



THE EFFECT OF COVID-19 ON CHILD LABOUR IN MATCH INDUSTRIES AT SATTUR TALUK IN VIRUDHUNAGAR DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

COVID-19 has created a global emergency of unprecedented degree and scale. While re-establishing worldwide wellbeing remains the primary objective, the exacting estimates required are causing enormous economic and social shocks. This pandemic triggers a global lockdown which destroys lives, lowers earning capacities and flattens the economy. However, children are more vulnerable to the long-term consequences and will suffer the most severe adverse effects. As a consequence, children in child labor risk grave physical and mental health problems. Child labour limits children's education, restricts their rights, and limits their future opportunities, and contributes to intergenerational poverty. The number of children in child labour has risen to 160 million worldwide – an increase of 8.4 million children in the last four years – with millions of risk due to the impacts of COVID-19, according to a new report by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and UNICEF. Thousands of match industries are based in Sattur taluk and employ a large number of child labourers and provide moral support to their families. This virus, which has shaken the entire world, is one of the most deadly and has infected everyone, including vulnerable people in the match industry who have lost their earning capabilities. In this light, the current paper aims to assess the impact of the COVID-19 on child labour in match industries at Sattur Taluk in Virudhunagar District.

Key Words: COVID-19, Child labour, Poverty, Income, Standard of Living.

INTRODUCTION

Child labour refers to the exploitation of the labour of children who are either too young to work, or are of working age but work under conditions that subject them to risk. It is an unfortunate reality that children worldwide are often forced to undertake work that is physically, psychologically and morally damaging to them. Nonetheless, not all work performed by children is classified as child labour. In fact, some light work that does not interfere with the child's development, their education, or health, such as helping parents around the home, or earning pocket money outside of school hours or on holidays, can be a positive experience for children. The term child labour therefore does not generally apply to children between the ages of 12-14 that engage in light work or to children between the ages of 15-17 who work in non-hazardous conditions.

Safety matches are one of the widest commodities used by all walks of people. The Match industries are one of the bread earning industry which caters to the need of the rural area. In India's 70% of the requirement of the matches are fed by the Tamilnadu alone and especially the southern districts. In the southern district, Virudhunagar district dominates in the production of matches and exported throughout India as well as abroad. The Sivakasi and Satturtaluk plays a dominating role in producing the matches. Sattur is one of the taluk which have scanty rainfall and agriculture is also very poor and more than thousands of people are depending on match works for their survival.

Outside India, Sivakasi has become synonymous with child labour and this situation has been hard to change in the last few years. A few years back, some activists exposed the fireworks industry over here and their continued employment of children with them. However, the state government is trying its best to redeem the situation by instituting a child labour project, which will try to stop the children from working in the dangerous environment and take up education instead.

COVID-19 and Child Labour

COVID-19, which is one of the biggest Pandemic which we never think off. Due to this pandemic the entire world struck by lock down which leads to loss of lives, earning capacity and subsequent flattening of economy. The women who are earning less normally in the match industries are hit by so much of COVID-19. As for the women are concerned the health is wealth as they are looking after the family and welfare. Otherwise this will affect their livelihood. So in this paper the analysis had been done to correlate the impact of COVID-19 on the socio economic status of women working in match industries.

In villages across the district - Thiruthangal, Ammapatti, Alamarathupatti, Thayalpatti, S.Anaikuttam, T.Ramalingapuram, Kottaiyur, D.Duraisampuram, Viswanatham, Meenakshipuram, Sankaralingapuram and Meenampatti - children continue to work in - or for - fireworks-making units. Increasingly, owing to the strict enforcement of the law, the children work from their homes. As a result, and because they are paid on a piece-rate basis, the children end up working long hours.

The Sivakasi area accounts for almost all the fireworks and 75 per cent of the matches produced in the country. A number of presses, which mainly print matchbox labels, too operate in Sivakasi. Being an arid

region, Sivakasi was climatically suited for the fireworks and match industry. Additionally, in the absence of adequate alternative employment opportunities in agriculture, labour, including child labour, was cheap.

In the match industry, where there are over 1,000 small and tiny units, child workers, mainly girl-children, are common. They do filling, packing, labelling and box-making jobs. Filling and box-making are mostly done in the houses, where children work in large numbers.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In India, from the beginning, matches occupy a predominant role in the economic development as well as industrial development of the country and as such the match industry is being one of the labour intensive industries. Always, it provides wide scope for employment in rural areas for men and women. In match industries 60-70 % of the employees are women from the rural area. Among these, 64 million are girls. Almost half of the 72 million children are engaged in hazardous work; 6.3 million are pushed into forced work and human slavery. Children are driven into this work for multiple reasons: When families fall into poverty, experience income insecurity, emergencies, or are affected by unemployment, human trafficking, conflict and extreme weather events. Government of India as well as Government of Tamilnadu empowered the women in all fields and also motivating them to participate in Science and Technology as well in Military and social environment.

Till the COVID-19 the women were lead a little comfortable and simple life. The COVID-19 has played major impact on their livelihood. Even though the Governments were providing the relief measures this will not be sufficient for them to survive and they are trying to adopt the difficulties. COVID-19 has not do impact only to the women but also to the entire society in the world. So the impact of COVID-19 causes economic impact to the down-trodden people and lead to loss their job.

The purpose of this study is to analyse the various factors leads to the sufferings due to COVID-19 and also to analyse how to develop their livelihood. The present study aims to focus on the study of impact on economic problem due to COVID-19 on the working women in the match industries.

Causes of increasing the child labour during the Pandemic period

The ongoing pandemic has augmented the existing causes of child labour, as well as added new ones.

First, children are forced to work because family incomes are not enough to survive on. With many people losing their jobs due to COVID-19, the financial crises being faced by families has increased manifold. These families will need extra pairs of hands to earn to provide two meals a day, leading to more children entering the economy or working on family-owned enterprises and farms.

Second, children are considered cheap labour, and with businesses and enterprises facing massive financial losses, the demand for cheap labour is going to increase. Due to reverse migration from urban centres, there is also going to be a shortage of adult labour. Children, especially adolescents, will be increasingly in demand to fill this gap.

Third, the pressure on children staying at home, especially girls, will be to contribute to household chores and sibling care. More and more girls will be pulled further away from education and into managing the household.

Fourth, with every livelihood crisis, the risk of trafficking increases. In India, a large number of children are already trafficked for labour. Due to reverse migration caused by the pandemic, a large number of children have returned to their villages. And given the livelihoods crisis already underway in rural areas, the children who are not tracked will become more vulnerable to trafficking. Children in overcrowded relief camps, quarantine centres, and those returning home with their parents are also at increased risk of being trafficked.

Fifth, the closure of schools will lead to a gradual detachment from education, especially for those children who cannot access online education. This detachment will eventually lead to dropouts among children, which in turn will lead to them entering the workforce.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To study the socio-economic profile of the child labourers in the study area.
2. To observe the reasons for increasing the child labour in match industry during the COVID-19 period;
3. To analyse the working conditions and also the problems faced by the child labourers in match industries during the Pandemic period ; and
4. To suggest the suitable measures to eradicate of Child labour in match industries in the study area.

METHODOLOGY

The research was involved on both primary data and secondary data. Primary data was collected by using proper questionnaire method with interview schedule and the secondary data have been collected from books, journals, websites, population details, child labour particulars, provisions, projects, the role of NGOs etc., were collected from the office of the Sivakasi Taluk, The Child Labour Department of the Virudhunagar Collectorate, the records of the NGO and various libraries and so on.

The researcher has not possible to study the entire population of child labour in the match industry in Sattur region. The population details, child labour particulars, provisions, projects, the role of NGOs etc., were collected from the office of the Sivakasi Taluk. The Child Labour Department of the Virudhunagar Collectorate, the records of the NGO and various libraries and this formed the secondary data. So the researcher has collected only limited respondent's i.e.50 respondents of child labours working in the match industry. The researcher has been selected the method of sampling is convenient sampling method.

HYPOTHESES

The researcher has been framed with the following hypothesis.

1. The socio economic factors do not influence the level of the opinion of the Child Labour.
2. There is no relationship between the socio economic factors and the level of opinion of the Child Labour.

Significance of the Study

The present study tries to understand the issues and problems of child labour as well as the efforts taken by the government and the NGOs to combat the problem. The findings of the study will help policy makers, administrators, development organizations, academicians, social thinkers and researchers in framing appropriate policies and planning suitable projects both to prevent child labour and to protect the welfare of the child labourers.

Analysis and Interpretation

Two-way tables were prepared and the analysis was done alongside the tables. Simple statistical tools like percentage and chi square test were used for analysis of this study.

Analysis and Interpretation

S.No	Particulars		No of Respondents	Percentage(%)
1	Age	Below 10	6	12
		10 to 14	10	20
		14 – 16	22	44
		16-18	12	24
		Total	50	100
3	Literacy level	Primary level(1-5)	16	32
		Middle Level Education (6-8)	25	50
		Above Secondary Education level (9 and above)	19	38
		Total	50	100
4	Year of Service	Upto 5 Years	15	30
		6 to 10 Years	22	44
		11 to 15 Years	7	14
		Above 15 Years	6	12
		Total	50	100
5	Type of family	Joint family	26	52
		Nuclear family.	24	48

		Total	50	100
6	Income	Below 25,000	22	44
		25,000 to 30,000	17	34
		30,001 to 40,000	6	12
		Above 40,000	5	10
		Total	50	100

Table No- 1: Details of Number of Family Members of the Child Labor

S. No	Family Members	Frequency	Percent
1	Below – 3	12	24%
2	4 – 5	33	66%
3	6 and Above	5	10%
	Total	50	100%

Source: Primary Data

The above table shows that the majority that is 66 percent of the child Labour family has 4-5 members. Followed by 24 percent has 5 and 10 percent has 6 and above members in their family.

Table No – 2: Age wise distribution of Child Labour Fathers

S.No	Fathers Age	Frequency	Percent
1	21-30	5	10%
2	31- 40	32	64 %
3	41- 50	11	22%
4	51 and Above	2	4%
	Total	50	100%

Source: Primary Data

Above table stated that 64 percent of the child laborers fathers were in the category of 31-40 age group. Followed by 22 percent in the age group of 41-50, 4 percent 51and above category, remaining 10 percent were in the age group of 21- 30.

Table No-3

Occupational Details of Child Labour Fathers

S.No	Fathers Occupations	Frequency	Percent
1	Match industry - Coolie	35	70%
2	Construction Worker	4	8%
3	Driver	5	10%
4	Beggar	3	6%
5	Others	3	6%
	Total	50	100%

Source: Primary Data

Above table stated that majority that is 70 percent of the child Labour fathers working as coolie in Match Industries at Sivakasi. Remaining 8 percent were construction another 10 percent were Driver, 6 percent were beggar another 6 percent were another category of occupations in the study area.

Table No – 4

Details of Child Labour Siblings

S.No	Siblings	Frequency	Percent
1	Below 2	15	30%
2	3-4	27	54%
3	5 and Above	18	36%
	Total	50	100%

Source: Primary Data

From the above table shows that 54 percent of the child Labour has 3-4 siblings in their family, followed by 30 percent below 2 and 36 percent were 5 and above siblings in their family.

Table No – 5

Annual Income of the child labour Family

S.No	Income	Frequency	Percent
1	Below 1,00,000	24	48%
2	1,00,000- 1,50,000	15	30%
3	1,50,000 and Above	11	22%
	Total	50	100%

Source: Primary Data

48 percent of the respondent family annual income was 1, 00,000 to 1, 50,000. Followed by 30 percent were 1,50,000 and above. Remaining 22 percent were Below 1, 00,000 Rupees in the study area.

Table No-6

Total Assets of the Child Labour Family (in Rupees)

S.No	Assets (Rupees)	Frequency	Percent
1	Below 5000	42	84%
2	5001 and Above	8	16%
	Total	50	100%

Source: Primary Data

From the above table it is inferred that 84 percent of the respondents' family assets was below 5000 Rupees. Remaining 16 percent were 5001 and above in the study area. As before mentioned in the social category majority of the children belongs to the Dalit Population so it is noticed that majority of the children family has small amount of assets. It is may be interrelated each other.

Table No – 7

Total Expenditure of the Child Labour Family

S.No	Expenditure (Rupees)	Frequency	Percent
1	Below 3000	4	8%
2	3001 – 6000	4	8%
3	6001 – 9000	41	82%
4	9000 and Above	1	2%
	Total	50	100%

Source: Primary Data

Table no 10 inferred that 82 percent of the respondent family expenditure were 6001- 9000 followed by 8 percent were 3001- 6000, 8 percent below 3000 and 2 percent were 9000 and above.

Table No -8 : Main Causes for Children Become Labor

S.No	Cause	Frequency	Percent
1	Poverty & COVID 19	27	54%
2	Family Problem	10	20%
3	Both Father and Mother Dead	5	10%
4	No Father	4	8%
5	Others	4	8%
	Total	50	100%

Source: Primary Data

Above table stated that 54 percent of the children entered into work due to poverty and COVID 19. Remaining 20 percent were due to family problems another 10 entered into work due to both father and mother was dead, 8 percent were entered to work due to no father, remaining 8 percent respondents were worked due to Other Causes.

Table No – 9 : Reason for Importance of Work on the Child Labour

S.No	Importance	Frequency	Percent
1	Covid 19- lock down	34	68%
2	Family Environment	5	10%
3	No Earning in the Family	6	12%
4	Earn the Money	2	4%
5	Others	3	6%
	Total	50	100%

Source: Primary Data

Through above table 68 percent of the child labor said that work is important for them than the education because COVID lock down period. Followed by 10 percent said that family environment, 12 percent no earning members in their family, 4 percent to earn the money for their own expenses and remaining 6 percent were other reasons in the study area.

Table No – 19 : Type of Income

S. No	Type of Income	Frequency	Percent
1	Daily	43	86%
2	Weekly	-	-
3	Monthly	7	14%
	Total	50	100%

Source: Primary Data

86 percent of the child labor earning their wage by daily basis remaining 14 percent of the child labor was getting their wages at monthly basis in the study area.

Table No – 20: Child Labour Wage Utilization

S.No	Wage Utilization	Frequency	Percent
1	House Hold Expenses	2	4%
2	Self Expenses	2	4%
3	House Hold and Father Drink	17	34%
4	House Hold and Self	12	24%
5	House Hold, Self and Father Drink	16	32%
6	Others	1	2%
	Total	50	100

Source: Primary Data

Above table inferred that 34 percent of the child labor wage utilized for house hold and father drinking purpose, followed by 32 percent of the child labor wages were utilized for house hold and self and father drinking purposes 24 percent were House hold and Self expenses, Each four 4 percent were House hold expenses and Self Expenses. Finally 2 percent of the child labor wages utilized for other purposes in the study area.

Table No – 21 : Self Expenses Details of the Child Labor

S.No	Self Expenses Details	Frequency	Percent
1	Savings	1	2%
2	Smoking and Drinking	33	66%
3	Others	16	32%
	Total	50	100%

Source: Primary Data

66 percent of the child labor spent their wages for drinking and smoking habits, followed by 32 percent of the child labor spent their salary for other purposes. And 2 percent were savings in the study area.

Table No – 22 : Types Hazardous Involved Works of the Child Labour

S.No	Type of Hazardous	Frequency	Percent
1	Accidents	3	6%
2	Sexual Torture	1	2%
3	Employee Problem	15	30%
4	Co Workers Problem	13	26%
5	Others	18	36%
	Total	50	100%

Source: Primary Survey

Above table inferred that 30 percent of the child labor facing problems from employee side in the work place. Remaining 26 percent were Co- Workers problem, 6 percent accidents 2 percent sexual problem and 36 percent of the child labor facing other problems in the study area.

Table No – 25 : Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided%)	Exact Sig. (2-sided%)	Exact Sig. (1-sided%)
Pearson Chi-Square	41.231a	1	.000		
Continuity Correction ^b	37.164	1	.000		
Likelihood Ratio	46.183	1	.000		
Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	40.407	1	.000		
N of Valid Cases	50				

0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.12.

Source: Compiled from primary data

Above table enlighten the chi- square test between Gender and Drug habit of child labor. Its p Value is less than the 0.05%, hence, it is statistically significant, So Null Hypothesis (H0%) was rejected, Alternative Hypothesis (Ha%) was accepted.

Here, There is significant association between gender and drug habits of the child labor.

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Hypotheses Testing-1

H_0 : There is no correlation between Total Income and Total Expenditure of the child labor Family.

H_a : There is correlation between Total Income and Total Expenditure of the Child Labor Family.

Table No – 23 : Correlations

		Total Income of the Child Labor Family	Total Expenditure of the Child Labor Family
Total Income of the Child Labor Family	Pearson Correlation	1	.677**
	Sig. (2 Tailed)		.000
	N	50	50
Total Expenditure of the Child Labor Family	Pearson Correlation	.677**	1
	Sign. (2- Tailed)	.000	
	N	50	50

Source: Compiled from primary data

Above table shows the correlation between total income and total expenditure of the child labor. The correlation analysis shows that P value is less than 0.05%, it is statistically significant, So Null Hypothesis(H_0) was rejected, Alternative Hypothesis(H_a) was accepted.

Hence: H_a : There is correlation between Total Income and Total Expenditure of the Child Labor Family.

Hypotheses Testing-2

H_0 : There is no significant association between gender and drug habits of the child labor

H_a : There is significant association between gender and drug habits of the child labor

Table No- 24 : Cross Tabulation Gender and Drug Habits of Child Labour

			Drug Habits of Child Labor		Total
			Drug Habit Child Labor	Non Drug Habit Child Labour	
Gender	Male	Count	33	1	34
		Expected Count	23.1	10.9	34.0
	Female	Count	1	15	16
		Expected Count	10.9	5.1	16.0
Total	Count	34	16	50	
	Expected Count	34.0	16.0	50.0	

Table No – 25 : Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided%)	Exact Sig. (2-sided%)	Exact Sig. (1-sided%)
Pearson Chi-Square	41.231a	1	.000		
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Fisher's Exact Test				.000	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	40.407	1	.000		
N of Valid Cases	50				

0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 5.12.

Source: Compiled from primary data

Above table enlighten the chi- square test between Gender and Drug habit of child labor. Its p Value is less than the 0.05%, hence, it is statistically significant, So Null Hypothesis (H₀) was rejected, Alternative Hypothesis (H_a) was accepted.

Here, There is significant association between gender and drug habits of the child labor.

Major Findings of the study

92 percent of the child labor in Madurai city attended school they drop out due to the poverty, family problem, school distance and cost of education in this 92 percent of the child labor 24 percent of them said that school experience was good because of education, Friends , playing games in the school etc. as well same 76 percent of the child labor said that school experience was bad because of teacher beating, home work and all.

□ Majority that is 62 percent of the child labor working approximately 14 hours per day. Remaining 20 percent of the child labor working hours approximately 12 hours per day and 18 percent were 13 hours per day in the study area.

□ 88 percent of the child labor work place does not having any facilities, remaining 8 percent of the child labor work place has only water facilitates, remaining 4 percent of the child labor work place has all of the facilities like water, toilet, etc.

□ Only 6 percent of the child labor living in their own home, followed by 10 percent of the child labor living in rental home and 84 percent were living in slum area, road side, nearby bus stand and railway station etc.

□ The study noted that 74 percent of the child labor in the study area were rescued child labor, that is already these child labor rescued by the NGO's or Government organizations, remaining 26 percent of the child labor were un rescued child labor in the study area.

□ 68 percent of the child labor has drug habits, like consuming alcohol; smoking etc. remaining 32 percent of the child labor does not have any drug habits in Madurai city.

Conclusion

The present study examines the socio economic status such as social background, religion, and details family members. Also the study covered what are the causes influencing the child labor. Finally the study found that working status of the child labor in Madurai city. Ultimately study come to know that in the 21 st century many of the governments and reports

stated that there child labor declining in India, but fact is that still not India alone every developing countries child labor is still exists. From this fact it is observed that government policies does not functioning effectively to eradicate the child labor. Government should take serious action to eradicate the poverty.

On the basis of findings of the study, the following suggestions are made. The following suggestion will help to improve the health and wealth of the women workers in match industries during COVID-19.

- Working conditions should be improved in the work places.
- Welfare facilities should be added more in match industries.
- To reduce the social and economic problems and work conflict among the women workers, the match industries should be arranged for training programme.
- Government should take initiative steps for women workers to improve the awareness about the COVID-19 for the self and family.
- They should be given health awareness on other diseases which might happen during the unexpected and unforeseen situations.

6.4 CONCLUSION

Our generation is facing this unexpected pandemic COVID-19 which cost so many lives and create so much of physical, psychological and mental agony among the people irrespective of age, region, geographical location. This is seems to be one of the cruel things being faced by us in this generation. Even though every body was affected directly and / or indirectly by COVID-19, the women workers were affected a lot because of their lead role in the family in brought up the children and co-ordinate with all nature of work and responsibilities of whole family. Most of us expected that the pandemic will be finished by December 2020. But unexpectedly second wave has started which engulf so many lives. India is one of the worst affected countries in the second wave. Hence this also cause so much of concern over the working women about their future of life. From this research it is found that the women who are working in the match industries have more confident in their survival and able to manage the family and society by adjusting the various situations. The level of confident is very high. The second wave also can be overcome by following the norms stipulated by the Government machinery.

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