

Module-13

CHILD LABOUR IN INDIA



Developed by:

Dr. Subrata Chatterjee
Associate Professor of Sociology
Khejuri College
P.O- Baratala, Purba Medinipur
West Bengal, India

CHILD LABOUR IN INDIA

INTRODUCTION

Children are always considered next to the pious versions of the Almighty who always strive to inculcate happiness, joy, innocence and hope. The future of a nation is determined by the way it treats its children and its women, after all, children imply a hope, a hope to strengthen not only the economy of the country, but also to provide the country with skilled human resources who have access to the basic amenities essential for the existence coupled with the tenets of the education in India. It is the moral duty of every citizen for the country to ensure that the childhood of our children is protected and not marred with instances like that of child labour which arise out of poverty and helplessness.

India is sadly the home to the largest number of child labourers in the world. The census found an increase in the number of child labourers from 11.28 million in 1991 to 12.59 million in 2001. M.V. Foundation in Andhra Pradesh found nearly 400,000 children, mostly girls between seven and 14 years of age, toiling for 14-16 hours a day in cottonseed production across the country of which 90% are employed in Andhra Pradesh. 40% of the labour in a precious stone cutting sector is chPoverty and lack of social security are the main causes of child labour. The increasing gap between the rich and the poor, privatization of basic services and the neo-liberal economic policies are causes major sections of the population out of employment and without basic needs. This adversely affects children more than any other group. Entry of multi-national corporations into industry without proper mechanisms to hold them accountable has lead to the use of child labour. Lack of quality universal education has also contributed to children dropping out of school and entering the labour force. A major concern is that the actual number of child labourers goes un-detected. Laws that are meant to protect children from hazardous labour are ineffective and not implemented correctly.

DEFINITION OF CHILD LABOUR

Child labour refers to the use of children as a source of labour while depriving them of their fundamental rights in the process. Such rights include the opportunity to enjoy their childhood, attend school regularly, have peace of mind, and live a dignified life. Child labour can also refer to the practice of exploiting children for financial gain. Some industries employ children in order to cut down on labour costs since their wage demand is low. Work that places children in a situation that is socially, mentally, physically, or morally harmful and dangerous is also defined as child labour because it ignores the well-being of such children. When children are made to

perform work that is legally prohibited to be performed by children of a certain age group, such type of work is also referred to as child labour.

International Labour Organization argues 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 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.

Generally, working children in the five to 14 years age group are classified as child labourers. Underage children are employed in hazardous and non-hazardous industries. In May 2015, the Indian government passed a controversial bill regarding child labour. The Amended 'Child Labour Act' permits children to work in family owned non-hazardous enterprises.

CAUSES OF CHILD LABOUR

Child labour is caused by several factors. Some of them are:

1. Poverty: Children who come from poor families may be forced to work to support their siblings and parents or supplement the household income when expenses are more than the parents' earnings. It is a huge problem especially in developing countries where parents are unable to generate income due to the lack of employment opportunities or education. Children can be found employed in mines or hawking in the streets to earn money that is used to provide basic necessities such as food and clothing for the family. Children may also be employed in factories to generate income for the family instead of attending school. Such a practice is a common phenomenon in poverty-stricken regions with large factories set up by international companies.

2. Low Aspiration: It is important for parents and children to understand that they can work hard and make something great of themselves. Low aspirations by parents and children is a major cause of child labour because in such a situation, being employed in a local factory, or selling grocery in the streets is the normal way of life. To these types of children and parents, success only belongs to a certain region or group of people. They do not aspire to become professionals in the society or great entrepreneurs. It is a mindset that forms the very foundation of child labour.

3. Huge demand for unskilled labourers: The demand for unskilled labourers is another cause of child labour. Children are mostly unskilled and provide a cheap source of labour, making

them an attractive option for many greedy employers. Child labour, by virtue of being cheap, increases the margin of profits for such entrepreneurs whose only objective is profit maximization even if it comes at the expense of ethics and good business practices. These types of employers can also force children to work under unfavorable conditions through manipulation or blatant threats.

4. Illiteracy: A society with many educated people understands the importance of going to school and pursuing dreams. Children have the ability and time to become whatever they aspire to be. Illiteracy, on the other hand, makes it difficult for many people to understand the importance of education. Illiterate people view education as a preserve of the privileged in the society. They will therefore not provide support to children so that they can go to school and build solid foundations for future success. The same view of life is seen among illiterate parents who prioritize children contributing to the upkeep of the family over going to school.

5. Early Marriages: Marrying at an early age is a major contributing factor to overpopulation. Young parents are able to sire a lot of children because they remain fertile for a long time. Having many children with little or no resources to support them leads to child labour. Older children are forced to work in order to help their parents support the family.

6. High cost of education: Quality education is expensive. To many parents who live in abject poverty, priority is given to providing food for the family because education is too expensive to afford especially when there are many children to pay school fees for. Instead of letting children stay at home because there is lack of money to send them to school, parents opt to have them working as unskilled labourers to help support the family. Some parents can also only afford basic education which means that children will be forced to look for work since they cannot pursue their education further.

AREAS OF CHILD LABOUR

The typical nature of child labour in India is more prevalent in rural areas. As we know, three fourth of the national income comes from agricultural sector and more than 75 per cent of the people are depended on agriculture for their subsistence. According to the 1991 Census 85 per cent of children are employed in different sectors of the agricultural and allied activities. Rural economy, which is, characterized by relatively a higher level of poverty, unemployment and illiteracy when compared to urban economy supports 90 per cent of the total number of child laboures in India. A considerable number of children are engaged in their respective traditional occupations. Many children are helping their family members in the field. Some work as part of contracts family labour where as other works in plantation work. Rodgers and Standing (1979) have classified the pattern of child labourer found in rural India as of domestic, non-domestic,

bonded and wage labourers. The domestic work includes maidservants or domestic servants, where female children have to bear the burden. Non-domestic works include grazing of animals, working in the fields etc. Gender based economic significance of male child is further enhanced in the countries where social and cultural taboos restrict women from participating in paid work of family or occupational work (Nazar, 1997). In rural India, girl child workers are readily available for work and it is found very common for school aged children to be involved in agricultural works as part of family labour. Girls are mostly engaged in domestic sectors than boys, because these children come largely from land less, small and marginal landholder families.

Secondary sectors play a predominant role in case of urban child labourers in India. More than one third of the urban workers are children and more than one fourth of them belong to the non-household industries and construction work. Children are found employed in many other sectors like hotel, firework, glass, carpet weaving, automobile etc. In urban areas considerable number of girl children are found to be employed in household works, cottage industries etc. Further children are engaged in many unorganised sectors like shops, pavement selling, dhabas, vendors, and porters, scavenging etc.

CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD LABOUR

Child labour has several negative consequences. Some of them are as follows:

1. Loss of Quality childhood: It is important for human beings to enjoy every stage of their development. A child should play with friends and make memories for a lifetime. Youths should explore life and form strong foundations that would define their adult lives. Child labour, therefore, leads to loss of quality childhood as children will be deprived of the opportunity to enjoy the amazing experiences that come with being young. Children are often encouraged to play because it helps in their growth and development. A child forced to work will miss many of the good things associated with childhood.

2. Health issues: Child labour can also lead to health complications due to undernourishment and poor working conditions. It is highly unlikely that people who employ children also have the moral capacity to ensure that they have good working conditions. Working in places such as mines and badly conditioned factories may result in lifetime health issues for children employed to work in these places. A child assigned physically demanding duties may suffer physical trauma that may scar him or her for life.

3. Mental trauma: It is not a pleasant experience to be kept working as a child while your age-mates are out playing and going to school. Children also lack the ability to shield themselves

from most of the challenges that occur in the workplace. Issues such as bullying, sexual exploitation, and unfavorable working hours may result in mental trauma in these children. They will find it hard to forget the past and may become societal misfits because of bad childhood experiences. Child labour may also result in the lack of emotional growth and thus insensitivity.

4. Illiteracy: Children that are employed do not have the time to go to school. They spend a lot of time in their workstations as the days and years go by. The lack of education and illiteracy makes them individuals with limited opportunities as far as employment is concerned. Education also prepares a person for several challenges in the society and without it, one may turn out to lack the basic skills required to overcome many of life's problems. An individual who has gone to school may be aware of how to approach certain situations in life without resorting to brute force. An illiterate person, on the other hand, considers force to be the only answer to nearly all of the challenges experienced.

MEASURES OF CHILD LABOUR

The measures taken by the Indian government to reduce and eradicate the child labor are explained below:

In 1998, the government of India launched the National Child Labor Project (NCLP).

The government of India launched the main program to remove or eradicate child labor working in dangerous or hazardous occupations and to rehabilitate them by setting up unique schools.

The government has worked to put them in unique schools where they are furnished with education, vocational training, monthly stipends, and nutrition and health checks.

Education for all children is the key that can bring about a fundamental change and aid to end or stop the difficulty permanently.

Reducing Child Labor through Technology

Child labor is an intricate issue especially for developing countries where there is no protection for the rights of the people, leave alone children's rights. But more importantly, the avail of child labor in the industries of textile and sports goods has been a source of serious concern for the country over the past few years. The use of child labor began in 1960 and since then it has been used as a means to expand the manufacturing base. Before the 60's child labor was widespread in family businesses but rarely did children worked outside the home. With the enhancement in the number of new factories and a wish by factory owners to lower labor costs, the explosion of a child labor staked the economy of the country.