

Urban Child Labour: A Sociological Perspective

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Abstract: *Child labour is a pervasive problem throughout the world, especially in developing countries. Africa and Asia together account for over 90 per cent of total child employment. Children work for a variety of reasons, the most important being poverty and the induced pressure upon them to escape from this plight. Working children are the objects of extreme exploitation in terms of toiling for long hours for minimal pay. Their work conditions are especially severe, often not providing the stimulation for proper physical and mental development. However, there are problems with the intuitive solution of immediately abolishing child labour to prevent such abuse. Any plan of abolishment depends on schooling. The state could help by making it worthwhile for a child to attend school, whether by providing students with nutritional supplements or increasing the quality and usefulness of obtaining an education. There must be an economic change in the condition of a struggling family to free a child from the responsibility of working. To support these statements a study has been undertaken. The present investigation focuses on the urban child labour with a sociological perspective covering their profile, their socio demographic characteristics in select categories in Navi Mumbai, the nature, causes and working conditions of their employment and the extent of child abuse in work settings.*

Keywords: *Abolishment, Abuse, Child labour, Exploitation, Poverty*

I. Introduction

Child labour is a pervasive problem throughout the world, especially in developing countries. Africa and Asia together account for over 90 per cent of total child employment.

Children work for a variety of reasons, the most important being poverty and the induced pressure upon them to escape from this plight. Though children are not well paid, they still serve as major contributors to family income in developing countries. Schooling problems also contribute to child labour, whether it be the inaccessibility of schools or the lack of quality education makes parents to enter their children in more profitable pursuits.

Traditional factors such as rigid cultural and social roles in certain countries further limit educational attainment and increase child labour.

Working children are the objects of extreme exploitation in terms of toiling for long hours for minimal pay. Their work conditions are especially severe, often not providing the stimulation for proper physical and mental development. Many of these children endure lives of pure deprivation. However, there are problems with the intuitive solution of immediately abolishing child labour to prevent such abuse. Any plan of abolishment depends on schooling. The state could help by making it worthwhile for a child to attend school, whether it be by providing students with nutritional supplements or increasing the quality and usefulness of obtaining an education. There must be an economic change in the condition of a struggling family to free a child from the responsibility of working. Family subsidies can help provide this support.

Though restrictions on child labour exist in most nations, many children do work. This vulnerable state leaves them prone to exploitation. The International Labour Office reports that children work the longest hours and are the worst paid of all labour. They endure work conditions which include health hazards and potential abuse. Employers capitalize on the docility of the children recognizing that these labourers cannot legally form unions to change their conditions. Such manipulation stifles the development of youths. Their working conditions do not provide the stimulation for proper physical and mental development. Finally, these children are deprived of the simple joys of childhood, relegated instead to a life of drudgery. However, there are problems with the obvious solution of abolishing child labour. First, there is no international agreement defining child labour. Countries not only have different minimum age work restrictions, but also have varying regulations based on the type of labour. This makes the limits of child labour very ambiguous. Most would agree that a six year old is too young to work, but whether the same can be said about a twelve year old is debatable. Until there is global

agreement which can isolate cases of child labour, it will be very hard to abolish. There is also the view that work can help a child in terms of socialization, in building self-esteem and for training. The problem is, then, not child labour itself, but the conditions under which it operates. Evaluating these statements a study is undertaken. The present investigation focuses on the urban child labour with a sociological perspective covering their profile, their socio-demographic characteristics, the nature, causes and working conditions of their employment and the extent of child abuse in work settings in select categories in Navi Mumbai.

II. Objectives

1. To ascertain the socio-demographic characteristics of working children in select categories in Navi Mumbai.
2. To examine the nature, causes and working conditions of employment of child labourers.
3. To study the nature and extent of child abuse in work settings.
4. To suggest policies and programmes for the welfare of working children

III. Methodology

3.1 Universe

The study is limited to the select work categories of child labourers within Navi Mumbai limits.

- 1) Motorised two-wheeler service units
- 2) Restaurants and tea stalls
- 3) Domestic service

3.2 Sample

The unorganised work categories of child labourers in these respective divisions were identified. Around 45 child labourers were taken for the final study.

3.3 Instrument

Interview schedule is used.

It covers information relating to the nature of the job, working conditions; problems faced in discharging tasks, wages and welfare measures taken up by the employer.

Questions relating to the various forms of abuse in family and work settings were also posed. These consisted of verbal and physical abuse.

3.4 Methodological issues for data collection

The study on child labour where in several aspects of child's family, work, attitude towards family and work etc. are studied in different perspective.

The present study three broad abusive categories were identified i.e. verbal and physical. In each category different abusive acts were listed in the following manner-

1. Verbal abuse - Use of obscene language, harsh words, scolding, nagging and threats.
2. Physical abuse - Pushing, slapping, causing bruises, physical abuse with an instrument.

IV. Limitations of the study

In spite of all the care taken by the investigator, there may be some of the lapses in conducting the survey. Hence, the conclusions, which are drawn on the basis of the representative sample, are relevant only to the sample under the study and no generalisations can be made about the totality of the child worker population.

V. Profile of child labour

In this section information regarding the age, religion, caste, education and migration of child labourers are discussed. A majority of the working children (66.7%) are in the age group of 12 to 14 years. Most of them are found in this age group as they can handle instruments, and are able to take up manual work. Nearly 33.3% belong to the group of 5 to 11 years, which explains the growing trend of the work participant's rate of child labourers in economic activities. Working children from Hindu religion constitute almost ninety % (89.6). More than half (54.3) of the child labourers belong to the backward classes (B.C) followed by 27.3% of children from S.C child labourers. The population of open category was also not insignificant (15.7) and the remaining belongs to S.T.

Sizeable number of child labourers i.e. 23 % is illiterates. When the child labourers were asked whether they are willing to study if there was opportunity through non formal or adult education schemes without prejudice to the work, there were following responses. 53% expressed disinterest in pursuing education after a day's hard labour. Some children felt that work and education can not go together even though they were willing to study. About 36% of the children migrated along with their parents. However, about 20% of the children migrated alone to the city in search of some jobs for their livelihood. In addition, friends (12%) and relatives (11%) have also helped some children to migrate to the city and guided them to secure work. About 21% of the child labourers were not migrants.

5.1 Work –related aspects of child labourers

Children often take up work because of compulsion by their parents and work mostly to supplement family or to meet their own basic needs. In some cases parents send their children, who are school drop outs to seek employment in order to prevent their remaining idle at home or falling into bad company and becoming vagrants. The high cost of living in the city may in some instances necessitate the child taking up work at much younger age.

Therefore, an investigation made to find out the reasons for child employment. Child labourers were asked to state reasons in order of importance for taking up employment.

The reasons for children taking up employment are in the following order; poverty, supplementing income, lack of education and parental wish etc.. Besides, there were other reasons too. It is out of compulsion that about more than half of the children preferred to take up employment at a tender age. When asked the distance of work place of child labourers 50% of children the distance between home and work place is 2 kilometres. From the data, it is observed that, 23% of children put in 3 years and more work experience.

5.2 Working conditions of child labourers

Working conditions which includes hours of work lunch intervals, payment of wages, working days in a week etc. are either in force or have a set pattern in unorganised sector. The working condition of the child labourers is as follows:

Child labourer work for long hours and they find no time to spend with their siblings, when investigated 76.6% work more than 8 hours a day and in some cases the hours of work is extended to 14 hours.

Regarding payment of wages, it is revealed that more than half of the working children i.e 55% receive their pay once in a month and detailed analysis reveal that the child labourer in the two wheeler service unit gets daily wages and 1/4th of child labourers are paid i.e. domestic labourers as and when their employer wishes and in some cases they don't receive any pay at all.

Working days in a week: children are engaged to work through out the week very rarely at the mercy of the employer they get a holiday. It was stated that 70% of children do not get a holiday in a week. This is more so in the domestic service category where the nature of the work is such that the employers cannot afford to give them a holiday.

There are certain public holidays declared by government, even on these days 70% of children not allowed to take off for the public holidays. Children in the domestic service are not allowed to leave the work on those days besides children work more on these festive days forgoing the pleasure of sharing the festive joys with their family members.

Other miscellaneous issues: 80% Of child labourers take lunch only after 5 hours of work. In some cases even after 7 hours. It was revealed that 56% take their lunch at the workplace itself.

5.3 Difficulties and Prospects of child labourers

Severe stress and strain, unlimited hours of work and hazardous to health and safety are the most recurring problems reported by the child labourers. Other problems include jobs beyond their physical and mental ability, interpersonal conflicts with their employers and very minute percentage stated that they have no problems with their work

The prospects for child labourers are scanty. It is evident that children go to work out of force and they are uncertain about their future when investigated regarding their preferences for better job with better pay was the reply. When asked a better job means a job which can give good opportunities of work and good working conditions. 60% prefer better job and income. Children working in the domestic service sector prefer to switch jobs because the tasks are limited in scope and have no upward mobility.

More detailed information regarding their ambition was gathered from the child labourers. They were asked whether to continue or go for a similar job. Information was extracted regarding their willingness to setup a similar enterprise through self employment or to take up any other job. When asked about their opinion in their future prospects, 37% preferred to continue the same job and the reason being lack of education and self confidence among them. It is also revealed that for a number of children i.e. if 23% the future is bleak and they have no idea as to direction which they are heading.

5.4 Abuse faced by child labourers

1) Verbal Abuse: it is the most elementary form of abuse, use of bad and harsh words, threatening the child with punishment and nagging are examples of verbal abuse. A majority of child labourers i.e. 68% are abused in work setting.

2) Child labourers received harsh words or scolding from their employers, co-workers.

3) Though child workers are paid a pittance for their work, employers nag them in order to extract maximum work.

4) Threat: threats pose great hardships to child labourers. Employers threaten the child labourers with dire consequences, such as termination of their services if they do not attend to work properly. About 44% of the child labourers are threatened by their employers. Slapping and pushing are the most frequently used forms of physical abuse in the work setting.

VI. Conclusion

According to census data of 2011, there are 43, 54,247 child labourers in India and majority of them are in the states of U.P, Maharashtra, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh though no concrete decisions have been taken to safeguard the millions of child labourers who struggle day in and day out this social problem has been a matter of great concern for leaders, planners, social workers and trade unions. Problems such as special vulnerability of children, prevalence of discrimination, lack of protection, loss of education, health and development, participation of children in illegal and dangerous work should be matter of great concern for policy makers. In conclusion child welfare should be one of the prime concerns as children constitute a major section of the population. Child protection laws have to be reformulated and recommended for implementation. A child protected is always at advantage to nation at large. The government must safeguard with its supporting base the legal rights and interest of child labourers so that they can have happy and peaceful life ahead as they are the future of the nation.

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