A Study of Urban Child Labour in Nagaland

Daniel Michal Khan, (PhD Scholar)
Political Science
St. Joseph University
&
Asst. Professor
Dept. of Political Science
Tetso College, Chumoukedima

Dr. Somingam Mawon, Asst. Professor,
Dept. of Political Science
St. Joseph University, Chumoukedima, Nagaland-797115

Abstract

This paper attempts to outline the linkage of interstate migration and child labour in Nagaland. This study is based on a sample of one hundred child labourers randomly taken from the rag pickers and brick kilning industries in Dimapur, Chumukedima, and Nuiland area of Nagaland. It was found that hundred per cent child labourers in these two sectors were migrants from other states, viz., Assam, Bihar and Manipur. The one-third (33%) child labourers were female migrated workers. Most of the migrant child workers were in the age group of 10-14 years. The majority of working children (93%) belonged to the Muslim community and all of them belonged to the landless families of labourers. The educational status of the migrant child laborers portrayed a very grim picture. None of them were found to be going to school and the reasons behind their absenteeism were many viz., poverty, lack of decent work opportunities for adults and adolescents, migration, social norms, etc. All of them belonged to the low income families. The wage earnings of working children were meager.

As more children workers engage in the economy, it lower the wages of jobs due to unskilled labour being engaged thereby creating a cycle of poverty in the long run. Thus, child labour is one of the important challenges of sustainable development because it slows down long run growth and social development through reduced human capital accumulation. This study highlights the importance of opening special schools for migrants in both the rural and urban areas so that they can receive basic education. It is also suggested that more employment

avenues for adult labour, both for male and female in the villages of the state be generated through promotion of traditional handicrafts, agro-based industries, pickle-papad making, and small loans with little interests, etc.

Key words: Child Labour, Migration, Child labour wages, Migratory child labour

Introduction

Migration is an important livelihood strategy (Breman, 1996). It is a significant phenomenon in India from economic, political and public health point of view, and plays a decisive influence on people's lives (Bhagat, 2010; Kumar et al., 2008). Migration is the movement of human beings to a new area usually from rural to urban in order to pursue better employment, wages or better living conditions. The Northeast India has been known for in-migration but outflow is three times higher than the inflow in this region. This paper attempts to outline the linkage of interstate migration and child labour in Nagaland, which is generally lacking in migration studies concerning the Northeast region. Thousands of migrants from Assam, Bihar, Manipur and other neighbouring states come to Nagaland in search of well-paid employment. Unfortunately people who migrate to Nagaland are not only poor but have large families to support. In most of the cases, the members of the family including children accompany the migrants.

As per the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (2019), the largest internal migration occurs in low and middle income countries, particularly China and India. The various studies proved that migration leads to vulnerability and a loss of well-being for migrant children as well as an increased risk of morbidity (Kouider, et al., 2014; Rosado, et al., 2013; Washbrook, et al., 2012). According to UNESCO (2019), children of migrant parents may benefit from stability and remittances, but their education and well-being often suffer. In India, all evidence indicates that migrations are large and growing. The majority of the migrant populations belong to Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Castes. They are mainly landless and land poor who possess the least amount of assets, skills or education. Almost all major states like Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra appear to be affected by migration (ILO, 2011-12).

There has been a consistent flow of migration in Nagaland because of employment opportunities in various unorganized or informal sectors. As per 2011 census, 14.9 million migrants were in the Northeast states, comprising of 33% of the total population in this region. In India, one out of five migrants is a child and it is home to 92.95 million migrant children. More than five out of ten (56%) child migrants moved to rural locations, while more than four out of ten (44%) amongst them moved to urban areas (Census 2011). The percentage of boys amongst urban child migrants (0-19 years) was higher (46.8%) as against girls (41.2%). Whereas, in rural areas it was the opposite as migrant girls constituted a greater share (58.7%) as compared to migrant boys i.e., (53.2%). Among the Indian states, Goa continues to have the largest percentage of in-migrant children (0-19

years) amounting to 80.7% of child migrants, followed by Kerala (55.7%), Maharashtra (37.2%), Tamil Nadu (34.3%) and Andhra Pradesh (33.5%) respectively.

While migration may offer opportunities initially, but in the long run, children of the migrated family become particularly vulnerable to child labour (Glind and Kou, 2011). The earnings of the migrants are usually not adequate due to low wages and non-enforcement of provisions of Minimum Wage Act, 1948. These contribute to increasing numbers of migrant children engaging in child labour.

According to a new report by the ILO and UNICEF, the number of children in child labour has risen from152 to 160 million worldwide – an increase of 8.4 million children in the last four years and millions more at risk due to COVID-19 (UNICEF, 10 June 2021). **Ryder G**. (ILO Director-General) said that the new estimate is the wake-up call and we cannot just stand and watch while new generation of children is put at risk. We are at a crucial moment and much depends on how we respond. States need to increase investment in rural development and decent work in agriculture is essential. Poor families need inclusive social protection to keep their children in school even in the midst of economic hardship. This is a time for renewed commitment and energy, to turn the curve and break the cycle of poverty and child labour (ILO and UNICEF, 2021 10 June).

Child labour is also a growing problem in Nagaland. Over the years it has increased from 3000 to 9000 in various works across the 16 districts headquarters towns in Nagaland (State Department of Labour). The Parliamentary Secretary for Labour and Employment, Saku Aier observed that it is becoming a major political, social, economic and moral challenge for the society at large, the rise is because of socio-economic conditions and poverty. He also urged for an active cooperation and support from the community and the NGOs towards eradicating this growing problem (zeenews.india.com, June 13. 2010, 17:45PM IST).

A large body of literature in India had examined the uniqueness and the reason for migration and concluded that it was for economic well-being. (Keshari & Bhagat, 2012; Mahapatro, 2012; Mitra & Murayama, 2009; Kundu & Sarangi, 2007; Kundu & Saraswati, 2012). Most of the migrated parents struggling for survival and for fulfillment of their basic needs of food, clothing or shelter or employment are not in a position to fulfill their obligation to enroll their children at school. On the other hand, failure on the part of parents to help their children with their home work, adversely affects the motivation and self-confidence of children. It is a bitter truth that in India, since a large number of people are illiterate who regard schooling as wastage of time and money; they want their children to earn for the family as early as possible (Verma, 1993).

However, there is a shortage of research studies on child migration in India as well as North Easter region of the country. Thus, this study will be useful to bring the attention of the Governments on better data collection on child migration in national surveys as well as the need for policy makers to acknowledge child migrants as an important target group. The analysis would also provide information about the status of child migration of

Nagaland and provide recommendations for further researcher to get deeper insights into the issue of child migration.

With this background, the present study was carried out with the following objectives:

- To find out the socio-economic background of migratory child labourers of informal sectors.
- To assess the perspectives of child labourers on their reasons for engaging in such hazardous work.
- To find out the impact of migration on children

Methodology

The study was conducted in Dimapur, Chumoukedima and Niuland areas of Nagaland. In many aspects, these areas are becoming important places of Nagaland state, being known as a hive of modern education and business for Nagaland. The study was based on survey method using semi-structured open-ended questionnaire to collect primary data from the study participants after obtaining consent from the employers and assent from the study subjects. A sample size of one hundred children between the ages of 6-17 years were randomly selected from two service sectors such as, rag pickers and brick kilning industries from the three different districts of Nagaland.

Results and Discussion

Age, Gender and Native Distribution

In this study, the migrant child laborers in the informal sectors were maximum in the age group of 10-14 years 56%, followed by 15-17 years age group (27%) and 6-9 years (17%). There was none from the native state in these two (brick kilns and rag pickers) informal sectors and all of the migrants (100%) were belonged to Assam (90%), Bihar (5%), Manipur (3%) and others states (2%). The highest numbers of migrant workers were from neighboring state of Assam. In terms of gender, the majority were males (67%) while 33% were females. The majority of the migrated children were from the most backward and flood prone areas of Assam and other states. They are the children of landless labourers and low land flood affected areas often having no land for cultivation.

Caste and Religion

On the basis of caste, children were divided into four categories, viz., Religious Minorities, Scheduled Castes (SC), Other Backward Classes (OBC) and General Class. It was found that 69% working children belonged to the Religious Minorities, followed by 16% OBC, while 11% were General Class and Scheduled Caste 4%. There was no child who belonged to Scheduled Tribes category. In terms of religion, the highest numbers of children were from Muslim (93%) background and the remaining 7% from Hindu community.

Distribution of Respondents by Study Area

The highest percentage of migrant labourers were found in Dimapur district (66%) and comprised of 45 males and 21 females, followed by 16 males and 8 females from Chumoukedima district (24%) and (10%) that is 6 males and 4 females found in Niuland district of Nagaland. The majority migrant child labourers were concentrated in Dimapur.

Distribution of Respondents by Works

In Dimapur district, the majority 48% (33 males and 15 females) migrant labourers were engaged as rag pickers and 18% (12 males and 6 females) were in brick kilning industries, followed by 19% (11 males and 8 females) child labourers were engaged in rag picking and 5% (5 males) were found in brick kilning industries in Chumukedima. In Niuland, no migrant labourers were found to be working as rag pickers except 10% (6 males and 4 females) who were working in brick kilning factories. Thus, in aggregate out of 100 participants among the three study areas majority 67% (44 males and 23 females) migrant labourers were engaged as rag pickers and 33% (23 males and 10 females) child labourers were working in bricks kilning factories.

Educational Status of Respondents

Out of the total 100 migrant child labourers taken for the study, only 27% (16 males and 11 females) were found going to school but not regularly and 73% (51 males and 22 females) were not going to any school. Among these 32% (17 males and 15 females) were dropouts. This shows that migrant children were largely deprived of the educational opportunities. When enquired about the reason behind their not attending the school, they reported that migration was the main cause behind their absenteeism from the school.

Reasons of Migration

It was found that the highest number of respondents i.e., 82% migrated to Nagaland because their 'family moved' in search of better lives, while 11% did not reveal the purpose of migration and 7% child labourers moved to Nagaland for 'employment'. Surprisingly, none had cited 'education' as the reason for migration.

From this data, it is clear that poverty of the family is one of the most important significant determinants for migration.

Table 1. Other Socio-Demographic Data

Sl. No	Socio-demographic variables	Total no. of participants = 100	
		Frequency	Percentage
1	No. of family members (n=100)		
	1-5 members (small to medium)	39	39%
	6 -10 members (large)	61	61%
	Total	100	100
2	Parents monthly income (n=100)		
	Nil	12	12%
	<Rs. 3000	11	11%
	Rs. 3001-5000	47	47%
	>Rs. 5001	16	16%
	Total	86	86%
4	Status of Parents (n=100)		
	Dead	12	12%
	Alive	74	74%
	Abandoned family	14	14%
	Total	100	100
5	Agricultural Land (n=100)		
	Parents have no agricultural land in their origin state	91	91%
	Parents are holding agricultural land in their origin state	9	9%
	Total	100	100
6	Parent's Occupation (n=74)		
	Labourer/daily wager	62	62%
	Rag picker	12	12%
	Total	74	74
7	Rental /month (n=100)		
	< Rs. 1000	37	37%
	Rs. 1001-2000	56	56%
	Nil	7	7%
	Total	100	100

Source: Primary Data

Table 1. reveals socio-demographic data of the respondents that 61% migrant child labourers belong to large family where in the family 6-10 members live and 39% belong to small or medium families. In terms of the status of parents being alive or dead, the study found that 74% respondents' father or guardians were alive. However, 12% migrant child laborers' parents had died and 14% respondents' fathers had abandoned the family and left the children behind with their mother. It was found that 91% of child labourers' parents had no agricultural land in their origin state, while only 9% parents are holding agricultural land in their native place.

The majority of the migrant child laborers' parents were daily wagers (62%) and working in various informal sectors with low pay and some time with no pay. A small minority 12% were working as rag pickers.

The inference that may be drawn from the above data that larger the family, the greater is the possibility of having child labourers in these two sectors. It may be due to the reason that parents are not able to care, feed and bring the children up properly due to their meager income. This is also evident in the data that the maximum monthly income of the parents was between Rs. 3001-5000 (47%), with most of the families (56%) spending Rs. 1001 to 2000 just for monthly house rent. This would mean that the family will have to manage the rest of the household expenses with the remaining amount which may be highly insufficient. It culminates in the transmission of children who are compelled to do such jobs in order to sustain themselves and their family.

Table-2: Distribution of migrant labourers based on their working condition

Sl. No	Work related data	No. of respondents	Percentage
1.	Type of rag picker (N=67)	M=44 & F=23	
	Free roaming rag pickers	51	51%
	Rag pickers linked to a scrap dealer	16	16%
	Total	67	67
2	Brick kilns labourers (N=33)		
	Support parents in kilning	19	19%
	Work independently	14	14%
	Total	33	33
3	Mode of Employment (N=100)		
	Through own effort	13	13%
	Through parents	78	78%
	Through others	9	9%
	Total	100	100
4	Work experience (N=100)		
	≤1 year	24	24%
	1 -3 years	56	56%
	>4 years	20	20%
	Total	100	100
5	Daily income (N=100)		
	0 - Rs. 100	36	36%
	Rs. 101-200	43	43%
	Rs. 201-300	17	17%
	>Rs. 301	4	4%
	Total	100	100
6	Mode of Payment (N=100)		
	Daily	55	55%
	Weekly	38	38%
	Monthly	7	7%
	Total	100	100
7	No. of hours of work/day (N=100)		
	5-6 hours	39	39%

7-8 hours	49	49%
9-10 hours	12	12%
Total	100	100

Source: Primary Data

In terms of work related information of the respondents, out of 100 respondents, the majority 67% migrant labourers were rag pickers and 33% were engaged in brick kilning industries. Out of 67% rag picker, 51% of the rag pickers were free roaming rag pickers and a small minority (16%) of them was linked to a fixed scrap dealer who provides them pulling carts, weighing scales, money to purchase waste from the household and take the waster collected by them at the end of the day. The remaining 33% were working in brick kilning industries; while 19% children were helping their parents at brick kilns by moving and drying bricks with minimal pay and 14% children work independently in brick kilns. It is an alarming and grim picture for the society that 78% migrant child labourers were asked by their parents to join work and to support family financially by their earnings. A disturbing scenario observed in this study is that the migrated parents, instead of sending children to schools, sent them to work or made the children work together with them in brick kilning industries and even used their children to collect rags from dumping areas.

In terms of work experience, the majority (56%) of the migrant child labourers had work experience between 1-3 years, while 24% had less than one year experience and 20% labourers has four years and above experience. In terms of daily income, 43% earn between Rs.101-200; while 36% labourers earn less than Rs.100 and a few of them that is 4% earn more than Rs. 300 daily. Due to non-enforcement of provisions of Minimum Wage Act, 1948 in our country, the labourers are still exploited economically. In regards to mode of payment, 55% earn daily basis, while 38% earn weekly and the least 7% earn monthly basis. Almost half of the total respondents 49% were working for 7-8 hours per day, while 39% work 5-6 hours and the least 12% laborers work 9-10 hours daily.

Table 3. Work related information and aspirations

Sl No	Themes and Sub-themes	No. of respondents	%
1	**Reasons for engaging such Occupation (n=100)**		
	To support family	67	67%
	Family traditional occupation	4	4%
	No other work eligibility/Need not require capital	18	18%
	No one to help family	11	11%
	Total	100	100
2	**Reasons for Dissatisfaction with work (n=100)**		
	Need to walk long distance everyday	46	46%
	Work is too heavy for me	13	13%
	Due to regular health issues	23	23%
	Income is minimal	18	18%
	Total	100	100
3	**Aspirations of Migrant labourers (n=100)**		
	Continue work only	46	46%
	Continue studies if help provided	21	21%
	Work and attend school at the same time	26	26%
	No idea	7	7%

Source: Primary Data

There were several dimensions to understand the dynamics of the existence of migrant labourers into the urban informal sectors. The majority migrant child labourers 67% engaged in such a hazardous work to earn and support their families financially, while 18% said that they were not familiar with any other works and have no capital to do other things and 11% engaged in such hazardous work because they have no one to help their family. Surprisingly, a few of them i.e., 4% responded that it was their family's traditional occupation.

Reasons for Dissatisfaction: Almost half of the respondents i.e., 46% were dissatisfied with their work because they walk long distance everyday inorder to collect good amount of rags, 23% respondents said that they have regular health issues mainly body ache and skin problems, and 18% labourers are dissatisfied because they feel that the income is minimal while 13% were dissatisfied because they feel that the work they are engaged in is too heavy for them.

Aspirations of Migrant labourers: Almost half of the study participants (46%) preferred to continue working because of their obligation towards their family, while a little more than a quarter (26%) would prefer to work and attend school at the same time and (21%) preferred to continue studies if help is provided to them. Only a few i.e., 7% respondents had no future plans. Thus, this study finds that almost half of the respondents 47% (26% + 21%) aspired to study if an opportunity provided to them.

Recommendations

Migration provides opportunities and serves common economic and survival strategy for families and their children. It is vulnerable and has influenced every aspect of life in the origin as well as the destination. The impact of migration has been felt particularly in the Northeast region of the country (R. Lusome & R. B. Bhagat, 2020). In recent times, there has been apprehension of small ethnic communities of the region being overwhelmed by huge inflows of migrants and subsequent demand for restriction and management of migration (R. Lusome & R. B. Bhagat, 2020).

In order to eliminate child migration, the foremost need is to bring about attitudinal change of government and all sections of the society to child labour. Government's oversight should increase where there are many child labourers working in hazardous conditions so as to better protect the rights of migrants, including migrant children. Due to the informal nature of these kinds of work, protection for migrant children has been minimal. If policies remain unchanged, then problematic link between migration and child labour would persist (Glind V. de H. and Kou A., 2011).

Governments or any other societies can provide low interest affordable loans to the deserving migrating workers. For instance, a village in Nepal where a cooperative bank offers loans to migrating workers at a low interest rate guaranteed by the community (United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator's Office Nepal, 2010). The ILO has also suggested access to affordable credit for youths of working age and low-interest government loans to promote educational endeavors and delay migration for work (ILO-IPEC, 2010c). The State should also provide more rehabilitation centres for rehabilitation of withdrawn children both in rural and urban areas for counseling and providing health care services, etc.

The children in this study have shown interest in getting education. They wanted to be someone different one day, but their dreams will always remain a dream, if government and the society at large do nothing for them immediately. It is, therefore, suggested that the government or NGOs should start schools at their convenient time near their working or residential places, both for urban and rural migrant labourers. A need is also felt to initiate awareness programmes that make the public, migrants in particular, aware of labour laws and the vulnerabilities associated with migrant children. The implementation and enforcement of child labour protection policies and legislation is urgently needed in the area of victim protection and children's rights. The State Government can make use of Article 15(3) of the Indian Constitution to articulate and forcefully implement laws and policies to reduce violation of child's rights.

As migration is socially normative and an economic strategy, it is likely to continue in spite of the risks involved. What is important is to ensure safe migration, which requires warning children about the risks of migration as well as equipping them with the information and tools for seeking assistance by providing emergency contact

numbers of such agencies or organizations. For example, Child Line 1098 number, Nagaland Helpline number 100, Women Helpline number 181, etc.

In the fight against child labour, it is very important that Governmental organizations, NGOs, Churches, pressure groups and state bodies play an important role. Child labour problems can only be prevented if people are made aware of this evil and are educated to tackle the problem with the help of legislative measures and awareness campaign to obtain cooperation of all sections of the society for elimination of these practices.

Conclusion

The study findings add to current available literature about the nexus between household poverty and migration contributing to child labour. Though poverty of parents cannot be used as an excuse for child labour; however, it cannot be denied that household economic status has a correlation with child labour. With the current economic trends in the country, the gap between wealth and poverty is ever increasing. This calls for an urgent need to address the concerns of those living in poverty, creating opportunities for improvement of household economic status so that the incidences of child migration for labour can be reduced.

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