

CHILD LABOUR AND INDIA

Abstract

This chapter deals with the acute issue of Child Labour in a developing country like India. It not only shakes the very base of our society by destroying the lives of the upcoming generations, who are the pillars of our society but also paralyzes the society in the long run. Although the government has taken stern action in this regard by formulating various Acts and laws, the dreadful act is still prevalent. The percentage of working children between the age group of 5 to 14 years across all the states of India has also been studied along with a comparison to highlight this issue between the pre-reform era and the post - reform era. Finally, the steps to overcome this grave issue has also been discussed in details. For the ease of readers, data on the percentage of working children between 5 to 14 years of age across different states of India have been given at the end of the chapter.

Keywords: Child Labour, Illiteracy, Malnutrition, Unemployment and Poverty.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Inspite of standing in the era of Globalization, certain social evils still prevail which is crippling the economy with each passage of day. The notable among such evils highlights- child labour, child abuse, illiteracy, retrenchment and unemployment, and many more. In this chapter, we are going to discuss the issue of child labour, one such social evils. Child labour, a burning topic, is a serious threat to the society. Child labour, in general, refers to children employed, who are less than 14 years of age in different types of sectors, be it household or hazardous. Children are the upcoming generations or the pillars of our society. The issue of child labour is a social evil as it shakes the very base of our society by destroying both the opportunities and dreams of poor children. Child labourers generally get deprived of basic education and essential nutrients which leads to the rise of malnutrition level in our country. On top of that, child labourers are widely exposed to exploitative actions both in physical and psychological ways which ultimately hinder their path of natural growth and development. As a result, mental setback happens and, in many cases, premature death has been notified too. It is not that the poor kids are joining such laborious tasks at such a tender age all by themselves. Many sociological factors have forced them to join work like- large families, poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, etc. There is a saying that large families do not lead to poverty. It is the poverty that leads to the formation of large families. If all the family members earn then their standard of living will get upgraded a bit. On the other side of the market, managers always have a tendency to employ children who could be paid lower wages, thereby retaining a larger part of the profit to them. **12th June is regarded as the World Day against Child Labour.** The problem of child labour in India is a deep-rooted issue which can't be changed overnight. Due to the enforcement of various laws, the rate of child labour in our country has deteriorated which is indeed a good sign. Inspite of that, some of the journals bear the fact that over 10 million children are still associated with this grave issue of child labour in India. The situation even got exacerbated after the Covid-19 pandemic. Many elder workers got retrenched due to that pandemic situation while children were taken as they could be satisfied and exploited by paying lower wages. Such is the condition and presence of the social issue of child labour in our country, which needs to be checked as soon as possible otherwise it will be too late to handle thus paralyzing the future society.

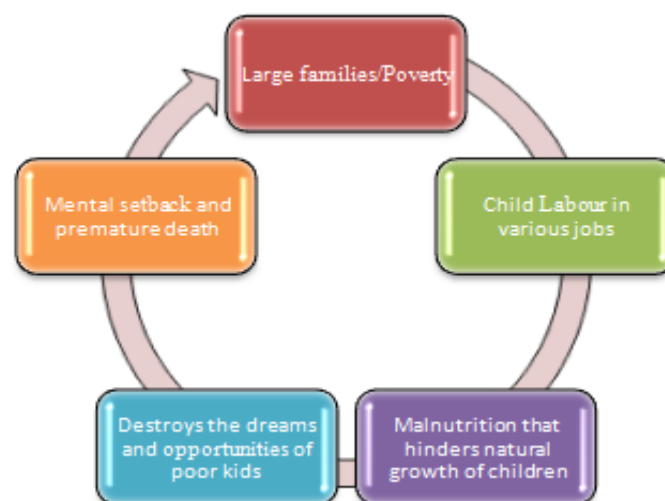


Figure 1

II. FACTORS AFFECTING CHILD LABOUR

Following are the factors that affect the issue of child labour-

1. **Poverty:** When a family is poor, children are forced to work in various fields to support their families. Although they are being paid a meagre amount, they are often prompted to work by their family members only.
2. **Unemployment:** Due to unemployment, poor parents can't sustain their families so they send their children to work both in households and industries.
3. **Prevalence of Disability:** In many families, various diseases and disabilities prevail which leads to a lack of earnings. This forces the little ones to go out for work and support their families.
4. **Rapid Rural-Urban Migration:** Poor families residing in rural areas often leave their places to migrate to their urban counterparts in search of better job opportunities and other facilities that will upgrade their standard of living. The migrant families along with their children are forced to work to sustain themselves in the crowd of cities.
5. **Illiteracy:** Due to acute poverty, poor and needy families fail to send their children to school to achieve the necessary education which makes them unaware of the issue of child labour, an upsurging social evil.

III. INDIA AND CHILD LABOUR

This part highlights the issue of child labour in the Indian context with special reference to the pre-reform and post-reform eras. According to census 2011, the *number of child labourers* in India has stricken 10.1 million among which 5.6 million are boys and 4.5 million are girls. Despite the fact that **child labour** has declined over the previous few years, poor children are still forced to work as bonded labour, child soldiers and trafficking. Across India, child labourers can be found in brick kilns, carpet weaving, mining, garment producing, agriculture, fisheries and many more. These children are also at risk of various types of exploitation which include sexual exploitation and production of child pornography. Sexual abuse committed against children is one of the most important concerns for both the law-enforcing agencies and the Government of India. On the basis of a report by Interpol, approximately 2.4 million instances of online child abuse were reported to the Government of India from 2017 to 2020. Among them, 80% of the children were girls who belonged to the age group below 14. Upon thorough investigation, it has been found that many social networking sites and media groups with more than 5,000 offenders have been sharing such videos with nationals of more than 100 countries. The graph given below (graphical representation of the table in the appendix) shows the number of working children between the age group of 5-14 years in all the states of India. It can clearly be seen that over the years the percentage of working children belonging to the age group of 5-14 years of age has fallen in each and every state of India which is indeed a good sign. Children up to the age of 14 should concentrate on their schooling and education rather than earning money for their families. They should be given some time to groom themselves for the upcoming challenges that they'll face in their lives and not overburden them with the day-to-day responsibilities.

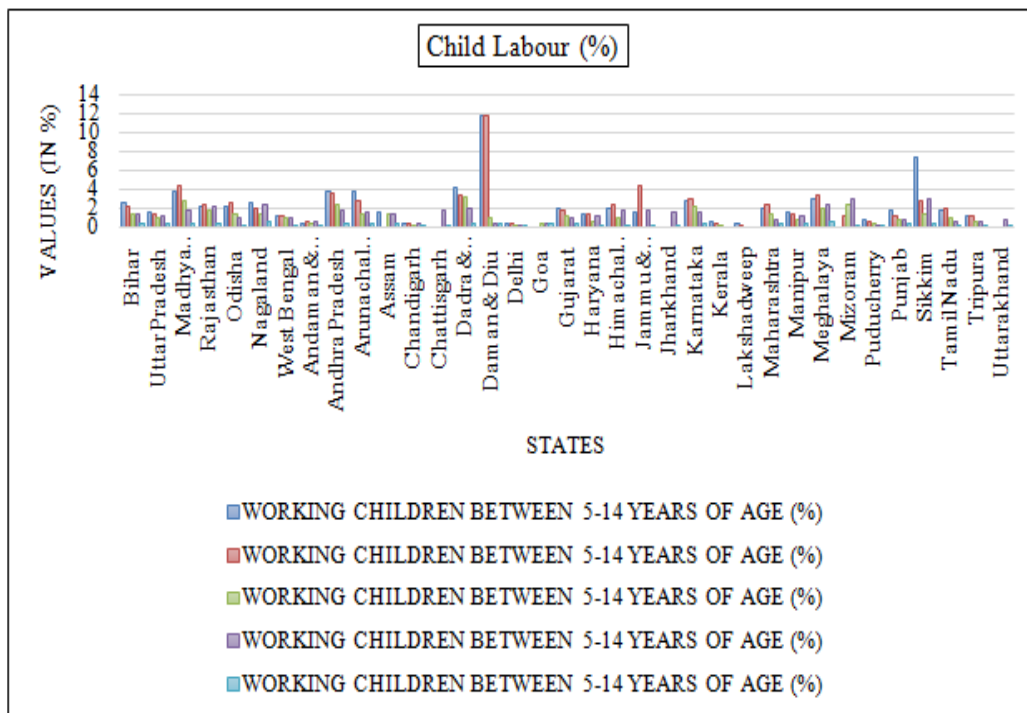


Figure 2

[Source: Census 1971 to 2011]

IV. CHILD LABOUR AND ITS EFFECTS

The effects have been enlisted below:

- Poor children, who are unable to secure a job, often become beggars and thieves. In many cases, they become prostitutes.
- Due to the prevalence of acute poverty, poor children are devoid of getting even basic education which retards the overall growth of the economy thereby showcasing poor and fragile human development.
- Due to a lack of primary education, poor kids will find it problematic to get a secured job when they grow up thereby leading to a sharp acceleration in the rate of unemployment.
- Poor children are often highly exploited and underpaid which lowers the per capita income of the country. Therefore, the government must resolve the matter from the grassroots level by dealing with such factors- illiteracy, poverty, unemployment etc. Child employment or under-aged employment needs to be abolished completely for the all-round betterment of the nation.

V. NEGATIVE IMPACTS OF CHILD LABOUR

The negative impacts of child labour are given below:

- As the practice is inhuman, the mental growth of the poor children is affected.
- Illiteracy due to not attending schools, often retard not only the mental but also the overall growth of the poor ones.

- Child labour makes one's standard of living low.
- The environment and surroundings in which such poor kids grow up, often make them addicted to liquor and tobacco.
- Often under-aged children are forced to work in in-human conditions as a result of which they face serious health issues. Malnutrition is yet another result of the grave issue of child labour.

VI. PRE VS.POST-REFORM RESULTS

It can be seen that over the years the percentage of working children belonging to the age group of 5-14 years has fallen appreciably. On the other hand, the literacy rate has risen and the total dependency ratio has fallen in almost all the states of our country. This clearly shows that poor families have become aware of the necessity of education in their children's lives which has accelerated the literacy rate to such an appreciable extent. It genuinely helps our country to develop and fosters economic growth simultaneously. Though this awareness didn't arise suddenly among the common masses, the government has indeed played a huge and very important role in this regard. The steps to overcome this acute issue of child labour has been discussed in one of the upcoming sections of this chapter.

VII. CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD LABOUR

The consequences of the issue of child labour are discussed below-

1. **Illiteracy:** Children who work, do not get an opportunity to go to school as their maximum amount of time gets spent in their workplaces. Due to such a constraint, they get only limited job opportunities when they grow up. Education not only imparts knowledge to the seekers but also grooms oneself for the upcoming challenges in the near future. Individuals, who have attended schools, know very well the ways to tackle various situations. An illiterate person, on the other hand, considers force to be the only way out of any hurdle that one confronts.
2. **Harassment and Abuse:** According to a study of GOI released in the year 2007, more than 20% of children who have participated in the labour force have encountered sexual abuse in their workplaces where most of them have happened with girls of below 15.
3. **Mental Trauma:** It is a matter of great challenge for a child to accept the fact that due to his/her dire poverty, he/she has to work day and night to sustain his/her family while his/her friends of the same age group are going out, playing with their peer groups and attending schools. Issues arising in their workplaces like- bullying, and exploitation (both in terms of volume of work and sexual harassment) may lead to mental trauma in these poor ones. Due to their worst childhood experiences, they'll never be able to forget their dark past and become societal misfits.
4. **Becoming a Would-be Criminal:** Illiterate poor children often get themselves attached to various criminal acts at a very tender age. Few reports of juvenile delinquency have been lodged the rate is getting increased with each passage of the day in our country.

- 5. Health Issues:** Child labour leads to various critical health issues due to malnutrition and undernourishment. Working in mines and hazardous factories poses negative impacts on the health of the poor which lingers for a lifetime. A child who has been assigned such duties that demand huge physical labour leaves a scar upon him or her for the entire lifetime.

VIII. CHILD LABOUR LAWS

Over the period of time, the Parliament of India has passed various laws and acts to ensure the safety and protection of children from getting themselves engaged in the labour market. Under Article 24, the fundamental rights highlight the prohibition of the underaged children to work in factories or mines. Certain laws are highlighted in this regard-

- 1. Factories Act (1948):** It prohibits employing underaged children in factories and also imparts strict rules for those employers who will break the above-mentioned conditions and hire the poor ones.
- 2. Mines Act (1952):** It restricts the employment of children below the age group of 18 years in mines. Strict rules have also been made for those violating the law.
- 3. Child Labour Act (1986):** It prohibits the employment of children below the age group of 14 in hazardous work which is identified in a list, which was expanded in 2006 and later in 2008, by the same law.
- 4. Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (2009):** It imparts free and compulsory education to children belonging to the age group of 6 to 14 years. It also ensured that 25% of seats in private schools must be kept reserved for the children belonging to the disadvantaged and specially-abled groups of society.

IX. STEPS TO OVERCOME CHILD LABOUR

The steps that are taken to overcome the grave issue of child labour in our country are discussed below:

1. There are different laws related to child labour that were framed by the Government of India to overcome this issue like- Right to Free and Compulsory Education Act, Mines Act, Child Labour Act and so on. Besides, the government has issued new rules for such employers who employ children. They can employ children only in non-laborious tasks and they have to make sure that all the below-aged children are sent to night schools which will be an effort to eradicate child labour from the employers' perspective. The Prevention of Atrocities Act ensures severe punishment for people who are found guilty of employing children engaged in bonded labour. In fact, the amendment makes sure of imprisoning those people found guilty who force children to beg or carry human wastes and animal corpses.
2. Parents must have clear-cut knowledge about child labour and child abuse beforehand so that they can enroll their children on schools and not force them to go for a job.

3. Our society should be true to its responsibilities of informing the authorities if they witness any sort of child labour or child abuse in any part of their locality. It is indeed a social etiquette to vehemently stop the ongoing grave issue of child labour which is still persisting in our society.

Talking about the possible solutions to this grave issue:

1. Basic Education should be made free so that people from the lower sections of society get the privilege of studying in schools.
2. The Mid-day meal system should be highly implemented in all the schools (especially of rural and suburban origins) so as to attract poor students towards the field of education.
3. Students should be provided education in exchange for labour or services which they provide. That is indeed a great loss on the part of humanity.
4. There should be more demand for skilled and trained labourers so that poor parents get an incentive to make their children educated and ready for the competition.
5. The current laws made against these social evils are not enough and many new rules must be proposed and implemented as soon as possible. It is because mere legislation without looking after whether it has been indeed implemented or not, does not lead to fruitful results.

X. CONCLUSION

Child labour is not only an issue that has hampered the basic rights of children but also a sign that represents a society that has lost its way. We all should therefore strive our level best and work jointly to completely eradicate this issue or else our country will always possess the tag of a *developing country* and will never achieve the title of a *developed nation*. As we know every issue has its way out, and this one has too as mentioned in the previous section. So, let us all come together and work efficiently so that this issue gets eradicated and never comes back thereby leading our country towards the path of progress.

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APPENDIX

WORKING CHILDREN BETWEEN 5-14 YEARS OF AGE (%)					
States	1971	1981	1991	2001	2011
Bihar	2.514739	2.106502	1.460143	1.346402	0.433808
Uttar Pradesh	1.58228	1.364577	1.067745	1.16006	0.448572
Madhya Pradesh	3.70563	4.4502	2.785	1.765194	0.39422
Rajasthan	2.279706	2.392169	1.759303	2.23436	0.368119
Odisha	2.244142	2.663227	1.428913	1.025931	0.219391
Nagaland	2.660078	2.094839	1.360909	2.305226	0.558969
West Bengal	1.154186	1.108926	1.045405	1.069007	0.256667
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	0.497391	0.692593	0.450178	0.550562	0.262205
Andhra Pradesh	3.741103	3.643839	2.498857	1.788924	0.478655
Arunachal Pradesh	3.830128	2.84019	1.432948	1.683242	0.416618
Assam	1.636574	.	1.461578	1.318337	0.318887
Chandigarh	0.422568	0.439381	0.291277	0.419423	0.297156
Chhattisgarh	.	.	.	1.74989	0.250084
Dadra & Nagar Haveli	4.191892	3.475962	3.2	1.942727	0.306395
Daman & Diu	11.73175	11.87089	0.922549	0.461392	0.318519
Delhi	0.421053	0.413457	0.290319	0.302498	0.15769
Goa	.	.	0.397949	0.306973	0.474297
Gujarat	1.940521	1.809872	1.267453	0.958201	0.414159
Haryana	1.373316	1.502778	0.666248	1.198822	0.211005
Himachal Pradesh	2.063121	2.32712	1.091433	1.773182	0.218514
Jammu & Kashmir	1.526727	4.316636	.	1.731368	0.203556
Jharkhand	.	.	.	1.51117	0.275846
Karnataka	2.760227	3.046989	2.170547	1.55648	0.408269
Kerala	0.523732	0.364791	0.119592	0.082146	0.065129
Lakshadweep	0.303125	0.14	0.065385	0.044262	0.04375
Maharashtra	1.960559	2.481175	1.353519	0.78869	0.442198
Manipur	1.526561	1.42273	0.897823	1.257018	0.41334
Meghalaya	3.007905	3.361976	1.951155	2.326003	0.634951
Mizoram	.	1.278138	2.378406	2.954443	0.254603
Puducherry	0.789195	0.59702	0.331683	0.195483	0.113862
Punjab	1.717763	1.29215	0.704408	0.727731	0.325679
Sikkim	7.457619	2.709177	1.378818	3.041959	0.442553
Tamil Nadu	1.731365	2.014244	1.03634	0.671091	0.209901
Tripura	1.124036	1.178958	0.597679	0.680088	0.136037
Uttarakhand	.	.	.	0.826752	0.278584

[Source: Census 1971 to 2011]