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## *Child Labour: Causes and Effects in India*

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### I. INTRODUCTION

*“There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children.”*

– Nelson Mandela

Children are future citizens of the Nation. They are the most tender, gentle and fragile one and needs to be handled and protected with the immense care and delicacy. The problem of child labour exists in almost all countries and it is a matter of great concern to many developing countries like India. Due to their socio-economic conditions, many children are driven to undertake hazardous job. They work for low wages, and for long hours. The term child labour is defined as the work which deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity and that which is harmful to their physical and mental development<sup>(1)</sup>. The main causes of child labour in India include poverty, unemployment and over population but poverty is the primary cause of child labour. These working children are exploited in terms of long working hours, low wages, etc. Generally these labours work in hazardous factories. This paper attempts to summarise the causes and effects of child labour in India.

### II. CAUSE OF CHILD LEABOUR

The world is home to about 1.2 billion individuals aged 10-19 years. Children are employed in both formal and informal sectors. Children are usually engaged in work construction work, domestic work and small-scale industries. Incidentally, agriculture is not only the oldest but also the most common child occupation worldwide. Bangle-making, beedi-making, power looms and manufacturing processes are some kinds of industries which depend on child labour. These industries use toxic metals and substances such as lead, mercury, manganese, chromium, cadmium, benzene, pesticides and asbestos. Child labour is very harmful and wholehearted efforts to eliminate this should be done<sup>(2)</sup>.

The 2001 national census of India estimated total number of child labour aged 5–14 to be at 12.6 million<sup>(3)</sup>. Small-scale and community-based studies have found estimated prevalence of 12.6 million children engaged in hazardous occupations. Many children are “hidden workers” working in homes or in the underground economy<sup>(4)</sup>. Although the Constitution of India guarantees free and compulsory education to children between the age of 6 to 14 and prohibits employment of children younger than 14 in 18 hazardous occupations, child labour is still prevalent in the informal sectors of the Indian economy<sup>(5)</sup>. Indian population has more than 17.5 million working children in different industries, and incidentally maximum are in agricultural sector, leather industry, mining and match-making industries, etc<sup>(6)</sup>. Child labour continues to be a great concern in many parts of the world. In 2008, some 60% of the 215 million boys and girls were estimated to be child labourers worldwide. Major engagement was in agriculture sector, followed by fisheries, aquaculture, livestock and forestry. In addition to work that

interferes with schooling and is harmful to personal development, many of these children work in hazardous occupations or activities that are harmful<sup>(7)</sup>.

Child labour is caused by several factors. Some of them are:

### **1. Poverty:**

Children from poor families may be forced to work to support their siblings and parents. When family expenses are more than the parent's earnings children may go for work in order to supplement their household income. It is a serious problem in developing countries where parents are unable to earn income due to lack of employment opportunities or education.

### **2. Illiteracy:**

Children have the ability and time to become whatever they aspire to be. Due to ignorance of parents about the importance of education, they do not provide support to children to build solid foundations for future success. That is why they prioritize children contributing to the upkeep of the family over going to school.

### **3. Early Marriages:**

Early age at marriage is a major factor to overpopulation. Young parents may have lot of children due to long fertile period. The parents are having many children with little or no resources to support those leads to child labour.

### **4. High cost of education:**

Quality education is expensive in India which is not affordable to poor parents. Instead of letting children stay at home, parents send them to unskilled works to support their family. Some parents provide basic education, and then they couldn't pursue their higher education and forced to look for an occupation.

### **5. High demand for unskilled labourers:**

The demand for unskilled labourers is another cause of child labour. Child labour, by virtue of being cheap, increases the margin of profits for such entrepreneurs whose only aim is profit maximization. They do not practice the business ethics and morals. These greedy employers can force children to work under unfavourable conditions through manipulation or blatant threats.

Thus, the Indian problem of child labour is not a result of any single isolated factor. It is a multi dimensional problem that involves various reasons contributing to it in a variety of ways which includes: continued poverty, illiteracy and ignorance of poor parents, population explosion -large family size, low family income, the tradition of making children learn the family skill, lack of political will and weak/tardy enforcement of laws, unemployment or underemployment, migration, absence of provision for universal compulsory primary education, low aspiration of both parents and children, etc.

## **III. EFFECTS**

### **1. Health Problems:**

Children who work often face serious health problems because of working continuously in hazardous conditions. Often the employers do not care at all about underage children who are almost always malnourished, and continue to work for long hours with little or no respite. Their mental health also takes a beating owing to this severe form of exploitation. These children often face severe mental trauma when they attain adulthood, owing to the constant threats and ill-treatment they received toiling away as labourers.

## 2. Low economic growth:

It also has a negative impact on the welfare of a nation. Since these children do not receive any education, it increases illiteracy, hampering the overall economic growth of the country, reflecting poor human development.

## 3. Social problems:

Children, who cannot find work to feed large families resort to begging on the streets, and in many cases, also fall prey to prostitution. At other times, they even turn into thieves just to make a quick buck on which the family's survival depends. Lack of education as children also means that when they turn into adults, finding jobs become tough since these children do not possess the necessary skills and training. This leads to a sharp hike in unemployment. Such children are always underpaid, and that lowers the country's per capita income, putting long-term economic development in peril.

## 4. Harassment and Child Abuse:

These days child abuse and harassment cases are also been seen with child labour. According to a study by Indian government released in 2007 about 20% of children in as labour have faced sexual abuse. Most of the cases of sexual cases occur with the girls below 15.

## 5. Indulgence into Crime Field:

Uneducated/ Unguided children who work in society sometimes get influenced by the criminal activities and commit crime at low age. Some cases of juvenile criminals have been reported in India and its increase is also observed in India.

## IV. SOLUTIONS

Every child born has the right to have dreams, pursue those dreams and enjoy their childhood. Even though the realization of some of these aspirations may be limited by several challenges, it is still possible to overcome them and achieve the highest levels of success.

1. Child Labour Laws: Indian government has done a great job in attempt to overcome the child labour. Factory Act, Mines Act, Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, Right to free and Compulsory Education Act were framed to safeguard the children from laborious tasks and helping them to rise.
2. Awareness: Parents must be given awareness about child abuse and bad effects of child labour. This will bring change in the society and minimize the cases of child labour. Many NGOs are working in this field and need support from government to aware more people specifically the poor people living in villages or slum areas.
3. Social Alertness: Society must pay attention about the child labour going on in cities, factories or shops. They must report the cases to the police. It is a social antiquate to stop child labour running in your society and supporting those children toward education field.

## V. CONCLUSION

Child labour is against the human rights of a child. Unless the standard of living improves at the lower levels of society, children will be forced to work. Therefore, the most essential part in this regard is the effective implementation of policies and strict enforcement of labour laws in India. The government of India has also taken various other initiatives to eliminate child labour problem. It is morally unacceptable to use the innocence of a child for the purpose of making the lives of adults easier. We should all strive to ensure the protection of fundamental rights of children and provide them with opportunities to aspire and achieve their dreams.

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