

The Challenges of Child Labour in Rural India

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ABSTRACT

Child labor is a complex socio-economic issue that constitutes a fundamental violation of children's rights and breaches both international and national laws. It represents a significant detriment to a child's future prospects. Often linked with poverty, child labor involves children contributing to household economies. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates in 2012, there were approximately 168 million children aged 5-17 involved in child labor, with 120 million of them falling in the 5-14 age group. Although there has been a decrease in child labor since 2000, especially in the developing world, it still persists as a considerable concern. Effectively addressing this problem requires strong political determination, financial support, and a fundamental shift in societal attitudes towards the acceptance of child labor. Child labor remains a significant issue in India despite the enactment of numerous policies and initiatives aimed at its elimination. It's worth noting that India, as a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), ratified the document in 1992. This research examines the factors impacting child labor in India, with particular attention to rural areas.

Key words: Child labor, Poverty, ILO, UNCRC, Enactment

INTRODUCTION

The term 'child labor' encompasses not only children working in industries but also those engaged in any form of non-industrial occupations that are harmful. According to the 2001 Census, child labor is more prevalent in rural regions compared to urban areas. Specifically, 89.57 percent of working children are found in rural areas, while 10.43 percent are in urban areas. According to estimates from the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO) 66th round in 2009-10, out of 4.9 million child laborers, 4.2 million (85.7%) are situated in rural areas. Despite a decreasing trend in overall child labor incidence in India, there persists a significant concentration of child labor in rural areas. The rural sector commonly faces challenges such as inadequate schools, variations in school quality, difficulties in retaining teachers in remote areas, limited access to education for children, inconsistent rates of rural school attendance, and lower educational standards and achievements. Children may also have to travel long distances to reach school, and even when they are enrolled, school breaks often coincide with sowing and harvesting seasons.

In view of complex socioeconomic challenges and systemic shortcomings, child labour remains a major problem in India's agricultural sector. Child labour continues to exist in a variety of forms throughout the agricultural sector, despite legislative measures and efforts aimed at eliminating it. Children are deprived of their fundamental rights, including access to education, adequate health care and opportunities for personal development, as a result of participation in agricultural labour. The physical and mental well being of young people can be adversely affected when they engage in physically demanding and sometimes hazardous work. In addition, by limiting their future prospects for higher education and better employment opportunities, it prolongs the cycle of poverty.

The combination of factors makes child labour in the agricultural sector a frequent occurrence. The main drivers are poverty, which makes families dependent on the work of children to make ends meet. The problem is exacerbated by the lack of access to education and inadequate enforcement of legislation on child labour. Young people tend to engage in farming, livestock rearing and other farm tasks from a young age in areas where agriculture is the main source of livelihood. Improving access to quality education, especially in rural areas, should be a focus of efforts aimed at providing alternatives for children's labour. Strengthening enforcement mechanisms and raising awareness about the harmful consequences of child labor are also crucial steps. Furthermore, reducing reliance on child labour may be helped by actions to alleviate poverty and improve the opportunities for gainful employment of disadvantaged families.

Objectives of the Study

1. To find out the present scenario and trends of child labour at national level.
2. To know the reasons for child labour in agriculture sector
3. To know the government initiatives for child labour Issue.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Adeoti, A. (2013) study observes the determinants of child labour and schooling among cassava farming households. It was found out that there is huge structural difference in the choice of child activities options across gender and age categories. The reveals that the participation of male children in agricultural activities than female. It was also found that the children in the age group of 6-9 were not in school, this delayed in school enrollment have negative impact on child well being. Further, the study revealed that, there was a gender inequality in school enrollment. As compared to boys, girls enrollment was seen less in the primary schools. The researcher found that gender, education of the parents; farm size and availability of the schools were the prominent reasons for child labour in the study area. The researcher suggested that, the initiatives which focus on free and compulsory education, creation of public awareness on the issue and involvement of NGOs will help to tackle the problem.

Barman, B., & Barman, N. (2014) Compulsory education has historically been one of the most important tools to eliminate child labor. School offers children guidance and an opportunity to understand their role in our society. That is why many in the developing world are calling for immediate removal and insisting that children go to school. But there are many problems with this, for example, children do not go to these schools without changing their economic situation.

METHODOLOGY

This study is based on mainly secondary data. It collected the data from Census of India Reports, NSSO, ILO and from different journals, books and internet.

Child labour estimates in India

As per the 1971 Census, the entire country had recorded 10.7 million child workers aged 5-14 years. By the 1981 Census, this number had risen to 11.6 million. In 1991, the figure stood at 11.2 million. The 2001 Census indicated a steady increase, with 12.26 million child workers documented, reflecting a continuous rise in absolute numbers. However, the 2011 Census showed a decline in child labor, coinciding with a sustained global campaign against child labor, involving various stakeholders and efforts at multiple levels.

Agricultural Child labor: Issue and Challenges

There is a need for a multidisciplinary approach with regard to the problem of child labour in agriculture. In order to provide a feasible alternative for child labour, efforts should be made to improve access to quality education, especially in the rural areas. Strengthening enforcement procedures and raising awareness about the negative effects of child labor are also critical tasks. Furthermore, actions aimed at alleviating poverty and boosting economic prospects for vulnerable families can help lessen the need for child labor.

There is not enough data available to make a clear distinction between paid and unpaid work performed by child labor inside and outside the home. It is becoming more and clearer that a large percentage of children are not enrolled in the formal education system, mainly because they are engaged in domestic work. Child labor is a major obstacle to enrollment, retention, and quality education in schools. Unofficial data (e.g., research studies, surveys, and investigations, fact-finding reports by individuals, private institutions and NGOs) does not provide an accurate estimate of the number of children involved in dangerous work and other worst forms of child labour. There are some estimates available for specific sectors and industries (e.g. hybrid cottonseed production, carpet production and brick kilns) but these are based on extrapolations from sample studies.

Children's work in agriculture is often overlooked and unidentified because they help their parents or siblings on the family's farm, or they work piecework or under a quota system on bigger farms or plantations, often as part of immigrant worker families. Because agriculture has historically and traditionally been an informal and unregulated industry in many countries, child labour laws – where they exist – tend to be less effective in agricultural industries than they are in other industries. In some countries, both adult and child workers are not covered by, or are exempt from, safety and health laws that apply to other groups of adult workers.

Government Initiatives

The Indian government has introduced a range of initiatives and programs to address child labor, such as the National Child Labor Project (NCLP) and the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS). These efforts focus on rescuing and rehabilitating child laborers, offering educational prospects, and providing economic assistance to their families.

The regulation of child labor in our nation began with the implementation of the first Factories Act in 1881, followed by numerous legislative measures aimed at either prohibiting or controlling the employment of children. Presently, India has twelve legislations dedicated to addressing child labor issues. Some significant legal enactments in this domain include:

1. The Factories Act, 1881
2. The Children (Pledging of Labour) Act, 1933
3. The Employment of Children Act, 1938
4. The Factories Act, 1948
5. The Plantation Labour Act, 1951
6. The Mines Act, 1952
7. The Factories (Amendment) Act, 1954
8. The Merchant Shipping Act, 1958
9. The Motor Transport Workers Act, 1961
10. The Apprentices Act, 1966
11. The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986
12. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009

ILO initiatives

The ILO has set a goal to eliminate child labor globally. To achieve this it has adopted a total of 18 conventions and 16 recommendations. India has ratified 6 out of the 18 conventions. As of March 2006, 143 countries had ratified Convention No. 138, which establishes minimum ages for various types of work, and 158 countries had ratified ILO Convention No. 182, which addresses the worst forms of child labor. In 2007, the ILO spearheaded the establishment of the "International Partnership for Cooperation on Child Labour in Agriculture," comprising the ILO, FAO, IFAD, IFPRI, agricultural producers' organizations, and IUF14. The objectives of this partnership are to:

1. Create awareness on child labour in rural areas, especially in agriculture,
2. enhance rural children's access to high-quality education
3. advocate for safer and more sustainable agricultural practices and rural development
4. Eradicate child labour and
5. Create decent work opportunities

CONCLUSION

Child labor in India's agriculture sector persists as a complex and deeply entrenched issue. Addressing it requires concerted efforts from government agencies, non-governmental organizations, communities, and society at large. By prioritizing the rights and well-being of children and implementing comprehensive strategies, India can work towards eradicating child labor and ensuring a brighter future for its youth.

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