

Impact of Child Labour on Health and Well Being of Children

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Abstract

Child labour is a pervasive phenomenon across the world especially in the low and middle income countries. There exists a range of factors that causes and drives the cycle of child labour ranging from socio-cultural to economic. No matter whatever the reason for its cause, the impact of child labour on young children's growth, development and well-being has been enormous and is a catastrophe not only for the victims of child labour but undermines the progress of nations in the long run. Many studies have been constituted to examine the adverse impact of child labour on physical, emotional, mental, economic and moral well-being of children. Studies have revealed that the impact faced by child labour is such that it not only affects them in the short run but has a multiplier effect undermining their future and which in many cases becomes too late to correct. Hence, this paper will be an attempt to describe the phenomenon of child labour and analyse the impacts of child labour on the overall health and well-being of children.

Key Words: Child Labour, Health, Well Being, Danger, Hazardous.

INTRODUCTION

Child labour is one of the most pressing global issues right now. As a result, nations and international organisations like the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) initiated steps to address the issue of child labour, which involves the exploitation of children as young as five years old. While it's true that even wealthy nations deal with child labour, the issue is most severe in low and medium income nations throughout Africa and Asia. Child employment has long been an issue of concern for the international community. In 1919, at the inaugural session of the International employment Organisation (ILO), the first effort to address this problem was taken by establishing a minimum age of fourteen years for children to work in industry. Child labour was outlawed in 1973 according to the International Labour Organization's Minimum Age Convention (Convention138), which defined it as economic activity carried out by a person under the age of fifteen and argued that it was harmful to the children's physical, mental, and moral health as well as their ability to attend school. Also, the United Nations General Assembly passed a convention on the rights of the child on November 20, 1989, which prohibits, among other things, the commercial exploitation and abuse of children.

State parties are obligated to safeguard children "from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral, or social development" according to Article 32 of the Convention. Furthermore, UNICEF advocates for a more all-encompassing solution to the issue of child labour, arguing that it is exploitative and harmful to children's physical, mental, emotional, social, and moral development. (F. Arat, 2002, pp. 177-178)

Countries' definitions of child work vary, despite the fact that several have taken action in this area. In order to grasp the problem, one needs just take a quick look at a few definitions. According to the ILO, child labour is any job that causes physical or emotional damage to a kid and robs them of their youth, dignity, and potential. Work that poses a threat to a child's mental, physical, emotional, social, or moral health, as well as work that prevents them from regularly attending school, fall under this category. Child labour, according to this definition, does not include all tasks performed by children.

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Any job, whether for paid or not, that a child does when they are too young, in an unsafe environment, or if it has an adverse effect on their physical health, mental development, moral fibre, or academic performance is considered child labour in Ghana, according to the country's 2003 Child Labour Survey (GCLS). Also, the GCLS specifies that children cannot spend more than four hours a day in school or training for economic or non-economic occupations. (ILO/IPEC-SIMPOC, 2007, p.4). On the other hand, Guyana National Child labour Survey Report (2004) restricts child labour definition to include unconditional child labour in its worst forms and those children under 18 that were engaged in work for atleast twice per month in economic activities under harmful physical and environmental conditions (Edmonds, 2008, p. 22). The definition adopted by Nepal National Household Survey is even narrower as it defines child labours as those engaged in performing only the market works (Edmonds, 2008, p. 22). Likewise there are variations in definitions adopted by many countries while estimating the statistics on child labour in their respective countries.

Besides, one concern that has been raised is about the non-inclusion of household chores performed by children at their homes by most of the countries. Children especially girls spend hours engaging in household chores like cooking, cleaning, washing clothes, running errands, looking after younger siblings, looking after the sick and infirm at home making them susceptible to fatigue, affecting studies and other diseases. Hence these complexities make the estimation of child labour and dealing with it a complex and arduous task.

The lack of a universally accepted definition of child work has made it impossible to collect reliable data on this issue on a global scale. Reports indicate that child labour has declined over time due to international and national efforts, but the figure is still concerning. Worldwide, 152 million children were working as child labourers in 2016, with the International Labour Organisation estimating that 1 in 10 children were involved in this industry. Additional data segmentation reveals that 73 million children, or around half of the projected child labour estimates, were allegedly engaged in dangerous employment that put their health and safety at risk. According to Edmonds (2007), children face the risk of physical injuries and morbidities as a result of exposure to harmful substances or weariness from long hours. Some injuries may develop permanent health issues that endure into adulthood. (Jayawardene et.al. 2022, p.78).

About one-quarter of the youngsters in the world's poorest nations work as labourers. With a rate of 29% in sub-Saharan Africa, 32% in central and western Africa, and 36% in eastern and southern Africa, the continent of Africa has the highest frequency. Eleven million children are reportedly employed as labourers in India, according to official studies. Nevertheless, estimates from non-governmental sources indicate that there may be 40 million youngsters working, making up around 13% of the employed population. In UP, 8.9 million children work as labourers, whereas in Bihar and Maharashtra, the figures are 4.5 and 4.9 million, respectively. One million child labourers are employed in Delhi alone. Urban and semi-urban regions account for 70.9% of child labour, while the service sector accounts for 17.1% and industry for 11.9%. (Srivastava, 2019, p. 634)

Objective of the Study

1. To understand the concept of child labour.
2. To know the impact of child labour on health and well-being of children.

Statement of the Problem

Just like adults, children are individuals in their own capacity. The propagation and recognition of children's rights is a testament to the recognition that they are humans with different needs of their own. Like any adult they have the basic right to live a life free from danger, exploitation and abuse. Besides, today's children are the assets of the nation as future legislators, administrators, economists, jurists, social activists and skilled and healthy manpower that will take the command of the nation.

However, despite realising this fact, societies across the world have failed to provide a congenial environment for their holistic growth and development. Violation to their rights through various types of exploitation is a reality today stripping them of a dignified and healthy life. Child labour is one such way

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through which children across the globe are deprived of a healthy childhood and future. Hence, this paper is an attempt to discuss the phenomenon of child labour and its impacts on the health and well being of children and suggest some policy implication measures to root out the problem.

Literature Review

Chubayangar, T (2013) in the paper *Migrant and Trafficked Children in Hazardous Employment: The Case of Nagaland* revealed that many migrant and trafficked children from the state and those from outside are employed in informal and domestic sector. While surveying the districts of Mon, Kohima and Dimapur it was found that although children had come to learn skills through work and in the hope that they would be schooled by employers, they end up performing unskilled jobs and who made them work for long hours without rest and paid very low wages ranging from Rupees 100-500 per month. Besides, traffickers also exploited them by withdrawing them from current employer making up excuses and then gave them away to a new employer in return for one time remuneration. The study revealed that the traffickers were mostly parents; relatives and peers.

Ali (2013) in the paper *No Child Labour Domestic Work* viewed that although child domestic work is the most widespread form of child labour, there is sparse information regarding it in the public domain. He asserts that this practice is akin to slavery, may be forced to work round the clock without any leisure time and be practically imprisoned by the employer. Moreover, parents prefer to send their girl child more than boy child to work as domestic workers.

Nanjundra (2014) in the article *The Paradox of Child Labour and Sociology: Issues and Perspectives* reports that various researches there is an intricate relationship between various socio-cultural factors and the intensity of child labour problem. In the ancient and traditional societies work for children was considered as a part of socialization process focusing mostly on family based work. The author opines that the prevailing modes of kinship, marriage and modes of domestic organisation have its distinct roles in prevalence of child labour. Quoting Naidu, in various instances parental roles is delegated to non-parental kin who foster these children, fulfill the obligation by training and maintaining children and thereby avail the right to enjoy the services of the young. Further quoting Nayar, girls are more prone to abuse and exploitation especially sexual abuse. If examined at a microscopic level child labour is also sex specific and so does the difference in ramifications.

Lamani and Venumadahava (2014) in *Child Labour and Child Rights in India* viewed that child labour causes physical, emotional and educational neglect of children. Exploited at a young age they suffer from low self-esteem which at times becomes a reason for destructive behavior among the children.

Gupta (2015) in *Child Labour in India: A Brief Study of Law and Its Implementation* informs that that state of girl as child labour is even more distressing as compared to that of boys. Girl child labour is common at homes especially as baby sitters and become an easy target of sexual exploitation. They are prominently working as invisible labour. The work they do especially don't come under the purview of economic activity, unrestrained hours of work which affect their opportunity to learn education, grow up into unskilled labour and are considered low in status.

Das and Singh (2016) in *Economic Condition of Child Labour Working in Hotel Industry of Barak Valley in Assam: A Study* reported finding conducted in three districts. They revealed that in the study area children from poor backgrounds especially from rural and suburban areas between 8-14 years were working in hotels. These children were victims of physical, health and economic abuse from the employers who made them work for long hours in unhygienic conditions and even trapped them under drug addiction to make them work for long hours. They faced abuses from customers and co-workers as well. Moreover, there was a big difference in wage between child labour and adult labour that is 1490 rupees per month to child labours compared to 7844 paid to adult workers.

Research Question

1. What is the concept of child labour?
2. What is the impact of child labour on health and well being of children?

Research Methodology

For this paper, secondary sources in the form of articles have been consulted.

Analysis

Child labour is an anathema to humanity particularly children. There is a thin line between child work which is looked at from the positive lens and child labour looked at from the negative lens which the society have intentionally or unintentionally surpassed undermining the health and well-being of children. Hence, the perpetrators include not only any third party but even the parents of children who wish the best for their offspring. Child work which is seen as a positive thing for children to socialise and learn basic skills of life as part of socialisation process and cultural practice especially in the tribal societies have negatively affected their well being which is mostly unintentional owing to how different societies approach work in the lives of children. On the other some works outrightly considered as harmful owing to its nature that includes works considered hazardous for them such as working in the mines, factories, industries including the worst forms of child labour like bonded labour, forced labour, slavery, child prostitution and those recruited as soldiers in wars such as in the African countries. Many studies have affirmed that exposure to various types of risks by child labour results in long term and short term problems for child labour victims. Hence, the negative impact of child labour on young children can be understood from various standpoints.

Child work poses risks to children's physical health, which is one of the issues surrounding this practice. Children are more prone to harm from abuse and accidents because of their psychological and physiological immaturity. As well as being more easily hurt by noise, heat, and toxins, children are more vulnerable to injuries that occur in accidents. Workplace stress on developing bones and joints may cause stunting and spinal injuries, according to the International Labour Organisation (2002) (Rosati et.al., 2005, p. 439). A child's energy reserves are drained by physical labour. Undernourished children are already at a higher risk of issues like stunting and wasting due to their poor energy stores, which are further depleted when they overexert themselves physically. Children are often exposed to various unhealthy environments where they work with sharp objects, chemicals or long hours of work. Exposing themselves to unhealthy environments such as working with toxic chemicals may affect their health in the short term and long term. They may become victims to various types of diseases like tuberculosis, lung problems, asthma, blindness, typhoid and malaria and others. Many may lose their bodily parts due to accidents in their workplaces. In the long term hazards encountered by them during young age may affect living a healthy life during adulthood becoming a burden for their already poverty stricken family. As a result, every unhealthy adult that countries have become liabilities for the nation in the future.

Thus it diverts the resources of states to spend on unwanted expenditure on social security measures and health sector which could have been avoided and instead used to make their country become a powerhouse of healthy, knowledgeable and skilled man force. With regard to performing work for long hours such as those in household chores make them vulnerable to several of problems such as fatigue and other problems. For instance working with dangerous gases during cooking, using sharp objects in the kitchen and working for long hours without rest endanger their security making them prone to unwanted accidents and develop problems such as back pain or spinal problem in later life. The result of unhealthy children is coterminous to unhealthy adults which is coterminous to endangering the future of the nation and its people.

Due to their very low wages, children who work as labourers are victims of severe economic exploitation. The market conditions already compensate adults less for the unskilled labour that they typically execute. They are unable to negotiate higher rates with employers due to their lack of competence. Some employers take advantage of their youth and lack of experience to make a profit. The substitution of child employment for adult labour is another undesirable outcome of child labour. Employers often use children because they are inexpensive and easy to control. Child labour is rampant

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because it drives down wages for everyone. When adults can't make ends meet, more and more youngsters from low-income households join the workforce.

Plus, as kids grow up, they aren't particularly good workers, and at the rate that technology like AI is consuming every industry, more low-income families will fall into poverty. Because child labourers lack access to school, opportunities for healthy physical development, and skill development, they are more likely to grow up to be adults with limited earning potential, thereby perpetuating the cycle of poverty. Child labour is harmful to the victims and the country as a whole because it limits their possibilities for social mobility, undermines their self-esteem, and limits their potential.

From a socio-psychological perspective, working youngsters as labourers stunts their emotional, mental, and psychological development. Prostitutes, domestic workers, rag pickers, factory employees, miners, and others who employ children routinely subject them to physical, verbal, and sexual abuse on the job. Their ability to regulate their emotions will be severely impaired if they are trained to endure abuse at an early age. As a result, they may grow up to be silent victims of bullying and harassment, unwilling to speak up when they experience abuse. Tragically, they lose their dignity at a young age because they feel inferior to others their age and from various socioeconomic situations. Another danger is of the children becoming delinquents who are unable to control their emotions of sadness, frustration and anger and many even take their own lives unable to vent out their emotions. When adults they may perpetuate the same on others as recruiters of child labour and abuse and sexually exploiting children.

Conclusion

Deprivation of healthcare and education, together with the loss of childhood, are therefore significant outcomes of child labour. It is disheartening to discover that child labour has not been significantly reduced or eradicated despite the development of human rights, child rights, approved international treaties, and state laws worldwide. There exist various political, social, cultural and economic reasons that drive child labour. However, one should not give up on curbing and ultimately eliminating it through comprehensive studies of various socio-cultural, economic and political factors operating across different societies. Policies are not to be devised from a myopic lens but consider the existing factors around child labour and probable solutions that may be distinct for different societies need to be framed.

The ramifications of child labour not only goes beyond the individual damage encountered by child labour victims but also threatens the society's security and progress in the field of economy, moral, physical and economic development. The future manpower of any country is dependent upon the present children of that country. Hence, the quality of the childhood is, therefore, to be taken adequate care of, attention and protection provided to them ensuring that they develop to their highest potential. Thus it is the need of the hour and not only political and social responsibility but moral responsibility of the nations to outcast this problem. Elimination may take time considering various unavoidable constraints however, efforts needs to be continuous and pursued with full vigour to eliminate the problem.

Recommendations

Some of the policy implication measures to control and eliminate child labour are:

1. Raising the economic standard of the poor through better wages so that they can make up for economic subsistence of the family.
2. Awareness regarding family planning to the poor families. More children means more mouths to feed, as parental wage cannot meet the needs it compels parents to send children for employment.
3. Improving the quality of elementary education so that parents and children find it attractive to send children to schools than engage in employment.
4. Educating parents of child labour and public about the cons of child labour.
5. Educating parents that work inappropriate to their age given though household chores should not be given to children. Performing household chores for unregulated period in different conditions may become hazardous for children especially for girls.

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6. Awareness to make people understand that childhood is a separate stage of life with different needs for their optimum physical, growth and development.
7. Strict implementation of laws framed under the Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act.
8. Proper rehabilitation of children so that they do not revert back to becoming child labour after being rehabilitated.

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