

# Can Child Labour Be done With: An Overview Of Recent Programmes, Policy Proposals Suggested To Address The Issue

Dr. Anuva Choudhury

Lecturer in the P.G Department of Industrial Relations and Personnel Management (IR&PM),  
Berhampur University, Berhampur 760007, Odisha, India.

**Abstract:** The issue of child labour is not a new concept in the Indian context. The present paper examines the situation of child labour in India as inferred from recent empirical studies. Further, the paper analyses the determinants of child labour in the country. Despite the countless policies and programmes launched to address the issue, the resultant dent caused in the numbers is very meagre. As the child gets older, income effects become more important determinants of child labour than the costs of education. Children are continued to be exploited and abused because the State and people do not address children's issues comprehensively and effectively. There is clearly an urgent need for a set of additional policies and programmes to help contain the issue of child labour. The paper reviews and suggests certain proposals for the development of more effective coping strategies, policies and programs to address the issue. The current paper adds a practical, actionable implication for the academicians, professionals working in the industry and government authorities to deal with the issue. Empowering communities with the knowledge to demand for proper implementation of employment schemes, food security and access to all government provisions would help to reduce instances of child labour.

**Keywords:** *Empower, Determinants, Employment schemes.*

## Introduction

Child labour is a global phenomenon. It exists in developed and as well as developing countries. The issue of child labour is not a new concept in the Indian context. The issue has evolved over time with all its negativities surrounding it. Since independence though as a society we have come a long way, the issue of child labour has remained one of the most vexed issues of all time. Among the deprived and dehumanised poor children, the worst sufferers are the children at work. Their suffering becomes unfathomable when we look at the torture and agony of these children engaged in hazardous and exploitative work. The UNICEF has rightly observed that a child engaged in hazardous work is a betrayal of the child's right as a human being and is an offence against our civilization.

Lately, a decline is seen in the absolute number of child labour in India as per census 2011 as compared to the number of child labour in the previous periods' census outcomes. Despite the countless policies and programmes launched to address the issue, the resultant dent caused in the numbers is very meagre. Child labour, somehow, has become a social norm that we accept and tolerate in our society. This exploitative and abusive practice will continue unless society adopts a zero tolerance attitude towards it. There is clearly an urgent need for a set of additional policies and programmes to help contain the issue of child labour.

## Background and Significance

Child labour is prominent in rural India - 80% of working children live in India's villages, where most of them work in agriculture. Some of them also work in household industries and are employed in home-based businesses. Children between 14-17 years engaged in hazardous work account for 62.8% of the India's child labour workforce, 10% of who are hired in family enterprises. Over half of working adolescents do not study. This number is higher for adolescents doing dangerous work. It is not surprising that more boys than girls (38.7 million vs. 8.8 million) are forced into doing hazardous work (according to International Labour Organization's World Report on Child Labour 2015). As per the National Census 2011, India still has 10.13 million child labourers in the age group of 5 to 14 after a decrease of around 20% from 2001 Census Figures. There are 22.87 million working children in India between 15-18 years. That means, as per the 2011 Census, 1 in 11 children are working in India (5-18 years). And 80% of the child labour in India is concentrated in rural areas.

As per the census 2011, in Odisha there are around 1.3 crore of children in the age group of 5-14 years working as labourers in different occupations. The south-western districts of the state which have low women literacy rates have high population of child labour. About 87 per cent of the total identified child labourers are from south-western Odisha. The data on the strength of child labour may not be accurate as they are scattered widely in unorganised sectors, as family workers, etc. Some children are also absorbed in permanent jobs. The employer's of child labour do not provide accurate data to the government and non-governmental agencies as they have engaged them in domestic services, non-monetary services, illegal activities etc. Children are also working in non-agrarian environment as bonded labour, anti-social activities like smuggling of drug and liquor pedaling. Also a vast majority of them work as migrant workers in the developed states.

## Objectives of the study

The practical value of different anticipated objectives/outcomes of the present research study are outlined in more detail below:

- i) To identify the indicators in defining the concept of child labour.
- ii) To analyse the dimensions, magnitude and areas of child labour employed and their occupational structure.
- iii) To explain the socio-economic conditions of child labour.
- iv) To investigate the root causes which force families and communities to allow children to be engaged in labour.
- v) To study the working conditions and living standard of child labour and the occupational health hazards faced by them.
- vi) To focus on constitutional safeguards and protective legislation for child labour.
- vii) To suggest appropriate multi-level policy measures, preventive and as well as curative strategies on the basis of the findings of the above aspects. .

## Dimensions of the Study

Below we give an account of existing related literature in order to ascertain the scope of research already done in the areas of Child Labour. A report by International Labour Organisation titled '*World Report on Child Labour – Economic vulnerability, social protection and the fight against child labour*' finds that between 2000 and 2008 the number of child labourers worldwide fell by some 30 million. Notwithstanding this progress, at the end of that period there were still over 215 million child labourers, and over half of them were doing hazardous work. Moreover, the overall downward trend masked rising numbers of children in economic activity in sub-Saharan Africa from 2004 to 2008 (ILO, 2010d).

Another paper by International Labour Organisation (ILO) titled '*Eliminating Child Labour Guides for Employers - Guide One Introduction to the issue of child labour*' finds that Child labour is normally

concentrated in the informal economy, in the rural sector and in other industries hidden from public view. Children who are engaged in child labour, either because they are below the legal work age or because they work in hazardous, illegal or degrading conditions, are unable to develop to their full potential. Employers and employers' organizations can play a role in the global fight against child labour.

Faraaz Siddiqi and Harry Anthony Patrinos in their paper titled *Child Labour: Issues, Causes and Interventions* have concluded that Child labour is a pervasive problem throughout the world, especially in developing countries. Africa and Asia together account for over 90 percent of total child employment.

In India, child labour is especially prevalent in rural areas where the capacity to enforce minimum age requirements for schooling and work is lacking. The inevitability of child labour is essentially a consequence of what can be broadly termed as the 'poverty argument'. Children work for a variety of reasons, the most important being poverty and the induced pressure upon them to escape from this plight. Chronic poverty is responsible for the prevalence and perpetuation of child labour. One pertinent view is that child labour is inevitable and bound to persist is a harsh reality and that withdrawal of children from the workforce is possible only when the economic status of the family improves. Though children are not well paid, they still serve as major contributors to family income in developing countries. Schooling problems also contribute to child labour, whether it is the inaccessibility of schools or the lack of quality education which spurs parents to enter their children in more profitable pursuits.

Child labour is viewed as a harsh reality. As long as poverty continues to exist and it would be difficult to totally eliminate it. Legislative measures are unlikely to succeed in this situation since this would put the poor families under acute economic stress. Principal efforts have to be directed towards regulation and amelioration of work conditions rather than elimination of child labour. A variation of the above approach views that child labour is unlikely to be done away with completely.

It is argued, notably by Ben white (1998) that irrespective of any industrial or agricultural legislation or even compulsory education that may have been responsible for the eradication of child labour, the simplest fact is that child labour still exists practically in every society. It exists because children themselves want it. As long as the various intervention agencies including the State insist on treating children as passive spectators who need to be rescued from work, or as an 'empty bucket' to be filled with whatever the current value system thinks fit, there is little scope for success. Under these circumstances, it is likely that any measure legislative or otherwise would succeed in eliminating child labour even from the supposedly exploitative segments. What, therefore, required is the recognition of the fact that involvement of children in work, paid or unpaid, is not objectionable or problematic. What is objectionable is the manner in which they are exploited specifically because they are children.

The focus should be on improving working conditions rather than removing them from work. In other words, they need to be treated just as any disadvantaged group (for instance women) with emphasis on protectionism and empowerment rather than abolitionism. The policies should be in the reduction of child labour which aims at altering modes of exploitation and the division of labour directly. Some proponents on child labour are of the view that child labour is not bad and in fact under certain circumstances, may even be desirable. Their arguments mainly based on the grounds that alternatives available to children in terms of education are so inferior that the children are actually better off by working. It is argued that by working under carefully supervised conditions, especially in a family environment, a child stand to gain much more than by going to school.

At the end of the spectrum lies the view that all forms of work are bad for children and there can be little scope for compromise on this issue. Proponents of this view argued in favour of children working, whatever their logic, are merely excuses for the perpetration of child labour to the advantage of certain vested interests. According to this view, any distinction between one form of work and another, as far as children are concerned is completely arbitrary. It is argued that the concept of segregation of work done by a child into exploitative 'labour' and non-exploitative 'work' suffers from basic plans and raises many issues than it resolves. The first issue that has to be sorted out is when and what circumstances a work is considered exploitative since it is only the working condition and not the work itself that decides the extent of



exploitation. There is, thus, no simple method by which some activities indulged in by a child could be classified as work and some as labour.

## Policy Proposals

The following proposals both preventive and curative aspects of child labour may be considered for a workable solution to the problem.

- i) When child labour emerges due to economic necessity, protection of child labour can be made by providing sufficient income to the parents of child labour. It calls for wage payment on adequate basis with wider employment opportunities. It will compensate the loss of income due to non-employment of child labour.
- ii) Poverty alleviation programmes must be effectively implemented in the child labour prone areas.
- iii) Universalisation of primary education should be accompanied with special emphasis for economically backward communities. Free and compulsory education should be given the highest priority. The Gurupadmaswamy Committee reported that major concern of the government should be in regard to evolving a meaningful policy for education of the children. Scheme for non-formal education should be initiated to cover the dropouts.
- iv) Voluntary efforts need to be strengthened. The non-government organizations (NGOs) need to work hand in hand with the Government agencies in the identification and rehabilitation of child labour. It is imperative to create awareness against this social evil.
- v) Central and State level Advisory Committees on child welfare be formed to have a vigilant eye on the problem.
- vi) Dedication of the Government authorities and a strong political will is required to cure this social cancer. Penalties for violation of legal provisions must be stringent against the employers.
- vii) Eradication of child labour calls for a long term 'Perspective Action Plan'. The social and economic requirements of the children should not be undermined.
- viii) Wide publicity must be made through the mass media about the protective legislations for the children to make the parents and employers conscious.
- ix) The Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) must be strengthened in rural and urban areas.

## Conclusion

Child labour is essentially an economic problem which cannot be solved by mere legislations. A national policy of labour is called for to improve the socio-economic conditions of working children and their families. The policy adopted in 1987 which comprised three thrust areas- legal action, development programmes on child labour and Project based Plan of Action need to be instituted. An integration of economic and social change along with organized and concrete efforts are needed to bring the child labourers into the mainstream of national life and provide effective solution to the problem.

## References

1. Basu, K. & Van, P.H. (1998). The Economics of Child Labour. *American Economic Review*, Vol. 88(3), 412-427.
2. Bhandari, Jayantilal. (2000). Child Labour Challenges in the New Millennium. *Kurukshetra*, Vol. 49(1), 28-30.
3. Bhargava, H.P. (2001). Practical Solutions to the Child Labour Problem. *Kurukshetra*, Vol. 49, 4.

4. Chakraborty, Sudip. (2005). *Child Labour in Rural Context: concern, causes and cure*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications.
5. Hansa, N. (1988). Tackling the Problem of Child Labour, *Yojana*, Vol. 32(23) 16-31.
6. Hiraway, Indira., & Cottyn, J. et al. (1991). *Towards Eradication of Child Labour*. New Delhi: Oxford and IBH Publishing Company.
7. Juvenile Justice Act. Retrieved from <https://www.cry.org/issues-views>
8. Kanbargi, R. (1991). *Child Labour in the Indian subcontinent: Dimensions and Implications*. New Delhi: Sage.
9. Khan, M.A. (1988). Child Labour: Causes and Remedy. *Yojana*, Vol. 32(23), 16-31.
10. Lal, Geeta. (1997). Child Labour in India: An Overview. *Social Change*, Vol. 27 (3 – 4), 57-65.
11. Mukhopadhyay, Ashim. (1994). Girl Child in Three Indian States. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 29(23), 1379-1382.
12. Rao, Hanumantha K., & Rao, M.M. (1998). Employers View of Child Labour. *Indian Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol.34, 15-21.
13. Remington, F. (1996). Child Labour: A Global Crisis without a Global Response. *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.31(52), 3354-3355.
14. Sharma, Usha. (2004) *Child Labour in India*. New Delhi: Mittal Publications.
15. Sinha, S. (2000). Child Labour. *Kurukshetra*, Vol. 48(12).
16. Statistics of child labour in India State wise. Retrieved from <https://www.savethechildren.in/resource-centre/articles/statistics-of-child-labour-in-india-state-wise>
17. UNICEF (1997). *The State Of The World's Children*. New York: Oxford University Press
18. Weiner, M. (1990). *The Child and the State in India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

