

A SOCIAL EVIL- CHILD LABOUR AND RELATED PSYCHOSOCIAL AND HEALTH HAZARDS WITH REFERENCE TO PURNEA EAST CD BLOCK, BIHAR, INDIA

ABSTRACT

The study is an attempt to make in depth enquiry into the phenomenon of child labour with children from marginalized families becoming child labourers, often under hazardous, exploitative and personal conditions. The study examines children engaged in hazardous/non-hazardous activities in the age group of 5-14 years and health risks associated with their work. A total of 95 household samples were taken consisting of 70 rural and 25 urban households. Children in the study never attended school, or did so only irregularly between spells of migrant labour. This underlines the serious nature of the exploitation to which children from poor families are exposed. The children are exploited by employers. Even when children move as family units with parents to work in far away locations, they are exposed to the difficult living conditions in which their families have to live best illustrated by the workers engaged in brick kilns. All child labourers were paid a wage. This explains the well-established nature of child labour, its widespread acceptance and prevalence. This could be seen as an example of parental helplessness, or their desire to get their child to learn a trade, or just a way out of poverty and insecurity, or a combination of all these factors. Working environment and nature of work influence health of child labourers significantly. Children's exposure to psychosocial hazards at work and their experiences of exhausting work, neglect and abuse are significant indicators of harm to their health and well-being.

KEYWORDS

Child labour, psychosocial hazards, health hazards, poverty, workplace issues

INTRODUCTION

Although there is no universally agreed upon definition of child labour, cross country studies of child labour universally define it as children who are part of the economically active population (Edmonds 2009). UNICEF defines child labour as “work that exceeds a minimum number of hours, depending on the age of a child and on the type of work. Such work is considered harmful to the child and should therefore be eliminated, for

- a. Ages 5-11: At least one hour of economic work or 28 hours of domestic work per week.
- b. Ages 12-14: At least 14 hours of economic work or 28 hours of domestic work per week
- c. Ages 15-17: At least 43 hours of economic or domestic work per week (UNICEF 2009)

The term ‘child labour’ covers:

- a. The worst forms of child labour, including slavery; prostitution and pornography; illicit activities; and work likely to harm children’s health, safety or morals, as defined in ILO Convention No. 182
- b. Employment below the minimum age of 14, as established in ILO Convention No. 138.
- c. Hazardous unpaid household services, including household chores performed for long hours, in an unhealthy environment in dangerous locations, and involving unsafe equipment or heavy loads.

Millions of children are engaged in hazardous situations or conditions, such as working in mines, working with chemicals and pesticides in agriculture or working with dangerous machinery. They are everywhere but invisible, toiling as domestic servants in homes, labouring behind the walls of workshops, hidden from view in plantations (UNICEF 2009).

Child labour is not a new phenomena confined to our but has been blackening the canvas of our society since time immemorial. In India, before the rise of capitalism, children were assigned the status of helpers and learners in family occupation under adult supervision (Tripathy 1996). Bihar has the third largest number of child labourers in the country (Chowdhury 2020). Children in Bihar face many deprivations due to widespread poverty. Deep rooted socio-cultural and gender inequalities, caste divisions, poor infrastructure, lack of basic services and recurring natural disasters.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) emphasizes the importance of protecting children from hazardous or harmful work. Article 32 of the Convention calls on States Parties to take legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to ensure that “the right of the child to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development”, is realized (UNCRC, 1989: Article 32). The ILO Conventions speak of the ‘fullest physical and mental development of young persons’ (ILO C138, 1973). (Fassa 2003) in a study to estimate the disability adjusted life years of child labour assumed that the worst forms of child labour can have three types of negative impact on health:

- exacerbating common diseases with an increase in the prevalence due to occupational exposures;
- determining occupational diseases; and
- causing injuries and premature death.

STUDY AREA

The study has been conducted in Purnea East CD Block of Purnea district, Bihar. As per the 2011 Census, there are 43.53 lakh child labourers in India and Bihar ranks third in the country with 4.51 lakh children who are employed as child labourers (Chowdhury, EPW engage 2020). The most prevalent form of child labour is employment in hotels/dhaba and as domestic workers (Sahu 2017). The important characteristic of child labour in the area is that about 90 percent of the working children are concentrated in the rural areas. They not only work in farm sector but also in various non-farm activities in rural areas. This is also a reflection of narrow jurisdiction of the law which focuses only on visible forms of child labour in urban areas. Further they remain as reservoir of cheap labour supply to be migrated to urban areas along with their families in the event of any distress in rural areas. Thus, the problem of child labour in India is essentially a rural problem.

METHODOLOGY

For the collection of primary data, a mixed method has been adopted including both quantitative data collection through surveys and qualitative data collection through participatory methods including interviews, case studies, and Focus Group Discussions. The qualitative methods helped in documenting the experiences of sending households, as well as those of individual child migrants, potential migrants and child labourers. Interviews with key informants shed more light on the situation. First-hand information was gathered from areas of Purnea East CD Block, Bihar that had greater incidences of child labour. Wards and villages with a relatively high concentration of child migrants were identified through discussions with local key informants such as village officials and other knowledgeable persons. A simple random sampling method was used to identify the children and families to be studied. For the sample, 95 children in the age group of 5-14 years were selected. The proportion of children and families from rural and urban areas was fixed after field visits were made.

Sample surveys were carried out based on defined criteria to gather data on the economic and social indicators of poverty and vulnerability and current extent of child labour. Semi-structured and Well defined Questionnaires, in depth interviews are the prime tools for data collection in this study. One-on-one interviews or group discussions were carried out depending upon the circumstances and the sensitivity of the discussions. The issues covered here included the factors pushing parents to leave their villages or to send their children away for employment under conditions of risk. (Mitra and Mishra 2013)

OUTLINES OF THE STUDY

Field based survey of the designated area was an eye opener to the fact that in spite of laws formulated at national and international arena; this social evil is still being in massive practice. The age group of 12-14 has the highest percentage of child labour. The younger ones between six to eight years are least in work sector with proportion of male workers at greater numbers than their female counterpart. The two predominant religion of the study area were the Hindus and the Muslims with proportion of the former being larger than the latter.

TABLE 1: SOCIO-CULTURAL PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

AGE	PERCENTAGE	SEX	NO. OF RESPONDENTS	RELIGION	PERCENTAGE
6 to 8	14.74	Male	63	Hindu	81.05
9 to 11	18.95			Muslim	18.95
12 to 14	66.32	Female	32		

Source: FIELD SURVEY, FEBRUARY 2020

The children responded clearly to the questions asked but their parents soon took the stage when they saw being questioned regarding about the children's educational status and the tone clearly depicted lie straight on their face. Maximum number of child labourers were attending school rather than giving priority to work. Due to **mid-day meal scheme** by the government, children are lured to go to school as most of them are in condition of not even being able to get a proper meal if they avoid school. It indirectly acts as source of food on a daily basis for their survival. They study in classes from one to nine. There are complaints regarding the ongoing education system as majority of the children belong to BPL category and lack of income leave them in a condition where they are unable to fetch books and clothing for school. They are forced to pay fees which are remitted to them by the government much later. There are complaints of teachers dismissing the class after attendance without teaching. If these things prevail in a developing state, it would be nearly impossible to fill the existing flaws.

Working and workplace condition

Employing children is considered as a cheaper option by employers as they can be paid less than the adult counterparts and they do not have any unions or associations to stand for their rights. Few children work for more than 25 days a month and at least for 6 hours per day. They work as daily wage earners and if they miss someday it counts as their loss. Working children are not given any written contract or job description. They work in sectors which are nearby to their residences thereby minimizing transport cost. As in case of brick kiln factories, majority of the children are migrants therefore they are given huts to reside within their

work premise. But the working conditions are pitiable with poor hygiene and sanitation. Maximum children face no abuse by their masters' at workplace and are satisfied with wage, work hours and facilities provided but there are also instances where few of them are subjected to exploitation, an example being a boy aged 7, a balloon seller.

TABLE 2: WORKPLACE CONDITION

Wage	36	59
Relation with Owner	91	4
Time of Work	72	23
Facilities Provided at Workplace	25	70

Source: Field Survey, February 2020

TABLE 3: WAGE STRUCTURE

		SALARY (in Rupees)	TOTAL NO. OF CHILDREN
Daily	41	500-1000	44
Weekly	30	1000-1500	38
Monthly	24	1500-2000	13

Source: Field Survey, February 2020

GRAPH ILLUSTRATING WORKPLACE CONDITION AND WORK DAYS

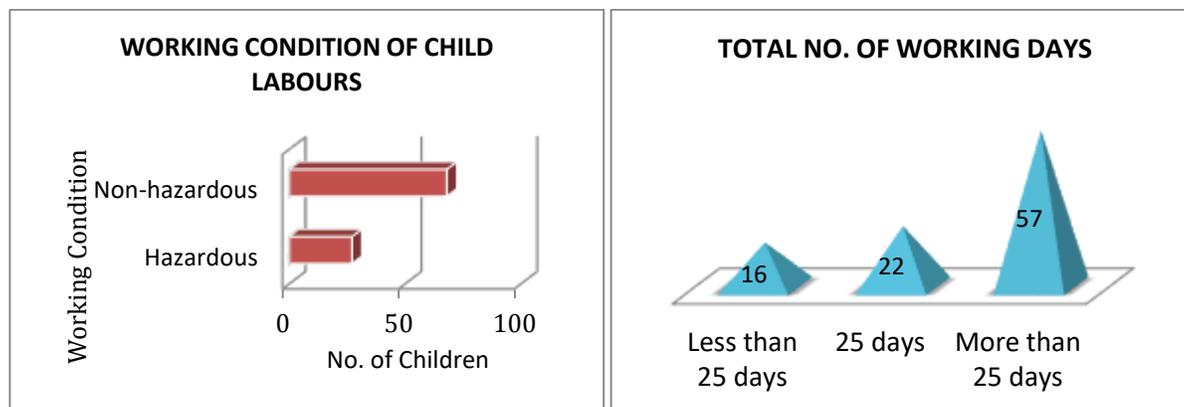


FIG: 1

FIG: 2

Source: Field Survey, February 2020

Large family size needs more income for livelihood as a result of which the girl child too participates in sustaining the economy of household as per her ability and pottery making factory presents a big example.

The parents complained about the nature of working of their wards, the hazards they are subjected to leading to irritation & pain in fingers, dust allergy, asthmatic bronchitis etc. They are prone to inhaling siliceous dust within respiration size range. Their eyes also get affected during this process.

Vendors in market are prone to several severe water borne diseases as they sit beside open drain which becomes flooded during monsoon. Foul smell from drains pollutes environment.

The health issues of child rag pickers may range from chemical poisoning to infections as they faced exposures to hazardous materials Bio-medical waste dumping are a common phenomena & children are threatened by needles, syringes, old bandages etc which may later on pose to be deadly. Right to health in spite of being a basic right to of every citizen fails to function for the rag pickers.

Children in plywood factory are prone to chemical toxins in form of formaldehyde. It was shocking to watch them working in a polluted environment without masks and protective glasses. They complained being subjected to eye irritation, nausea, breathlessness, headache, etc.

Many of the children, who work in agricultural fields in an effort to accomplish a task, over extend themselves, which stunts their optimal growth and development. This is also compounded with unbalanced and nutritionally deficient meals.

Children selling at streets are at risk for harassment, physical and verbal abuses.

TABLE 4: VULNERABILITY OF CHILDREN TO TOXINS

Heat	43
Chemical	9
Foul Smell	34
Intoxicant	9

Source: Field Survey, February 2020

TABLE 5: HEALTH HAZARDS FACED BY CHILDREN

HEALTH HAZARDS	NO. OF CHILD LABOURS
Backache	29
Headache	29
Problem in vision	5
Cough	21
Burning sensation in hands and feet	27
Breathlessness	9
Dust Allergy	15
Heatstroke	17
Nausea	11
Dizziness	2
Skin Allergy	7
Respiratory Issues	5

Source: Field Survey, February 2020

DISCUSSION

To overhaul the country's child labour laws, the Indian government passed The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act 2016 which prohibits "the engagement of children in all occupations and of adolescents in hazardous occupations and processes" wherein adolescents refer to those below 18 years of age and children to those under 14. But the continuous presence of child labour in the country is a reflection of the fact that implementation of laws at state and district levels has been lacking. Though the number of children engaged in labour has come down but there is still a lot to be done to end the scourge.

Article 15 (3) of the Constitution empowers the state to make special provisions for women and children. It says, "Nothing in this article shall prevent the state from making any special provisions for women and children". Unfortunately the survey depicted a different scenario whereby girl children are made to do both household as well as other works like pottery making or in brick kiln factory.

Article 24 states, "No child below the age of fourteen years shall be employed to work in any factory or mine or engage in any other hazardous employment". But every children engaged in brick kiln factory are below 14 of years of age. They have either migrated or are locals. There are instances where children can be seen working in chemically toxic plywood factory.

Article 39 (f) provides that "children are given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity and that childhood and youth are protected against exploitation and against moral and material abandonment". Children, albeit a few of them are subjected to abuse at their workplace but no actions were taken against them. Due to long work hours and nature of work, children are susceptible to physical and psychological hazards which sometimes become life threatening.

Article 45 states that, "state shall endeavor to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years". A large number of primary school children do not go on to high school. Those in the rural areas can work alongside the family, but the children are hampered from achieving an upward climb in the workforce. Those who go on to secondary school get a chance to begin to prepare for a career but socioeconomic

considerations may result in failure and among those who succeed many are not prepared to be absorbed in the workforce or cannot enter because of the scarcity of opportunities. But failure also results from the disadvantages of the poorer students and those in rural parts whose families because of their own lack of education and poverty cannot support children through school financially.

(Quick, Quick and Horn 1986) noted that work-related stress can cause behavioural, medical and psychological problems. Behavioural changes tend to be the earliest and most overt signs of stress, and include: (1) greater alcohol and drug abuse; (2) increased cigarette smoking; (3) accident proneness; and (4) violence. Psychological consequences include: (1) family problems; (2) sleep disturbances; (3) sexual dysfunction; and (4) depression. Medical problems include: (1) hastening the appearance of disease; and (2) worsening the impact of illness.

According to the ILO, “psychosocial factors at work refer to the interactions between and among work environment, job content, organizational conditions and workers’ capacities, needs, expectations, custom, culture, and personal extra-job considerations that may, through perceptions and experience, influence health, work performance and job satisfaction” (Assessing psychosocial hazards and impact of child labour 2011).

The following hazards were accounted for by interviewing the children and/or their parents:

TABLE 6: PSYCHOSOCIAL HAZARDS FACED BY WORKING CHILDREN

Psychosocial hazards	
Job demands	Physically demanding, Mental workload, emotional burden, monotonous, socially isolated
Workload and work pace	Work overload, high levels of time pressure, continually subject to deadlines
Work schedule	inflexible work schedules, unpredictable hours, long or unsociable hours
Environment and equipment	Inadequate equipment availability, poor

	environmental conditions such as lack of space, poor lighting, excessive noise
Organizational culture and function	Lack of rest phase, lack of equipment, poor communication, low levels of support for problem solving and personal development, lack of feedback on work performance, poorly motivated
Interpersonal relationship at work	Social or physical isolation, poor relationships with superiors, interpersonal conflict, lack of social support, bullying, harassment, violence in some cases
Career development	poor pay, job insecurity, low social value to work, discrimination at workplace
Home-work interface	Conflicting demands of work and home, low support at home, conflict between employees, problems remain unsolved

Source: (Leka, et al. 2008), as per Field Survey, February 2020

These hazards cause mental workload.

TABLE 7: MENTAL WORKLOAD ASSESSMENT MATRIX

SL NO.	PROBABILITY	CONSEQUENCE			
		A	B	C	
1	Rarely/unlikely	Increase of tension, no health damage	aggression, disease	Depression and other mental	Health hazard

				issues	
2	Regularly/probable	Accident in workplace, low effectivity	Increased sick leave	death	Human error/injury
3	Permanent occurrence	Low effectivity	Prolong low effectivity	Permanent work disability	Decreased effectivity

SOURCE: (Paciova and Balazikova 2010)

Psychosocial issues should be best addressed with full involvement of workforce. Mental health of child in developing countries are not given prime attention.

CONCLUSION

Child labour is a significant issue requiring attention of all sectors of society. Many issues of child labour were identified in this research. Child labourers are found throughout the country with higher concentrations in rural agricultural communities and some urban centers. There are children who are involved in the worst forms of child labour including hazardous work in commercial agriculture, working street children and child domestic workers. Child labour primarily occurs in large families. Most of them belong to illiterate, poor, weaker and oppressed sections of society. Working children are bound to perpetuate a cycle of poverty because they too will not be able to adequately provide for their own families as adults because of low education levels. International and national laws exist against child labour but they are not enforced. Stakeholders should take productive measures in wiping child labour from the canvas of the society but it is not an easy task as it has its roots in various socio-economic and political issues. Working conditions of child labour are very pitiable. It was seen that good number of workers in brick kilns, agriculture, pottery-making, dhaba, tea shops, hawkers involved child labour in its worst form. Child labour laws have been ineffective because of lack of enforcement machinery. The penalties for violating the minimum age to work and other laws related to child labour are lenient.

Child labour is a complex economic problem. In a country where millions go to bed hungry without having a single full meal of the day, complete elimination of child labour by mere legal recourse is never a

practical solution. Strengthening primary education, evolving alternate production system, sensitization of workers on matters of exploitation, deconstruction of parental attitude towards educating girls through social education, technical education to child workers are some of the important measures that will lead to relief, rehabilitation, elimination and prevention of child labour.

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APPENDICES

A. SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Name of the respondent/head of the family
2. Sex: Female Male
3. District: Block: Village
4. Religion: Hindu Muslim Others (Mention)
5. Whether living in (a) Own house (b) Rented house (Tick any one)
6. Whether (a) Native (b) Migrant (Tick any one)
7. If migrant, mention the place of migration:
8. Reason for migration
- 9.

SL NO.	NAME OF CHILD LABOUR	SEX		WORK SECTOR
		MALE	FEMALE	

Work Sectors:

- a. Brick kilns b. Agriculture c. Pottery d. Fish, vegetable and fruit vendor e. Hawkers f. Tea shops g. Dhaba h. Garage i. Rag pickers j. Others (mention)

10.

SCHOOL STATUS			WORKING STATUS			
ATTENDING SCHOOL	SCHOOL	EDUCATION LEVEL	1. WORKING	WORKING	SALARIED	1. HAZARDOUS
NOT ATTENDING SCHOOL	1. PRIVATE	2. GOVT	2. NOT WORKING	WORKING	DAY S	2. NON - HAZARDOUS
1. YES	TE					
2. NO						

Education Level:

- a. Illiterate b. Preschool c. Primary education d. High school e. Above high school

11. What is/are the main reason/s children did not attend school?

Reasons:

- a. too young b. disabled/illness c. no school/school too far d. cannot afford schooling e. family did not allow schooling f. not interested in school g. education not considered valuable h. to learn job i. to work for pay j. help at home with household chores k. others (mention)

12. Reasons behind putting children to work

- a. Family needs income b. Less paying capacity c. Child to look after family d. Child not interested in education e. Reason, other, if any

13. Exposure to toxins:

- a. Heat b. chemical c. foul smell d. others, mention

14. Benefits received from workplace:

- a. Weekly rest day b. medical expense c. school expense d. sick leave e. free/subsidized accommodation
f. food g. Transportation h. Others (Mention)

15. In addition to main work does the child do any other work? a. Yes (mention) b. No.

MAIN WORK HOURS	OTHER WORK HOURS

16. Has your ward reported of any abuse that may have occurred in their workplace? (For parents/children)

- a. Yes (mention) b. No

17. Has there been any action against the miscreants?

- a. If yes, mention what? b. If no, why?

18. In case of girl child, has the report of abuse been frequent?

- a. Yes b. No

19. In which of the following brick manufacturing process is your ward involved?

- a) Removal of impurities like vegetation, stones, pebbles, etc. b) Shaping or molding (hand/machine) c)
Drying d) firing/burning

20. Health hazards related to work in brick kiln industry:

- a) Backache b) Headache c) Problem in vision d) Burning sensation in hand & feet e) Cough f)
Breathlessness g) Tumors in fingers h) Inability to sleep.

21. If engaged in agriculture, what are the health hazards faced by him/her?
22. If your ward(s) is (are) engaged in pottery making what is the health hazards faced consequently? a) Cough b) Irritation in hands and feet c) Backache d) Headache
23. If your ward is a seller of fruits, vegetables and fishes, what health hazards are faced by him/her?
24. If your ward is a hawker, what health problems are faced?
25. Health hazards of working in tea shops:
26. Health hazards of working in garage:
27. Health hazards of working in dhaba:
28. Health hazards of rag pickers: a) Nausea b) Exposure to chemical wastes c) Cough d) Headache e) Backache
29. Other sectors: related health hazards:
30. Relationship with the owners or employers: (a) Satisfied (b) Unsatisfied
31. Wage they receive: (a) Satisfied (b) Unsatisfied
32. Mode of wage payment: (a) Daily (b) Weekly (c) Monthly
33. Mode of transport to workplace: (a) Stay at place of work (b) Walk (c) Bicycle
- 34.

SL NO.	HAZARDS	YES	SOMETIMES	NO
JOB DEMANDS				
1	Is the work physically demanding?			
2	Is there mental workload?			
3	Is there emotional burden?			
4	Is the work monotonous?			

5	Are you socially isolated in course of work/workplace?			
WORKLOAD, WORK PACE AND SCHEDULE				
1	Are workloads high?			
2	Is there time pressure of work completion?			
3	Is your work subject to deadlines?			
4	Do you have flexible work schedule?			
5	Do you have fixed working hour?			
WORK ENVIRONMENT AND ORGANIZATION				
1	Is there lack of work equipment?			
2	Are the working conditions poor?			
3	Do you get rest phase between works?			
4	Do you have proper communication with employer in case of difficulty?			
5	Do you get support from employers if problems are faced?			
6	Do you get feedback on work performance?			
7	Do you get motivation from employers if you perform well?			
RELATIONSHIP AT WORK				
1	Are you isolated in your workplace?			
2	What is your relationship with superiors/employers?			

3	Is there any conflict between employees?			
4	Do you get support from home/workplace?			
6	Are you subjected to bullying/harassment?			
7	Are you exposed to violence?			
CAREER DEVELOPMENT				
1	Is there fear of losing job?			
2	Are you paid timely and accordingly?			
3	Is there discrimination at workplace?			
HOME-WORK INTERFACE				
1	Do you work rigorously both at home and workplace?			
2	Do you have enough support from home in issues from workplace?			
3	Are there any conflicts between you and employees?			
4	Does anyone solve the problem or it remains unsolved?			