A STUDY ON CHILD LABOUR IN GUJARAT STATE 
(CONSIDERING 2 BLOCKS OF GUJARAT STATE)

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ABSTRACT

The problem of child labour has been prevalent in most economies, especially the developing ones. Children in the poor families are sent to work to supplement the family income and since the poor do not have enough resources to send them to schools, they send them to work instead of keeping them idle. Though India is signatory of various international conventions and agreements, there is growing number of child labour in India. Even though the magnitude of child labour in India is declining but still it exists in the society. Actually, the problem of child labour thrives within the informal economy. In India, most of the working children are found in the unorganized sector. Among various sub sectors in the unorganized sector, the activities in the private domain of the homes go unreported and unregulated. So, our homes have a huge demand for the child labour especially the girl child labour and girls are more vulnerable in this case as compared to the boys in the family as they will be the first to leave the school and join the labour force in case of inadequate income of the family.

Here an attempt has been made to find out the status and problems of working children in Gujarat state. 300 children were interviewed and it was found out that these children work under very hard conditions. They work for long hours without adequate rest intervals. Besides, they are also paid very low amount without any regular increments in the income. Thus, for years these children are forced to work under hard conditions for meager income. Moreover, mostly these children are not aware of existing laws regarding child labour. Since it is being observed that poverty is the major reason behind the children being forced to work, any law to prohibit child labour and the programmes to eradicate child labour must be accompanied with poverty eradication programmes. There must be emphasis on compulsory primary education and the education of the girl children needs to be especially taken care of.

Keywords: Child Labour; Human Capital; Poverty

INTRODUCTION

For many years, child labour has been one of the biggest obstacles to social development. It is a challenge and long-term goal in many countries to abolish all forms of child labour. Especially in developing countries, it is considered as a serious issue these days. Child labour refers to children who miss their childhood and are not able to have the basic amenities which a child should have. Recently the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2013) estimated that there are around 215 million children between the ages five to fourteen who work worldwide. They are often mistreated and forced to work for prolonged hours, in very bad conditions. This can affect their health physically, mentally and emotionally. These children do not have the basic rights like access to school or health care or to create
their unions. Child labour refers to the employment of children in any work that deprives children of their childhood, interferes with their ability to attend regular school, and that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful.

There are many forms of child labour worldwide. Children are engaged in agricultural labour, in mining, in manufacturing, in domestic service, types of construction, scavenging and begging on the streets. Others are trapped in forms of slavery in armed conflicts, forced labour and debt bondage (to pay off debts incurred by parents and grandparents) as well as in commercial sexual exploitation and illicit activities, such as drug trafficking and organized begging and in many other forms of labour. Many of these are “worst forms” of child labour as they are especially harmful, morally reprehensible, and they violate the child’s freedom and human rights. Child labour tends to be concentrated in the informal sector of the economy. For some work, children receive no payment, only food and a place to sleep. Children in informal sector work receive no payment if they are injured or become ill, and can seek no protection if they suffer violence or are maltreated by their employer.

Child labour is also an immense burden for economic and social development. It perpetuates the vicious cycle of poverty and hampers sustainable development of rural communities and individuals. Especially in rural areas, where school drop-out rates can be high and work hazards severe, child labour interferes with accumulation of human capital as it substitutes to schooling and damages children’s minds and bodies. In the longer term, stunted skills lead to low productivity and incomes of rural populations.

According to ILO (2013) the largest numbers of child labourers are working in hazardous work and the total number of child workers is increasing, even though it is forbidden by law. These children are vulnerable to diseases and they struggle with long-term physical and psychological pain. The main cause that induces children to work is poverty. These children work for their survival and their families (Mapaure, 2009). Some studies like Dessy and Pallage (2003) argue not all the work that children do is harmful or brutal. Some work may provide successful learning opportunities, such as babysitting or newspaper delivery jobs, but not if the work exposes them to psychological stress, like human trafficking, prostitution and pornographic activities.

The international organizations have made great efforts to eliminate child labour across the world. Many countries have adopted legislation to prohibit child labour; but in developing countries due to poverty and lack of schooling opportunity, this problem is prevalent. It is not easy task for low income countries to achieve banning child labour. Several studies and international organizations considered that education with the help of implementation of law concerned, and the most important thing is increasing employment program for their parents in addressing child labour, is the key strategy.

**Defining and Contextualizing Child Labour**

**Definition**

Child labour is the term used for the employment of children in an industry or business, especially when illegal or considered exploitative. According to International Labour Organisation, “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.
In its most extreme forms, child labour involves children being enslaved, separated from their families, exposed to serious hazards and illnesses and/or left to fend for themselves on the streets of large cities – often at a very early age. Whether or not particular forms of “work” can be called “child labour” depends on the child’s age, the type and hours of work performed, the conditions under which it is performed and the objectives pursued by individual countries. The answer varies from country to country, as well as among sectors within countries.

UNICEF defines child labour differently. A child, suggests UNICEF, is involved in child labour activities if between 5 to 11 years of age, he or she did at least one hour of economic activity or at least 28 hours of domestic work in a week, and in case of children between 12 to 14 years of age, he or she did at least 14 hours of economic activity or at least 42 hours of economic activity and domestic work per week.

Rural and urban child labour

Child labour has been a complex rural problem, as well with children helping out in the farm with their families. The vast majority of child labour is involved in agriculture. On the other hand agricultural sector is the mainstay of developing countries economy, particularly in India. Generally, throughout the world rural children were more likely to be engaged in economic labour activities compared to urban children, because poverty is more prevalent in rural areas especially among those who depend on agriculture. Poor rural families considers making their children work in farms, may increase their household income.

Urban children usually are involved in domestic work, restaurant, hotel or sales. Their working conditions are very poor, unhealthy and crowded. They work for long hours with very low wage or no wage. Girls are usually the most vulnerable; they are typically trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation in urban centres such as Mumbai, Calcutta and New Delhi (Baker, 2008). They face many problems due to poverty. Poor urban children are at particular risk of many problems such as lack of education, healthcare and social protection (Baker, 2008). Urban children attend more to school than rural children. Urban areas provide better educational access, quality and infrastructure than rural areas. For poor rural children living far off from school, transportation cost often becomes a challenging affair for their families (Hueble, 2008). Moreover, urban and rural areas differ in the terms of how schooling and child labour are related. Education levels are generally very low among children in rural areas

Facts And Figures

1. Rural areas host 75 percent of the world’s poor, with 2.1 billion living on less than USD 2 a day, and 880 million living on less than USD 1 a day. 1 Child labour is mainly a rural issue. Out of 215 million of child labour worldwide, 129 millions are in agriculture alone.
2. About 60 percent of child labourers aged between 5-17 years work in agriculture, in contrast to 7 percent in industry and 26 percent in services.
3. Agriculture is among the three most dangerous sectors to work in at any age, and even more dangerous for children. Data show that around 60 percent of hazardous work of children is in agriculture.
4. Only 1 in 5 child labourers are in paid employment – the large majority are unpaid family workers.
5. Rural children, particularly girls, tend to begin work at a very young age, sometimes when they are 5-7 years old.
6. Without considering household services, on average, boys make up 63 percent and girls 37 percent of child labour in agriculture in the age group 5-17 years.
7. But 92 percent of girl child labour in the age group of 5-14 also perform household chores, as
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compared with 67 percent of boys. (for more details, see Appendix 1)

LITERATURE REVIEW

Christopher (2003) narrated that child labour exists because it is the best response people can find in intolerable circumstances. Poverty and child labor are mutually reinforcing: because their parents are poor, children must work and not attend school, and then grow up poor.

Mondal, Abdul (2006) showed that, The key factors jeopardizing children’s advancement in Bangladesh is the high drop-out rate from school, particularly for marginalized and poverty ridden group in urban slums and rural areas. The causes of child labor is multidimensional and derives from lack of access to various entitlement especially important among which is access to good quality productive employment. This is particularly true for Bangladesh, where moderately high GDP growth rates have been accompanied by low rates growth of employment, relative to the growth of child labor force. The role of education is an effective tool in the reduction of poverty & the prevention of child labor.

Mohammad Ali Khan (2001) observed that the prevalence of child labor is not only in Bangladesh but also become a serious problem throughout the world and especially in many poor countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. The number of child laborers (5 to 14 Years) is 250 million in the world today and 61% of them from Asia. Bangladesh is a contested terrain in the context and it has 6.5 million child laborers who constitute 16.6% of the total labor force of Bangladesh.

Sharmin (2004) observed that children in many occupation are victimized both physically and sexually by the employers. Also, child abuse particularly sexual exploitation of children in certain cases remain hidden where discovery of truth is complicated. This is mostly because in many cases children especially girl children do not disclose sexual abuse due to social norms and values in their society.

Prabhe (2009) concluded that poverty at home and Socio economic compulsion together with the failure of the school education system to retain all children below 14 Years in schools drive millions of families to send their children at a tender age to work as labor to earn the bread for their families or to support their family income. Child labor is interlinked with some socio-economic issues like poverty, Gender discrimination lack of social security, illiteracy, growing unemployment and the deteriorating conditions of workers in the informal economy particularly in the rural areas.

Salahuddin (2001) examines that children are the most precious human capital of any country. Children are the most productive and contributory to the society. The children reed certain preparatory period of time along with care, nurturing and protective from exploitation, In Bangladesh the use of child labor is on the increase and it is gradually being recognized as a multidimensional social problem. The problem of child labor in Bangladesh is mainly the creation of extreme poverty aggravated by the attitude of the tradition bound agro-based society.

Lilian Agbenya, (2009) found that Child labour trafficking in the Lake Volta fishery of Ghana is one of the prominent issues receiving immense attention from various organizations, NGOs, Civil society within and outside Ghana and the government of Ghana. The findings of this study reveal that poverty plays a major role in fueling this problem however, other complex factors such as cultural norms, migration and institutional failures also contributes enormously to the problem. The children who are mostly boys between the ages of six and seventeen years performed tasks, such as fishing, mending of nets, diving and household chores. These children are made to work under extreme harsh conditions, waking up very early in the mornings at 3am or 4am and going to bed late in the evenings (11pm, 12am) mostly throughout the week without going to school and having little to eat and sometimes being flogged by their masters at the little offense. It also indicates that parents, family members, the fishers and agents are involved in this human trade. In addition the study also revealed that some effort is being made by government, NGOs, Civil Organizations and other institutions to combat this problem.
RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

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. This paper critically examined the issue of child labour in Ahmedabad district of Gujarat State India.

The main objectives of this research paper are:

1. To know the situational differences of child labour in rural and urban areas of Ahmedabad district and
2. To assess the impact of child labour prohibition act in these places.

METHODOLOGY

This study has relied on both primary and secondary data. The primary data underpinning this research consisted of interviews with children aged between 7 to 14. The data was collected using different data collection strategies and was analyzed properly. In order to answer research question, secondary data is collected through literature material researched from academic books, articles, and news and research reports on child labour, poverty education and public health of child labour. This study is based on a comparative study between rural and urban area of Ahmedabad District, Gujarat, India. (Total 300 samples are selected - wherein 150 from rural and 150 from Ahmedabad City Area) for comparison of their socio economic status. Since child labour is an extremely complex phenomenon, this study is limited to examining the nature and extent of child labour aged between seven to fourteen years.

MAJOR FINDINGS

Majority child labours are living with their parents, so there are very few orphan and living separately (from their parents) children seen in the study. These child labours have sisters and brothers, but not all of them are working, many of them i.e., 66% are studying and only 33% of their sisters and brothers are doing labour work like them. 54% child labours are doing one or other kind of labour work at their own wish, to support their family income and their parents, whereas 46% are those child labours who do not willingly join in laborious work but they are under pressure of their family members or some relatives and join hands with them to overcome the income crisis.

30% child labours were made understand to be free from labour work, but their economic condition did not support their decision. 42% wish to go to school for education and rest are not willing to have any kind of education since they are not interested in it. Only 17% do know about the Right to Education Act. Only 2% of the sample child labour were caught by the government (concerned staff) officials and they were made free by realising them not to do the labour work again. Also their parents and employers were called and proceeded further. But as stated earlier they again joined the work.

These children are of different age between 7 to 14. Out of them 14 years aged children were in majority followed by 13 years, 10 years and 12 years. Small kids of 5 to 9 years age were seen very few (5%) in this study. The study level of these children - totally illiterate 9%, from 1st to 5th standard 49% and from 6th to 9th standard 42%. In rural areas, children were in higher numbers obtained education upto 5th standard, since their village schools facilities are limited, and their parents do not want them to go for further study to another bigger village/ block level school and force them to join the agriculture or animal husbandry work. Mostly these children belong to baxipanch castes.

According to 88% child labour, they are not able to cope up with their economic crisis situation with their earned income. Compare to city area, there is considerable difference in monthly household expenditure pattern, and therefore in this study, city area child labour facing the problem very acutely. Around 67% of respondents give their income to their parents, Also many of them were seen having bad habits of gutka, tobacco chewing, spending their monthly income on mobile.
The differentiation in work is also seen in both the selected areas; i.e., in city area they are engaged in restaurants, tea stalls, fast food stalls, incense making, sewing work, cracker factory and in scrap market etc. Whereas in rural area their presence were noticed in farm fields, grazing fields and in retail laborious work. Their engagement in these work were recorded from 4 hours to 12 hours. Although the proportion of child labour engaged for more than 8 hours were only 4%. 26% were working for 8 hours, 13% for 7 hours, 21% for 6 hours and 27% for 4 to 5 hours. In city and rural areas they were engaged mostly for 5 to 8 hours job and in some of the backward rural areas it was limited upto 5 hours.

Their monthly income varies much from 500 to 3000 Rs. according to the types of their work and areas where they are working. Very few 28% children get loading and boarding facility from their employers. 23% facing very rude behaviour of their employers. Hardly few of them are getting any financial assistants in case of their need from their employers.

SUGGESTIONS

Eliminating child labour in a rural community requires addressing all forms of child labour jointly to avoid that as a result of interventions children shift sectors or locations while continuing to work. ILO’s Integrated Area-Based (IAB) approach promotes an integrated programme of interventions, based on the involvement and cooperation of local communities, government, employers’ and workers’ organizations. Stakeholders are supported in identifying the root causes of child labour, and promoting alternatives. In Mongolia, an ILO-IPEC project targeted child labour in small-scale informal mining through: 1. Policy coordination, implementation and capacity building 2. Public awareness and attitude 3. Knowledge/data base and research 4. Child labour monitoring 5. Direct actions to withdraw children from the worst forms of child labour 6. Law enforcement 7. Social partnership and collaboration. The project strategy ensures long-term and effective solutions to child labour through building commitment, ownership and partnership at the local level. As a result, each target area has developed its own action plan, adopted by the local Parliament, to eliminate the child labour as a priority.

CONCLUSION

Child labour in India is found in almost every sector of the informal economy. Children are found working in workshops and small factories, in dhabas and restaurants, on the streets as well as domestic servants. But perhaps the largest sector in which children are found working is agriculture. Child labour is the burning issue to protect children rights at present. They are always verbally, physically, mentally abused by other who controls them. They are forced to work to these vulnerable and hazardous jobs only for their as well their family’s survival. They start working from dawn and finish their work at night. No recreational facilities are available for them. They have no time and facilities for education. Their working environment is severely unhealthy. They do not get equitable payment.

Children are important assets and the future of a nation. The state as well as the society should offer them ample opportunities for their proper education and physical, mental, social and moral growth and development. As childhood is the formative part of human life, children, should not therefore, be exposed to such work as is detrimental to their physical or mental growth unfortunately, a large number of children of the world today are not cared as they required. They are compelled to sell their labor for their survival. They are also victims of negligence, cruelty and exploitation.

This study has examined the issue of child labor in the informal sector in Dholka and Ahmedabad city of Ahmedabad district. Here, adult workers are very expensive to the entrepreneurs in this sector. Due to this fact, employers target young children for employment to harvest high profit by paying very less amount to the children. That is why many studies including this one characterize the informal sector as the main harbor of child laborers.

In 2006 the International Labour Organization set a visionary target – to bring to an end all the worst forms of child labour by 2016. With the target date drawing closer, the global campaign to end child
labour is at a critical juncture. There are clear signs of progress but also disconcerting gaps in the
global response. As things are today, the pace of progress is not fast enough to achieve the 2016 target.
Greater national ownership and ambition supported by employers’ and workers’ organizations is
urgently needed if we are to get on track for 2016. A re-energized worldwide movement is necessary
to create a political climate for enhanced national efforts. A stronger involvement of the social partners
in the development of National Action Plans, corporate social responsibility initiatives, and in sectoral,
workplace and community activities could further enhance capacity, and strengthen and re-energize
the worldwide movement, as could better targeted and more ambitious advocacy efforts.

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APPENDIX

State-wise Distribution of Working Children according to 1971, 1981, 1991 and 2001 Census in the age group 5-14 years

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Note: *1971 Census figures of Assam includes figures of Meghalaya.
**Census could not be conducted.
***Census figures 1971 in respect of Mizoram included under Assam.
**** Includes marginal workers also.