

HARMFUL CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD LABOUR

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ABSTRACT

We Indians take pride in the fact that India is rapidly emerging as a leading developing nation. Prosperity is reaching several segments of people and the benefits have reached out to large parts of the country where none existed just a few decades ago. No mean achievement this. But the story is not entirely green. There is a dark underbelly that has and is contributing to this growth. It's the use of child labour.

As a nation we have long accepted this very cruel practice of using children as very cheap, and often, free labour. We have turned a blind eye to children being denied their right to be in school and an opportunity to better their lives. This problem is across both urban and rural areas and we have been by and large living with this black truth.

KEYWORDS:

Child, Labour, Work

INTRODUCTION

The picture that emerges is dark. Children are working in hazardous export oriented industries like fireworks, match works, electroplating, beedi rolling, glass blowing, brassware, lock making, glass blowing, lead mining and stone quarrying amongst several others. These are places that have a severe negative impact on the health of anyone working there. In the case of children, by the time they begin touching their teens, they are already inflicted with several life threatening diseases.

Sitting at home in a city, we have no idea of the terrible conditions that these children are made to work in and for more than ten to twelve hours a day. In many cases, these children are offered by the parents in lieu of a loan that they may have taken from the factory owner. So it's a barter deal; loan in cash that is repaid in kind through the child. Not all are barter deals. Some work for money where the pay is as little as ten rupees per day!

There are other situations where children are made to work. These are typically home run cottage industries like handloom and carpet weaving. This author has personally visited carpet weaving centers in Bhadohi and Mirzapur, in eastern U.P. and has seen children working alongside their parents, in virtually all homes lying in interior rural areas. The

typical explanation given by the parents are that they see the child as an additional resource for income generation.

This is a necessity given the abject poverty prevailing in rural areas and in the absence of any social security system. People look at raising children as additional manpower, which further exacerbates the population problem that India is reeling under. It's a Catch-22 situation! A poor villager can't afford to raise children but continues to produce them in the hope that they will add to the income while also providing an income security in his old age. This is one of the primary reasons one sees large families in rural areas where deep poverty prevails.

This gets murkier. Remember the recent case in Vasant Kunj, a South Delhi middle-to-upper-middle class colony, where a maid from Jharkhand was locked up at home, and was beaten and tortured for over several months. She was denied food and when she couldn't take it anymore, she barely managed to scream for help. When the police along with representatives of a NGO finally managed to get an entry, they were horrified to find a starving sick girl with scars on her body that included burn marks. She was filthy, having skin infections, and was in traumatized state. All this in the home of a lady working in a senior position in a well-paid MNC. And we think that child labour and abuse

happens only in the villages? This is right here in the heart of India's capital and in the home of a so called highly educated and highly paid executive.

So what makes a person living in an urban area do this, especially in an age of high awareness of the laws, active roles played by NGOs, and a hyper active media? Despite this, we still have people employing children as domestic labour and abusing them! What has made us so cold and cruel? Why have we allowed our inner conscience to die? What legacy of morality and ethics do we leave for our children when a child's first education is supposed to start from home? The very home where another child is denied his basic fundamental right to education and a life of dignity.

HARMFUL CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD LABOUR

A nation stands on the legs of its society and the citizens that live within it. If we have to build a nation where the next generation can live with dignity and fairness, where there is equal opportunity to prosper for all, then we have to ensure that we lay the very core of that society on a strong foundation i.e. our home.

If there is a child labour happening in our home or in our vicinity, it is our moral right to raise our voice against it. If we don't, we would lose our moral right to look into our children's eyes and expect respect from them. We cannot raise one child's future while denying another one. No way.

Child labour takes place when children are forced to work at an age when they are expected to work, study and enjoy their phase of innocence. It implies lost or deprived childhood that leads to exploitation of children in various forms: mental, physical, social, sexual and so on.

Not all children in India are lucky to enjoy their childhood. Many of them are forced to work under inhuman conditions where their miseries know no end. Though there are laws banning child labour, still children continue to be exploited as cheap labour. It is because the authorities are unable to implement the laws meant to protect children from being engaged as labourers.

Unfortunately, the actual number of child labourers in India goes undetected. Children are forced to work in a completely unregulated condition without adequate food, proper wages, and rest. They are subjected to physical, sexual and emotional abuse.

Children often work in dangerously polluted factories. They work for 9 to 10 hours at a stretch including night shifts. No wonder that a large number of child workers have sunken chests and thin bone frames which give them a fragile look. They are made to work in small rooms under inhuman conditions which include unhygienic surroundings. Most of these children come from extremely poor households. They are either school drop-outs or those who have not seen any school at all.

Child labourers run the risk of contracting various diseases. They are vulnerable to exploitation by all. There is no strict enforcement of laws against child labour, so, employers continue to circumvent the provisions of the law in the full knowledge that the child workers themselves will not dare to expose them.

The authorities should incorporate a provision for surprise checks and establish a separate vigilance cell. Employers should compulsorily take steps for the intellectual, vocational and educational well-being and upliftment of a child worker.

CAUSES OF CHILD LABOUR

Factors such as poverty, lack of social security, the increasing gap between the rich and the poor have adversely affected children more than

any other group. We have failed to provide universal education, which results in children dropping out of school and entering the labour force.

Loss of jobs of parents in a slowdown, farmers' suicide, armed conflicts and high costs of healthcare are other factors contributing to child labour.

A widespread problem: Due to high poverty and poor schooling opportunities, child labour is quite prevalent in India. Child labour is found in rural as well as urban areas. The 2001 census found an increase in the number of child labourers from 11.28 million in 1991 to 12.59 million.

Children comprise 40% of the labour in the precious stone cutting sector. They are also employed in other industries such as mining, zari and embroidery, dhabas, tea stalls and restaurants and in homes as domestic labour.

DISCUSSION

Government authorities and civil society organizations need to work in tandem to free children engaged in labour under abysmal conditions. They need to be rescued from exploitative working conditions and supported with adequate education. Above all, there is a need to mobilize

public opinion with an aim to bring about an effective policy initiative to abolish child labour in all its forms.

A large number of children in India are quite strangers to the joys and innocence of the formative years of their lives. Instead of enjoying their early steps on their life's journey, they are forced to work under conditions of slavery. Child labour persists due to the inefficiency of law, administrative system and exploitative tendencies on the part of employers.

Children are employed illegally in various industries. But agriculture is the largest sector where children work at early ages to contribute to their family income. Rural areas employ 85 percent of the child labour in India. They are forced to work at young ages due to factors such as poverty, unemployment, a large family size, and lack of proper education. Despite constitutional provisions against child labour, a large number of children continue to be exploited under hazardous work conditions. Poorly paid for long hours of work, they have to abandon their studies to support their family at an age when they are supposed to just play around and have fun. They are made to forego all the joys of childhood by a cruel and ruthless world.

Rural areas employ the largest number of child labour. In urban areas, they work in dhabas, tea-stalls and restaurants, and households. They are shamelessly exploited in the unorganized sector as domestic servants, hawkers, rag-pickers, paper vendors, agricultural labourers, and as workers in industrial concerns.

Some of the industries that employ children as labourers include match industry in Sivakasi, Tamil Nadu; glass industry in Firozabad, brassware industry in Moradabad and the handmade carpet industry in Mirzapur-Bhadoi, precious stone polishing industry in Jaipur, Rajasthan; lock making industry in Aligarh; slate industry in Markapur, Andhra Pradesh, and slate industry in Mandsaur, Madhya Pradesh.

Sometimes, children are employed against a loan or debt or social obligation by the family of the child. Generally, they are forced to work assisting their families in agricultural sector, brick kilns, and stone quarries. In urban areas, children of migrant workers mostly belonging to low caste groups such as dalits or marginalised tribal sections are pledged to work in small production houses and factories. Bonded child labourers are particularly subjected to mental, physical and sexual abuse, sometimes even leading to death. In Orissa, people sell daughters,

eight to 10 years old, as maid servants to the creditor in order to clear their debt.

Child labour is inevitable in a country like India where over 40 per cent of the population lives in conditions of extreme poverty. The children have to supplement their parents' income or in some cases, they are the only wage earners in the family.

Another reason is that vested interests deliberately create child labour to get cheap labour as a factory hand, a domestic servant or a shop assistant.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

We need policies which try to alleviate poverty and inequality as they can have a significant and decisive impact on economic conditions and social structures that have a bearing on child labour. Such initiatives may incorporate agrarian reforms, employment-generation programmes, use of improved technology among the poor, promotion of the informal sector and creation of cooperatives and social security schemes. Also required is effective enforcement machinery to punish the violators of laws. Labour-inspection and related services need to be strengthened.

Child labourers have to toil long hours to eke out a living for themselves and support their families. Exploitation becomes a way of life for them and becomes very harmful to their physical and mental development. They are forced to inhabit an adult world, shoulder adult responsibilities, and suffer extreme exploitation.

Despite legislation banning child labour, it has not been possible to completely stop the practice of hiring children as labour across the world. India is no exception to employment of children as labour; rather the country employs the largest number of child labourers in the world.

Poverty, social inequality and lack of education are among is the main cause of child labour. According to a UNICEF report, in rural and impoverished parts of the world, children have no real and meaningful alternative as schools and teachers are not available. Many communities, particularly rural areas do not have adequate school facilities, even the availability and quality of schools is very low.

Also, the low paying informal economy thrives upon the low cost, easy to hire, easy to dismiss labour in the form of child labour. After the unorganized agriculture sector which employs 60% of child labour, children are employed in unorganized trade, unorganized assembly and unorganized retail work. Other contributory factors to child labour

include inflexibility and structure of India's labour market, size of informal economy, inability of industries to scale up and lack of modern manufacturing technologies.

CONCLUSION

Child labour inflicts damage to a child's physical and mental health. A child labourer has no basic rights to education, development, and freedom. Children employed as labourers work in unsafe environments where there is a constant danger of fatal accidents. They are forced to lead a life of poverty, illiteracy, and deprivation. They are required to perform gruelling and physically demanding tasks and in return receive only meagre wages. Poor working conditions cause severe health problems to such children. A child labourer not just suffers physical and mental torture but also becomes mentally and emotionally mature too fast which is never a good sign.

Collective efforts are needed on the part of society and the government to put an end to the practice of child labour. In fact, every citizen should take a pledge to never employ child labourer, rather discourage others too from doing so. We should create awareness amongst people employing child labourers and the parents sending their children to

work. We need to provide our children a happy childhood where they are able to enjoy the best period of their lives with a merry and carefree attitude. The government should make efforts to increase the incomes of parents by launching various development schemes. Efforts should be made towards poverty eradication combined with educational reforms to provide free or affordable access to quality education. Only by taking comprehensive steps, the Government can hope to eliminate all forms of child labour by 2020.

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