

Condition of child labour in Ludhiana city of Punjab

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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 Jalandar 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

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increased overtime from 1.6 per cent in 1961 to 2.9 per cent in 2001. It is a matter of great consideration.

It is seen that Legislative and Administrative measures would be of little use until and unless people get sensitive towards the needs and conditions of these working children. Keeping this in mind the present study was conducted in the Ludhiana city of Punjab to create sensitivity among the citizens, administrators and policy makers regarding child labour around them so that they understand the needs of this marginalized group of society and act in pragmatic way. The specific of the study are to study the socio-economic and working conditions of child labour and to identify the factors responsible for it.

METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted in Ludhiana city of Punjab state. Ludhiana was purposively selected for the study as it leads in industrial growth and development among other cities of Punjab, as well as the most populated city. A sample of 200 male children within the age group of 8-14 years belonging to different units of labour *i.e.* industrial labour, domestic labour and miscellaneous labour (other than mentioned categories) were selected. In the total sample 50 male child labourers from industrial unit, 50 from domestic unit and 100 from miscellaneous unit were randomly selected in the proportion of 1:1:2. Self-structured schedule and standardized psychological tests were used to collect data. The data was analyzed through simple percentages. Exclusion of female child labour is the limitation of the study because of highly disproportionate availability of female child labour in all the categories.

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the present study as well as relevant discussion have been summarized under following heads:

Social characteristics:

Age of the working children is an important factor to determine whether the activity in which child is employed is suitable for his age or not. Observations presented in Table 1 indicates that 80.50 per cent of the children were from the age group 12-14 yrs. and one fifth (19.50) of the labour in the age group 8-11 yrs. It was found that these children started working at a very tender age. Out of the total sample, 43.50 per cent of children were illiterates and about 16 per cent were primary pass. The rest took the admission in school but dropped after two or three years. The highest number of illiterates were in the miscellaneous unit (49.0 per cent) where education was not required at

Table 1 : Distribution of child labourers according to their social characteristics (Percentage)

Social characteristics	Domestic (n=50)	Industrial (n=50)	Miscellaneous (n=100)	Total (n=200)
Age				
8-11 yrs.	14.0	8.0	28.0	19.50
12-14 yrs.	86.0	92.0	72.0	80.50
Education				
Illiterates	32.0	44.0	49.0	43.50
1-4	50.0	36.0	39.0	40.0
Primary	18	20	12	15.50
Religion				
Hindu	98.0	90.0	93.0	93.50
Sikh	2.0	10.0	4.0	5.0
Muslims	--	--	3.0	1.50
Native Place				
Punjab	10.0	12.0	8.0	9.50
Bihar	26.0	40.0	25.0	29.0
U.P	24.0	46.0	53.0	44.0
Himachal	12.0	--	2.0	4.0
Nepal	28.0	2.0	2.0	8.50
Others	--	--	10.0	5.0

all followed by industrial (44 per cent) and domestic unit (32 per cent). It was found that majority of the children were either illiterate or their educational level was equal to or below Primary. The study further highlighted that most of the respondents were Hindus (93.50 per cent) while 5 per cent were Sikhs. Only 1.50% of the respondents were Muslim. The inquiry into the place of birth/ native place revealed that majority of the respondents were the children of migrant labourers from adjoining states which accounted to 44 per cent from Uttar Pradesh followed by 29 per cent from Bihar. Only 9.50 per cent of the children belonged to Punjab state. It was observed that in domestic unit 28 per cent of labourers were from Nepal where as from other two units only 2 per cent belonged to Nepal.

Living arrangement:

It is quite evident from Table 2 that the living conditions of child labourers were not very good. Majority of them were sleeping either at road sides or in small space in slums. 60

Table 2 : Distribution of respondents on the basis of living arrangement (Percentage)

Living arrangement	Domestic (n=50)	Industrial (n=50)	Miscellaneous (n=100)	Total (n=200)
Slums	12	40	45	35.50
Road side	--	60	55	42.50
Proper house	88	--	--	22.50

Table 3: Distribution of child labourers on the basis of working hours and income level (Percentage)

	Domestic	Industrial	Miscellaneous	Total
Income /mth				
Less than 500	24.0	--	4.0	8.0
Rs.500-1001	30.0	8.0	32.0	27.0
Rs.1001-2000	32.0	78.0	40.0	47.50
Rs.2001-2500	14.0	14.0	24.0	19.0
Working duration (hrs)				
<8	72.0	--	14.0	25.0
8-10	6.0	60	28.0	30.50
11-12	10.0	36.0	44.0	33.50
>13	12.0	4.0	4.0	7.0
No fixed holidays	88	44	26	56.50

per cent of industrial and 55 per cent of miscellaneous labourers had not any proper place not spend the night. They just sleep at road sides without basic amenities like water where as 40 per cent of industrial and 45 per cent of miscellaneous labourers were living in slums along with their families. On the contrary, 88 per cent of domestic labourers were living in posh areas. They either lived in the houses of their employers or space provided to their nearby the employer's house and had free basic amenities of livelihood.

Working hour and income level :

It is a well known fact that child labour is basically a cheap labour. Each working child takes the place of an adult worker for almost half the wage. The employers hire children instead of adults per petty unskilled works. More over children are easily handled as well as exploited accordingly. In the market maximum wage rate of a manual labourer is Rs.150 per day. Accordingly the monthly income of a labourer accounts to Rs.3000. But the data in Table 3 presents the dismal situation. Only one fifth (19 per cent) of the children were receiving wages between Rs.2001-2500. Not a single child had monthly income more than Rs.2500. Maximum number (47.50 per cent) of children received wages between Rs.1001-2000 per month (32per cent domestic, 78per cent industrial, 40 per cent miscellaneous). Around one fourth (24 per cent)

of the domestic labourers were working at the minimum amount of Rs.500 or even less and one fifth of then received above Rs.2000. It was evident from the data that about half of the children were receiving almost half of the wages earned by adult labourers.

So far as working hours of the child labourers is concerned, Table 3 reveals that majority (64 per cent) of the children worked for 8-12 hrs. a day. One fourth (25 per cent) of them were working for less than 8 hrs./ days. Out of children who had less burden of work belonged of domestic unit. On the other hand, seven per cent of the total children were working for more than 13 hrs./day. Out of these, children, 12 per cent were from domestic and 4 per cent were from miscellaneous units. It was also observed that 56% of the children could not take leave even on Sundays 88 per cent of domestic labour, 44 per cent of industrial and 26 per cent of miscellaneous workers had to work on Sundays and other festive holidays.

Working conditions:

The working conditions of the child labours was observed in terms of air pollution, ventilation, drinking water and toilet facility, lunch back etc. The data in Table 4 indicated that out of the total sample, 71.0 per cent of them felt that they were working in pollution free environment. The domestic labour working in the residents of their employers considered that there was no pollution.

Table 4 : Distribution of child labourers on the basis of their working conditions (Percentage)

Working conditions	Domestic (n=50)	Industrial (n=50)	Miscellaneous (n=100)	Total (n=200)
Air polluted environment	4	58	27	29
Unventilated rooms	2	40	74	47.50
Dissatisfactory drinking water facility	--	18	41	25.0
Dissatisfactory toilet facility	--	74.0	78.0	58.0
Fixed lunch hours	46.0	82.0	70.0	67.0
Ill-treated by employers	78	88	61.0	72.0

Table 5 : Distribution of respondents on the basis of factors responsible for child labour (Percentage)

Factors	Domestic (N=50)	Industrial (N=50)	Miscellaneous (N=100)	Total (N=200)
Supplement family income	64	74	68	66
Illiteracy	64	70	78	72.50
Conflicting parents	10	4	3	5
Drunken father	26	14	10	15
Orphan	12	16	18	16
Step F/ Mother	6	--	33	4.50

It might be due to the fact that they worked in the house of the employer in posh localities. In case of industrial child labour, 58.0 per cent were working in polluted environment as compared to 27.0 per cent in miscellaneous units. Though majority of child labourers working in industrial and miscellaneous units considered their locality as clean but after visiting the localities it was found that their positive response was due to the fact that either they were not or were ignorant of this fact.

Almost all the domestic labourers (98.0 per cent) were working in ventilated atmosphere. On the contrary the work place of 40 per cent of industrial and 74 per cent of miscellaneous labourers was unventilated and dark rooms. They never saw sunlight during working hours. 41 per cent of miscellaneous and 18 per cent of industrial labourers said they did had to wait for lunch break even for taking water. The toilet facility was available to all the domestic workers where as 74 per cent of industrial and 78 per cent of miscellaneous workers had no toilets facility. They used the open spaces to ease the nature call. In total 67 per cent of the respondents has fixed lunch hours. In case of industrial labour, majority (82 per cent) had fixed lunch have followed by miscellaneous labourers (70.0 per cent). On the other hand, domestic labourers did not have fixed under lunch hours. Though they had to had lunch after the employer's family finished with, yet they eat on usual time. When the child labourers were asked about the behaviour of the employers towards them, they admitted that scolding and abusing beating was the common practice by the employers eighty eight per cent of industrial 78 per cent domestic and 61 per cent of miscellaneous labourers complained of ill treatment by the employers. In a few cases of domestic and miscellaneous labourers, the children were kept in locked rooms and not given food for the whole day. Overall it was found that so far as physical working condition of work was concerned, domestic labourers were in better position as compared to others. However, not much difference among different units was found in the treatment by the employer.

Factors responsible for child labour:

There were several factors which compelled the children to work in such a small age. The study found multiple responses regarding factors. It is evident from Table 5 that majority (25 per cent) of the child labourers started working due to illiteracy. The second main reason quoted by 66 per cent of children was that they had to work to supplement the family income. Another factor for the child labour was that children ran from their homes due to family reasons like step parent (4.50 per cent), drunken father (15 per cent) conflicting parents (5.0 per cent) and orphanage (16 %) etc. and had to work for livelihood. Not much difference was found among different working units regarding these factors. Overall it was inferred that the major two factors which covered all the reasons were poverty and running from home due to family conflicts.

Conclusion:

The study concluded that overall the conditions of domestic child labour was somewhat better than the industrial and miscellaneous labour but not much difference was found in the economic and psychological conditions of the child labourers in all the units. Further, it was found that illiteracy was the main factor of child labour. Abolition of child labour has not been realized so far inspite of great efforts of the government. Even if child labour is withdrawn and put these children into schools with the use of force, the family will have to face loss of income. It becomes more serious matter when child and parents know that even after getting education they will not get employment. The solution to this problem seems to be the assurance of an effective and compulsory skill based primary education programme. To assure the accessibility, education may be given with incentives like free food, clothing, books, stationery bags and stipend etc. Acts and laws are of little use until and unless people as citizens get sensitive towards the needs of these marginalized children. Instead of indifferent attitude towards these children. Instead of indifferent attitude towards them, every citizen

must take some responsibility to curb this evil and act in some constructive way. Particularly in case of domestic labour, employer should adopt the child working in his house for education at least upto Primary level. In case of industrial labour, some skillful training by the government may be provided in the premises of industrial unit for a specific time. This training programme should be made mandatory and monitored by government officials from time to time. Awareness regarding the adverse effects of child labour on the child in particular and on society at large is very much necessary. Rallies and demonstrations by NGOs, schools, colleges, and university level may be organized to make the citizens aware of the problem of child labour. At last and not the least, the area of consideration for the state policy makers and administrations should be migrant labourers in Ludhiana

city because majority of the randomly selected child labourers in all the three units belonged to migrant labour from adjoining states.

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