



CHILD LABOUR IN INDIA

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INTRODUCTION

Children in Indian society has always been a topic less spoken or discussed. Children in every society have always been taken as the greatest gift to humanity. Childhood is an important 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 helpful to their intellectual, physical and social development go on to be responsible and productive part of the society.

If we are to engage the children in to work when they are too young for the task, we are unduly reducing their present welfare or their future income earning capabilities, either by shrinking their future external choices or by reducing their future individual productive capabilities. Generally it is said that due to economic problems children are forced to forego educational and other development opportunities and take up jobs which mostly exploit them as they are usually underpaid and engaged in hazardous conditions. Parents send their child for a job as a desperate measure due to poor economic conditions. It is therefore no wonder that the poor households represent the largest segment contributor of child labour. One of the key aspects of child labour is that children are sent to work at the expense of education. There is a strong effect of child labour on school attendance rates and the length of a child's work day is inversely associated with their capacity to attend school. Child labour restricts the right of children to access and benefit from education and denies the fundamental opportunity to attend school. Child labour, thus, prejudices children's education and also adversely affects their health and safety.

Who is a Child – International Labour Organization (ILO) states, the term child labour is best defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to their physical and mental development. It refers to work that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children, or work whose schedule interferes with their ability to attend regular school, or work that affects in any manner their ability to focus during school or experience healthy childhood. i ILO states that child labour may be defined in different ways, and different definition would yield different estimates of child labour. According to ILO, children or adolescents who participate in work that does not affect their health and personal development or interfere with their schooling, is not child labour; rather it may generally be regarded as being something positive. Such harmless work includes activities such as helping their parents at home, assisting family or earning pocket money outside school hours and on holidays. Such kinds of activities may contribute to children's development by providing them with skills and experience, and help to prepare them to be productive members of society during their adult life. ii UNICEF definition of child labour is different. A child 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. UNICEF in another report says, "Children's work needs to be seen as happening along a spectrum, one end being destructive or exploitative work and beneficial work - promoting or enhancing children's development without interfering with their schooling, recreation and rest' being the other end. And between these two end there are vast areas of work that may or may not negatively affect a child's development." iii In India , The Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act, 1986 has defined the child as anyone who is "a person who has not completed his fourteenth year of age" The law further has defined the establishment for employment as, "The "establishment" includes a shop, commercial establishment, work-shop, farm, residential hotel, restaurant, eating-house, theatre or other place of public amusement or entertainment".

The Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act, 1986 states that employment in hazardous industries is prohibited, such industries are classified into 13 occupations and 57 processes. In the last 5 years, the number of hazardous processes listed in the schedule of the Act has increased from 18 to 57 and occupations from 7 to 13. Also as per Article 24 of the Constitution, no child below the age of 14 years is to be employed in any factory, mine or any hazardous employment. Further, Article 39 requires the States to direct its policy towards ensuring that the tender age of children is not abused and that they are not forced by economic necessity to enter a vocations unsuited to their age or strength. Recently, with the insertion of Article 21A, the State has been entrusted with the task of providing free and compulsory education to all the children in the age group of 6-14 years.

CAUSES

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

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.

CONSEQUENCES / EFFECTS:

Child labour has several negative impacts. Some of them include:

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.

Reasons for prevalence of child labor:-

- The wage of the children is less when compared to adults. So most of the small entrepreneurs prefer to continue their work with children.
- The resistance offered by children to do things when compared to adults is less.
- All the children working as child labour belongs to poor families or orphans or children who ran away from home. So most of the times the responsibility and care that has to be taken for workers is less.

Negative Effects of child Labor:-

- The child who works as child labour will have no chance of improvement in his life.
- Children who are working as child labor don't have time to complete their education. They usually lag behind in studies or completely stop their education before even completing high school.
- It is hard to escape from this vicious cycle and once anyone falls into this cycle, their life will be ruined completely.
- The economy and growth of the country faces lot of problems if children are not properly educated.
- Children who starts working at early stage have little parent monitoring so they are first target for illegal activities.
- Children working as child labour are easily addicted to drugs and thereby ruining their entire life.
- The ethical and moral support required for children at the tender age is out of box question for child labour.

POTENTIAL HAZARDS

Hazard in childcare work can be categorized as biological, chemical, physical, and psychosocial

Biological hazards

Children and childcare workers were under the high risk of infectious disease compared to children who reared at home and adults not in a childcare setting Cytomegalovirus (CMV) is notorious for fetal development and 10 to 15% of infected fetus could lead to adverse birth outcomes⁴, so this infection might poses a great risk for female worker who planning to get pregnant. CMV could be transmitted by body fluid such as blood, tears, urine, saliva, and nasal secretion through contact with toys or diaper changes. HIV, Hepatitis B and C and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) could be transmitted through blood, such as by a bite. Intestinal (enteric) pathogens like Hepatitis A, Cryptosporidium, Giardia, Shigella, Campylobacter, enteroviruses, and rotavirus can be transmitted by fecal-oral contamination through diaper changes, via sink faucets and the hands of childcare workers or children. People caring for children not yet toilet trained are at the highest risk of these exposures. Some vaccinations such as hepatitis A and B, Rotavirus have been available and recommended, and helpful for acquiring the herd immunity. However, many of the pathogens especially related to enteric are hard to be prevented by vaccination. Therefore the preventing strategy including contact precaution cannot be overvalued in the childcare setting

Chemical hazards

Childcare workers are exposed to disinfectants and sanitizers which contain chlorine bleach. This compound is known to irritate the skin and eyes. Other common cleaning agents may contain volatile organic compounds which, if inhaled, could lead to upper respiratory irritation or headaches. Arts and crafts materials such as powdered paint, permanent markers, and spray-fixatives or enamels contain organic solvents, which can cause dizziness, allergies, psychological and behaviour changes, nerve and respiratory damage with chronic exposure.

Physical / Musculoskeletal hazards

Childcare workers perform a variety of physically demanding tasks, and are at a high risk for musculoskeletal disorders. The prevalence of back and neck/shoulder discomfort was revealed to be 43-61% and 25-35.4% each . Caring for children aged 0 (OR1.40, CI 1.01 to 1.95) and requiring holding/lifting a child/material exceeding 20 kg everyday (OR 1.51, CI 1.10 to 2.06) were significantly associated with neck/shoulder pain ¹¹. On the worksite analyses, ergonomic exposures such as frequent lifting, bending, stooping, squatting, reaching, and carrying were concerned. For example, activities that can cause musculoskeletal strain include lifting and carrying children, pushing and pulling strollers, carrying diapers and garbage bags, moving furniture and play equipment. In addition, caregiving activities frequently cause awkward postures due to the small sizes and low heights of cribs, chairs, and tables designed for children's use .

Psychosocial hazards



Stressors in the childcare setting originate from issues such as understaffing, inadequate break times, long working hours, limited resources, non-structured programs, and ambiguous job description and evaluation. Depending on the facility management, social factors may include poor communication, conflict in relationships with co-workers/parents, inadequate professional support and recognition, and differences in philosophies and work ethics. Childcare positions often offer low wages, no benefits, and can require unpaid overtime. Although childcare workers are often highly motivated, these factors may result in childcare workers having low job satisfaction, burnout, and a high turnover rate.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

Hepatitis A/B, rubella, and varicella vaccination are now routinely recommended in early childhood; if children and their care-givers have all been vaccinated, disease risk is very low. Rubella vaccine is especially indicated for childcare workers who wish to become pregnant.

It is important to follow strict hygiene routines such as training workers in diapering procedure with proper hand-washing techniques. Other infection control practices include to refrain from kissing children on the lips and not to place saliva-laden objects (children's fingers, toys, etc.) in the mouth.

Workers should have access to hazard information about potentially toxic substances (disinfectants, organic solvents) such as Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) and training on the proper handling of these substances. Whenever possible, choose or substitute less toxic chemical products such as low solvent cleaners, and use solvents properly and sparingly to reduce exposure.

Workers should learn good body mechanics, such as lifting and carrying technique, and encourage toddlers' independence to decrease carrying and lifting. Transfer or rotation into caring for older children might relieve some physical load on the back and shoulders, if feasible. Other strategies for improving ergonomic aspects of the work include: 1) provide appropriately-sized furniture for teachers; 2) redesign storage areas by placing heaviest materials at waist level; 3) use a cart to carry garbage or diaper bags and reduce size and weight of loads; 4) use a step-stool when reaching above shoulder level; and 5) sit against a wall or furniture for back support when working on the floor. Workers can also incorporate stretching and movement into their curricula and do these activities along with the children.

The psychosocial work environment could be improved by addressing organizational demands, having positive and regular staff communication, and offering professional development opportunities. Workers may also benefit from learning skills to cope with or manage stress at work using such as cognitive behavior techniques, time management skills, relaxation exercises, etc.

Steps to be taken to resolve this social problem:-

- Government must take strict actions against the people who are responsible for child labour (brokers and people who employed children) and make their laws that can solve this problem from ground level.
- NGOs should work completely like identifying the child labour to enabling them to join in caring centers, which provide education and thereby provide hope to children.
- Create the awareness among parents of poor children about the importance of child education and educate them about the negative impacts of child labour.
- Government should build infrastructure and other facilities for compulsory education of children and they should implement all the international guidelines about child labour.

Finally, children are future of any country. If they are weak and not properly educated, it is not good for any country and it can't develop. It is everybody's responsibility to shape up healthy children with good education and high moral values.

Initiatives against child labour in India

In 1979, the Indian government formed the Gurupadswamy Committee to find about child labour and means to tackle it. The Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act was enacted based on the recommendations of the committee in 1986. A National Policy on Child Labour was formulated in 1987 to focus on rehabilitating children working in hazardous occupations. The Ministry of Labour and Employment had implemented around 100 industry-specific National Child Labour Projects to rehabilitate the child workers since 1988.

The Indian government has enacted a plethora of acts, laws, organizations, and institutions to combat the overwhelming prominence of child labour. Some of the initiatives include the Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act which is a piece of legislation that prohibits the engagement of children in certain employment (mostly in dangerous conditions) and regulates the conditions of work of children; the National Policy on Child Labour seeks to adopt a sequential approach with focus on rehabilitation of children working in hazardous occupations & processes in the first instance; and the Ministry of Labour and employment functions to provide and supervise a range of policies concerning child labour in India.

Non-governmental organisations

Many NGOs like [Bachpan Bachao Andolan](#), [ChildFund](#), [CARE India](#), Talaash Association, [Child Rights and You](#), [Global march against child labour](#), RIDE India, Childline etc. have been working to eradicate child labour in India.



Child labour has also been a subject of public interest litigations in Indian courts.

REHABILITATION

BBA ensures that children are protected and are not vulnerable to being re-trafficked. BBA provides eminent support like trauma counselling, protects victims in BBA homes and transit rehabilitation centers, and ensures aftercare by helping with access to compensation and relevant government schemes.

Statutory rehabilitation

Poverty and illiteracy are driving forces pushing children into child labour and child trafficking. BBA tries to mitigate these factors, by ensuring that the child gets economic compensation from the employer, trafficker and the state through the application of relevant legislation. This compensation includes backwages (28th May 2012 judgement), fines on the employers (15th July 2009 judgement) and compensation through rehabilitation packages under bonded labour law and centrally sponsored schemes for the rehabilitation of bonded labourers. In the last three years, Rs 5,120,000 (about 84 000 USD) has been recovered from traffickers/employers convicted of trafficking children, practicing slavery and supporting forced labour in Delhi.

Immediately after rescue, a child is taken to a children's home wherever possible. For Delhi and surrounding areas, BBA's Mukti Ashram, established on the outskirts of Delhi, is a safe haven.

Mukti Ashram

Founded in 1991, Mukti Ashram was the first center in India for rescued bonded labourers. Since 2007, Mukti Ashram has emerged as a model for providing immediate support and access to services for children rescued from child labour and trafficking. In the short-term home, children receive food, clothing, shelter, medical aid, psychological and legal assistance and non-formal education. BBA ensures that the children get best quality care to overcome the trauma of slavery and servitude, which also eases the process of their reintegration into society.

RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Non- formal education: All children should be provided with non-formal education. They are taught the basics of education, including reading, writing and arithmetic. The basic purpose of non-formal education is to create interest in education, so that children will visit regular school afterwards.

Psycho-Social Counseling: Counseling should be provided by trained counsellors and staff to children during their stay. Professional counselling helps children overcome their trauma and look forward to their future.

Sports Activities: Children should be given the opportunity to get involved in sports and cultural activities like cricket, football, theater plays and skits.

Social Education:It helps to generate awareness amongst the local community on various social issues, especially trafficking and forced labour. It empowers not only children but their parents to fight for their rights and ensures economic social rehabilitation of rescued children.

1) ChildFund is a child development organization representing the voice of deprived, excluded and vulnerable children in India regardless of their race, creed and gender, since 1951. Presently, we are assisting over 2 million children and families across the country with our unique child-centric intervention programs. There are 2 entities of ChildFund in India: ChildFund International in India and ChildFund India registered as a Society.

2)CARE focuses on the empowerment of women and girls because they are disproportionately affected by poverty and discrimination; and suffer abuse and violations in the realisation of their rights, entitlements and access and control over resources. Also, experience shows that, when equipped with the proper resources, women have the power to help whole families and entire communities overcome poverty, marginalisation and social injustice.

With these joint efforts of all of us, we shall be able to wean over the problem of child labour not only in India but all over the world.