

Education and Health of Child Labourers in Lucknow



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Abstract

Indian Constitution provides free and compulsory education upto the age of 14yrs.It also states that 'No child below the age of 14years shall be employed to work in any factory or mine or engaged in any other factory or mine or engaged in any other hazardous employment.'Even then every year there is rise in the number of child labourers.The present study is related to the child labourers engaged in unorganised sector of Lucknow in Uttar Pradesh. Data was collected from child labourers and rag pickers in Lucknow. Their interview was also taken and the matters related to their education, health and mental health were discussed. Nonformal system of education seems to be a failure for such children and they needed schools where they are provided education along with part time jobs. Everybody apart from government should come forward to improve their living conditions.

Keywords: Education, Health, Child Labourers, Employment.

Introduction

Child labour in a restricted sense means employment of children in gainful occupations which are dangerous to their all-round development. The working of children hampers their physical, mental, moral and social development. In India Article 24, of the constitution states. "No child below the age of 14 years shall be employed to work in any factory or mine or engaged in any other hazardous employment".Article 45 of the Indian constitution refers to the provision by the state for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of 14 years. In spite of this the number of child Labourers is increasing every year. The present study is related to the child labourers engaged in unorganised sector in the city of Lucknow. An unorganized sector is one in which children do not have legal protection of work, the minimum wages Act does not apply to them, they cannot form unions, nor do they have representation in any form.

This study was carried out in Lucknow city of Uttar Pradesh State of India. Such localities were selected where children were engaged in work. Most of the children were found to be working in workshops, General stores & Grossary shops, Binding work & printing press, Tailoring shops, Domestic services and Embroidery work/chikan industry & carpentry work Purposive sampling technique was used for the study.

The sample comprised of 92 child Labourers (40 females and 52 Males) of 10-14 years of age. Apart from them 20 Rag pickers were also interviewed. As majority of the child labourers were unable to read and write, interview method was used to collect data. A structured interview schedule was prepared to record the data collected during the survey.

Objectives of the Study

1. To find out the status of education of child labourers in Lucknow
2. To examine their working and living conditions and the level of their job satisfaction.
3. To study the effects of malnutrition on the health of child labourers

Education of Child Labourers and Various Schemes of Government For Them

State Government is responsible for setting up new schools, appointing more teachers and ensuring increase in enrolment of such child labourers. But the elementary education budget of the state governments consists mostly of allocations for teachers' salaries with little scope for other activities relating to special efforts for enrolment of out of school children, community mobilisation etc. Recognising this limitation, the central government has introduced a number of 'centrally-sponsored schemes' which provide funds to the state governments in crucial areas of achieving UEE (Universalisation of Elementary Education), some of the

major schemes are operation Blackboard (OB); Non Formal Education (NFE) Sarv. Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA); and the National Programme for Nutritional support for primary education (Commonly known as the Mid-Day Meal Scheme). There are also the externally-aided basic education projects like the Shiksha Karmi Project and the Lok Jumbish Project (LJP) in Rajasthan, Bihar Education Project (BEP) and the District Education Programme (DPEP). By the 93rd Constitutional Amendment, Education has also become a fundamental right for all children aged 6-14 yrs. Other departments of the Govt. of India which have contributed to the Universalisation of Primary or elementary education are the National Child Labour Projects (NCLP) of the Ministry of Labour and Early Childhood care & Education (ECCE) of the dept. of Women and child development. The government also provides assistance to NGO's for some innovative programmes.

Some of the strategies being attempted by NGO's for street children are as follows.

1. Pavement schools with some nutrition facilities and flexible timings with a child-wise approach to understand their specific problems and traumas.

2. Drop-in centres which function throughout the day.
3. Provision of special residential homes and schooling facilities.
4. Integration of some children in to existing government municipal schools which have excess capacity

The labour ministry is of the firm view that the educational needs of working children from deprived socio-economic backgrounds can be met only through special schools since the existing government schools would not be able to accommodate such children. According to primary research done by Burra, Neera (1995) in a number of industries, the child Labour was being justified in the name of traditional occupations, the fact of the matter was that children of master craftsman and the better-off-artisans were going to school regularly and they spent a couple of hours a day, learning skills from their fathers. It was the children of scheduled castes, scheduled tribes or the Muslim Communities who provided the bulk of the child labour force. These groups represented a combination of economic and social disadvantages.

Table-1: Frequency and % age distribution of spread over of working hours in different jobs.

Work Hours	Domestic Services	Embroidery work/chikan industry	Work shops	Grossary shops	Binding works/printing work	Tailoring shops
	n=20,%age	n=20, %age	n=15,%age	n=15, %age	n=10, %age	n=12,%age
2-4	3 15	4 20				
6-8	5 25	5 25	5 33.3			2 16.7
8-10	10 50	7 35	10 66.7	7 46.7	3 30	10 83.3
10-12	2 10	4 20		8 53.3	7 70	

Table-2: Wages in Rs/month.

Work Hours	Domestic Services	Embroidery work/chikan industry	Work shops	Grossary shops	Binding works/printing work	Tailoring shops
Hours of work per day	3	5	8	8	6	6
Wage amount in Rupees	2500	5000	5000	5000	5000	4500

Rag pickers were not employed anywhere, since they were not offered work by the employers and were considered to be the most backward and unhygienic & incapable of doing work. Therefore they just wandered from morning till evenings in the Garbage dumps and rubbish heaps to earn their livelihood. Their condition was miserable and more pitiable than other child labourers.

Life of children in rag pickers community

They lived in very small houses in slums which were very much below the standard of living of human beings. Some of them lived in small shelters on the banks of river Gomti, these shelters were made up of Bamboos, plastic sheets, tin & whatever they felt suitable to keep in it. They are also in a continuous fear that they will be asked to leave the place and search their shelters somewhere else. One can find hundreds of such small shelters on the banks of river Gomti. These people dwell here and are alive as if they are born to work for the rich. They have nothing to protect and therefore nothing to lose. They are

unable to smile and do not take interest in anything which is not concerned to them. Yet they are intelligent. They are in a condition where nothing is precious, it may lead them to child delinquency. They did not have proper clothing to protect themselves from bad weather. All of them were malnourished & had no medical facilities at all. Many of the kins of the children had died, exact reason could not be known. They only had night sleep in their shelters for the rest of the day they wandered with their large sack and a long metal poker either with their elders or with their co-rag pickers or even alone some times. The paper scraps, tins, rags, bottles, plastic pieces or whatever they collect sell for Rs.6-12 per kilogram. They begin their work before sunrise and their work continued till they slept. These children were under the group which was socially degraded and shunned even by domestic servants & sweepers. They earn just to remain alive and there is no question of their education or getting good food. None of them even saw any school. In this world of Information Technology one can still see the

existence of creatures like Rag pickers. The rich don't even bother to have a look at them as if they are street animals. It seems as if there was no end to such life on earth. Instead of reduction in their number, it is going on increasing each coming year. No body is accountable to them. They are accountable to themselves. Therefore, it is the duty of each & every citizen to think over the matter and atleast come a little bit forward to enable them lead a life of a human being and treat them as human beings.

Child Labourers and Their Education

They lived in slums in very small houses ill ventilated and dimly lighted and without adequate means of security etc. They were devoid of medical facilities and often victims of ill treatment by employers or adult co-workers. They were without adequate clothing, footwear and easily exposed to the bad weather conditions. They received very low wages but still contributed to the family's expenses. Most of them worked in unorganised sectors as shown in Table-1.

- 70% of them belonged to age group 12-14
- 15% of them belonged to age group 10-12
- 10% of them belonged to age group 8-10
- 5% of them belonged to age group 6-8

Most of the children joined labour force by the age of 10 yrs. Irrespective of sex, eldest child in the family had to work in order to meet family's expenses. All the domestic servants and those engaged in embroidery work were females. Major portion of their wages was spent on food. Majority of them had no future plans. Parents of 7% children saw the school but studied only till primary level. They give no importance to education. They only know that education does not give any benefit in earning their livelihood and is unimportant to them. So they do not aspire for the education of their children. Those who joined the schools, also left them as they had no proper guidance and failed. So most of the children could not have education more than primary level. Due to the absence of dignity of Labour, they were not even treated well by their employers. Instead they were treated as backward and low class people.

Mental Health of Child Labourers

The children felt themselves inferior to their counterparts living in other localities. 80% of them felt themselves backward, maladjusted in the society due to lack of basic needs like inadequate clothing, footwear etc. It must be recognised that healthy childhood derives from healthy parenthood and stable family life. In the absence of all these, they exhibit defence mechanisms and show signs of mental ill health.

Working hours of child labourers and their health

62% of children found their job tiring 60% of them worked 7 hours a day & 30% of them worked for 8 hrs/day & 10% worked for 4-5 hrs/day. Children employed in stitching/tailoring & embroidery work said because of continuous bending work their neck & back ached. All of them went by walk to their work spot. They worked quite hard for their job but did not get proper food. Their employers made no provision for their lunch or dinner at the workspot. They had to

carry their lunch or dinner with them to their workspot. But most of them did not carry food with them and had dinner after having breakfast. As a result of such a long gap between the meals most of them showed signs of some kind of deficiency or the other. Their around development was retarded and their physical, mental, moral, social & emotional development also retarded. Some of them had eye, ear and speech defects and two of them also had grey hair. Still most of them expressed satisfaction with the food they eat.

Conclusion

Poverty, ignorance, economic compulsion, death, disease or loss of job of earning members and ignorance of parents are some of the reasons advocated for child labour. Since most of the child labourers are of the age 5 to 14 years, it becomes a matter of deep concern to find out ways and means which may put an end to the exploitation of children in India who are found to join the labour stream. They have no future plans and are accountable to themselves. Since non formal system of education seems to be a failure for such children a type of schools should be opened for them where studies are combined with part time jobs. It is not only the duty of government but everybody should come forward to improve their living condition. Rehabilitation programme for the rag pickers is utmost necessary and there should be holiday school for the child labourers and an alternate environment should be provided to them so that they come out of their world full of miseries and have a normal life

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