to work in the cotton factories established in Lancashire and Yorkshire. The atrocities to which these children housed in horrible overcrowded and unsanitary dormitories, were subjected, constitute one of the darkest chapter in the history of child labour^[20].

Here in India, Factories were started about the middle of 19th century, and many children were employed in early cotton, jute mills and coal mines. Since then the employment of children continues, inspite of a series of legal and constitutional enactments, while in England and other developed countries, with the enactment of labour laws, the employment of children had considerably declined. It is surprising the way child labour was brought to be exploited at a time when countries in the west had discovered its evils and were striving to combat it. Labour Investigation Committee rightly marked. The black spot of labour conditions in India is the illegal employment of children in certain industries and the legislature measure have met with little success in making the conditions of work of children better^[21].

As per Census 2011, the total child population in India in the age group (5-14) years is 259.6 million. Of these, 10.1 million (3.9% of total child population) are working, either as ‘main worker’ or as ‘marginal worker’. In addition, more than 42.7 million children in India are out of school. However, the good news is that the incidence of child labour has decreased in India by 2.6 million between 2001 and 2011. However, the decline was more visible in rural areas, while the number of child workers has increased in urban areas, indicating the growing demand for child workers in menial jobs. Child labour has different ramifications in both rural and urban India (Table 1).

Table 1: Ramification of Child Labour (Source-Census 2001 and 2011)

Year	Percentage of working children (5-14)			Total number of working children (5-14) (in millions)		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
2001	5.9	2.1	5.0	11.4	1.3	12.7
2011	4.3	2.9	3.9	8.1	2.0	10.1

Together, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, and Madhya Pradesh constitute nearly 55% of total working children in India (Table 2).

Table 2: States with High Incidences of Child Labour (Source-Census 2011).

States	Percentage	Number (In million)
Uttar Pradesh	21.5	2.18
Bihar	10.7	1.09
Rajasthan	8.4	0.85
Maharashtra	7.2	0.73
Madhya Pradesh	6.9	0.70

CHILD LABOUR AND HEALTH

For decades, child labor has been an important global issue associated with inadequate educational opportunities, poverty and gender inequality^[22]. Not all types of work carried out by children are considered child labor. Engagement of children or adolescents in work with no influence on their health and schooling is usually regarded positive. The International Labor Organization (ILO) describes child labor as ‘work that deprives children of their childhood, potential and dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development’^[23]. This definition includes types of work that are mentally, physically, socially or morally harmful to children; or disrupts schooling.

Research into the impacts of child labor suggests several associations between child labor and adverse health outcomes. Parker^[22] reported that child labor is associated with certain exposures like silica in industries, and HIV infection in prostitution. Additionally, as child labor is associated with maternal illiteracy and poverty, children who work are more susceptible to malnutrition,^[22] which predisposes them to various diseases. Many studies examined physical health effects of child labor, including nutritional status, physical growth, work-related illnesses/symptoms, musculoskeletal pain, HIV infection, systematic symptoms, infectious diseases, tuberculosis and eyestrain. Eight studies measured physical health effects through clinical examination or blood samples, in addition to self-reported questionnaires. All studies in which a comparison group was used reported higher prevalence of physical diseases in the working children group. Two studies were concerned with physical growth and development. A study conducted in Pakistan,^[24] reported that child labor is associated with wasting, stunting and chronic malnutrition. A similar study conducted in India compared physical growth and genital development between working and non-working children and reported that child labor is associated with lower BMI, shorter stature and delayed genital development in working boys, while no significant differences were found among females.^[25]

The majority of studies concluded that child labor is associated with higher prevalence of mental and behavioral disorders, as shown in the results. School attendance, family income and status, daily working hours and likelihood of abuse, in its different forms, were found to be associated with the mental health outcomes in working children. These findings are consistent with previous studies and research frameworks.^[26] Child labor subjects children to abuse, whether verbally, physically or sexually which ultimately results in psychological disturbances and behavioral disorders. Moreover, peers and colleagues at work can affect the behavior of children, for example, smoking or drugs. The effects of child labor on psychological health can be long lasting and devastating to the future of children involved.

Concerning work-related illnesses and injuries, a study conducted in Bangladesh reported that there is a statistically significant positive association between child labor and the probability to report any injury or illness, tiredness/exhaustion, body injury and other health problems. Number of hours worked and the probability of reporting injury and illness were positively correlated. Younger children were more likely to

suffer from backaches and other health problems (infection, burns and lung diseases), while probability of reporting tiredness/exhaustion was greater in the oldest age group. Furthermore, the frequency of reporting any injury or illness increases with the number of hours worked, with significant variation across employment sectors^[27].

A study in Iran reported that industrial workrooms were the most common place for injury (58.2%). Falling from heights or in horizontal surface was the most common mechanism of injury (44%). None of the patients was using a preventive device at the time of injury. Cuts (49.6%) were the most commonly reported injuries^[28].

Other studies that investigated the prevalence of general symptoms in working children in Pakistan, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Indonesia reported that child labor is negatively associated with health^[29]. Watery eyes, chronic cough and diarrhea were common findings, in addition to history of a major injury (permanent loss of an organ, hearing loss, bone fractures, permanent disability)^[30]. One study, conducted in India reported that working children suffered from anemia, gastrointestinal tract infections, vitamin deficiencies, respiratory tract infections, skin diseases and high prevalence of malnutrition^[31]. Another study of poor quality in India reported that child labor was associated with higher incidence of infectious diseases compared to non-working children^[32].

CONCLUSION

Child labour impedes children from gaining the skills and education they need to have opportunities of decent work as an adult. Inequality, lack of educational opportunities, slow demographic transition, traditions and cultural expectations all contribute to the persistence of child labour in India. Age, sex, ethnicity, caste and deprivation affect the type and intensity of work that children perform. Agriculture and informal sector employment continue to be sectors where children end up working. Child labor is a human rights issue. There is a lot of provision added in the constitution of India for child welfare to overcome child labor and to avoid the situations that comes as a consequence of the child labor. At an International level, different organizations are also working for the same cause. But still there are a lot of efforts needed to create an environment which is free from child abuse.

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