

Condition of child labour in Ludhiana city of Punjab

SIMRAN KANG SIDHU, SHALINI SHARMA AND GAGANPREET

ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted to find out the socio-economic and working conditions of the child labour and to identify the factors responsible for it. The study was conducted in the industrial hub of Punjab state *i.e.* industrial, domestic and miscellaneous. The data were collected on self-structured interview schedule and analyzed by suitable statistical tools. The major findings of the study were that out of total sample only 10 per cent of the child labourers were from Punjab and the rest 90 per cent were the children of migrant laborers from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Majority of them were living at road side followed by slum areas. One-fourth of the laborers earned even less than Rs. 500 per month. Domestic workers had more facilities (physical and medical) than their counterparts. A majority of industrial laborers complained of frequent abuses by their employers. The main factors responsible for child labour were illiteracy, poverty and family conflicts. The study concluded that the major area of consideration for policy makers and administrator was migrant laborers. Whose uneducated children had to engaged in labour for livelihood.

KEY WORDS : Child labour, Migrant labour, Conditions

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INTRODUCTION

Child labour includes children prematurely leading adult lives, working long hours for low wages under conditions damaging to their health and to their physical and mental development. They some times are separated from their families and frequently deprived of meaningful educational and training opportunities that could open up for them a better future (Gupta, 1979). In a country like India, where over 40 per cent of the population is living in conditions of extreme poverty, child labour is a complex issue. Employers give certain justifications for employing children to suppress their guilt by saying that the work keeps children away from starvation. They are prevented from committing crimes which they would have indulged in if they have no jobs. The beauracrates hold that the total eradication of child labour is not feasible because the government cannot provide substantial alternative employment to them. The social scientists say that the main cause of child labour is poverty. The children either supplement their parent's income or are the only wage earners in the family. Another reason forwarded for the existence of child labour is that it is deliberately created by vested interests to get cheap labour (Ahuja, 2001).

What so ever are the reasons, it is a harsh fact that child labour in India prevails with 44 million labourers in the age group 5-15 years. A visit to several factories in Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra revealed that children work in dangerously polluted factories whose bricks, walls are scarred with soot and there is an oppressive smell in the air. They work near furnaces which burn at a temperature of 1400°C. They handle dangerous chemicals like arsenic and potassium. So far as Punjab is concerned the magnitude of absolute poverty in Punjab is relatively less as compared to many states but there are pockets of relative poverty in the state that is contributing to a sizable child labour force (Goyal, 2005). In a survey conducted by National labour Institute Noida in 2006 in Punjab, it was estimated that there were around 10,000 children working in sports goods industry in Jallandar city. According to 2009's official data by the ministry of child welfare, 2051 and 2316 children are working in the industrial cities of Ludhiana and Amritsar, respectively. There is no denial to the fact that the number of working children in Punjab is quite less *i.e.* 2.9% as compared to other states (like A.P-10.3%, Rajasthan 7.9%, M.P-4.5% and U.P-3.1%) but despite various acts and laws, it has

Correspondence to:

SIMRAN KANG SIDHU, Department of Economics and Sociology, Punjab Agricultural University, LUDHIANA (PUNJAB) INDIA

Authors' affiliations:

SHALINI SHARMA AND GAGANPREET, Department of Economics and Sociology, Punjab Agricultural University, LUDHIANA (PUNJAB) INDIA