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Research Journal

Indian Streams
Research Journal

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Child Labour: A Study Of Perception And Attitudes Of The Child Workers Towards Their Work.

Dr. R.K. Bharti

Lecturer, Deptt. of Social Work, Institute of Social Sciences, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar University, Agra, U.P. (India)

Abstract: Child labour is employment in of children for wages various occupations and trades. Child workers undertake to perform various jobs which are harmful and injurious to their physical and mental development. No benefits, other than nominal wages, are available to the child workers. They are even denied intervals for rest, medical leave and festival holidays. Welfare, health and safety measures are non-existent. Therefore, the protection and promotion of interests of the working children has become a subject of paramount importance today and a civilized society can not afford to overlook the exploitation and abuse of child labour. The present study is a survey research which investigates the perception and attitudes of the child workers towards their work in Agra District of U.P. state of India.

Keyword: Child Labour; Working Children; Perception; Attitude; Leisure.

INTRODUCTION

The protection and promotion of interests of the working children has become a subject of paramount importance today and no civilized society can afford to overlook it. A society like ours which functions within the framework of welfare state aiming at ensuring a minimum desirable standard of living to each and every member is obliged to come forward to understand the need and problems of child labour and to understand various measures that may be instrumental in the fullest development of children on whom depends the future of our nation. The child must enjoy special protection and should be given opportunities and facilities to enable him to develop physically, mentally, socially, morally, and spiritually in healthy and normal manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity. The child must in all circumstances, be among the first top to receive protection and relief.

It is a matter of common understanding that children are employed in various occupations and trades to undertake a variety of jobs, many of which adversely affect their health and are injurious to physical and mental development. In many a case they are generally paltry. No benefits, other than nominal wages are available to the child labourers. They are even denied the medical leave and festival holidays. Welfare and social security measures are non-existent. This survey study examines the perception and attitudes of child works towards their work.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Singh, et. al. (1976) found that in not a single case, trade unions had made a complaint to the inspectors against the employment of children. On the other hand, such a power, if given to the trade unions may be used by them out of bad motive and for harassing

the employers, causing strains on employer employee relationship.

Mamdani (1994) argued that for most groups, high rather than low fertility would constitute rational economic behaviors because children perform a variety of tasks beneficial to their parents. Income of the households with no land will depend upon the higher number of the child workers and large family size. A larger family means grater income during the busy season and higher saving for lesser busy season.

Nag et.al. (1994) observed that work input of children make family more economically successful. The rank correlation coefficient between the total work output of children and the balance of income over goods expenditure was 0.54 which was statistically significant at 1 percent level of probability indicating that households with greater total work input of children were economically more successful.

Naidu (1996) concluded that child labour depends on the type of occupation. There is a difference in the household industrial sector and agricultural sector in respect of child employment and economic value of children. Labor value of children is higher in household industrial sector as compared to the agricultural sector. For this reason there is more employment of children in the household industrial sector than the agricultural sector.

Hirway (1997) mentioned that child labour system in third world countries is partially due to inadequate educational system and certain socio-cultural constraints of the poor. The educational system in developing countries frequently lacks the infrastructure for providing compulsory primary education to all the children and there are serious problems with the quality education. Many a times in the eyes of the poor, the cost of education is higher than the

returns.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

1. To study the attitude of child workers towards their work.
2. To understand the perception of the child workers for liking and disliking the work they do.
3. To comprehend the work compulsions, aspirations and preferences of the working children.
4. To study the weekly holidays, time of work and ways of spending the leisure time by the child labourers.

METHODOLOGY

With the above objectives in view, different occupations and trades employing children in the informal sector of Agra district of U.P. State of India were treated as strata for sampling purposes. These strata of trades and occupation were: hotels/restaurants/dhabas/tea stalls; cycle/bike and motor repairing shops; shoe industry; carpet industry; petha manufacturing units; and marble industry. Total 500 child labourers were selected through random sampling technique. Observation Schedule and Interview Guide were used to collect information and facts from the respondents and the field.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

During the interview with the working children, it was observed that the work is not liked by majority of the working children. They do not wish to work in their childhood. The activities in which they are engaged or the work in which they are employed is not liked by 80.8 percent of the working children. Due to compulsions on account of poverty they are forced to work for money. The working children have given various reasons for not liking the work. Information regarding the attitude of working children towards the work was also collected. Data pertaining to the attitude of the working children towards the work revealed that 80.80 percent working children are not interested in doing the job and they do not like to work (Table 1). Just a handful (19.20 percent) of working children are willing workers showing interest in the work. Such expressions may also exist more for concealing the conditions than those revealing it.

Among the working children who do not like to work, 74.50 percent dislike work because the work in which they are engaged is low wage work and at the same time they have to work more. About 15.34 percent of the working children reported that they dislike the work because work is injurious (Table 2). Similarly, some of the working children are not interested in work as they desire to attend school and to get education. This reason is given by 9.42 percent of the working children for not liking work. In some cases, the work is done at

night by the children and the night work is disliked by some of them. This is specially so in case of dhaba, petha manufacturing units and home based shoe manufacturing units.

TABLE No. 1: Attitude Of The Child Workers Towards Work

ATTITUDE	CHILD WORKERS	
	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Number of child workers who like to work	96	19.20
Number of child workers who do not like to work	404	80.80
Total	500	100.00

TABLE 2 :Reasons For Not Liking Work

REASONS FOR NOT LIKING WORK	CHILD WORKERS	
	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Injurious work	62	15.34
Low wages but more work	301	74.50
Work done at night	3	0.74
Want to attend school	38	9.42
Total	404	100.00

Out of the 500 working children in the sample, only 19:20 percent have shown interest in the job in which they are engaged. Mainly two reasons have been reported by them for liking the work. Among them, monetary benefit is the main reason as reported by the majority (97.92 percent) of the working children who like the work. A few of them (2.08 percent) feel that the work done by them is not harmful (Table 3).

TABLE No. 3: Reasons For Liking The Work

REASONS	CHILD WORKERS	
	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
To earn money	94	97.92
Harmless work	2	2.08
Total	96	100.00

As we have seen that majority of the working children engaged in these manufacturing industry are not interested in doing the work. Due to economic compulsions they are working in the hazardous industry. Several reasons have been given by the working children which have compelled them to seek employment. Out of 500 working children, 393 have started working due to compulsion and several reasons have been given by them which compelled them for doing the work. Extreme poverty has been the basic reason for entering the labour force in the case of 73.54 percent working children, (Table 4). In some cases, the other compulsion is that there are no other earning members due to sickness or death of the parents in 4.58 percent of the households, as a result their children are compelled to seek employment. The attitude of parents is also one of the factors responsible for compelling the children to earn money. The parents compelled the children to do work as reported by ' 6.87 percent of the working children. To supplement household income is also one of the reasons for work cited in the case of more than 15 percent cases (Table 4).

TABLE No.4: Work Compulsions For Working Children

REASONS/WORK COMPULSION	CHILD WORKERS	
	Number	Percentage
Poverty	289	73.54
Parent's sickness or death	18	4.58
Compulsion of parents	27	6.87
To Supplement household income	59	15.01
Total	393	100.00

The working children were asked about their attitude towards work as well as their preferences. The analysis of data regarding the opinion of the working children revealed that except for 31.60 percent children who expressed an interest in furthering their education, the remaining want to remain in the labour market. Nearly 39 percent of the working children want more training for a better future; 15.80 percent want to continue the same work and 13.80 percent are keen to switch over to a better job (Table 5).

TABLE No.5: Aspirations/Preferences Of The Working Child

DESCRIPTION	CHILD WORKERS	
	Number	Percentage
Like to continue work	79	15.80
Like to get more training	194	38.80
Wants to switch over	69	13.80
Wants to go back to school	158	31.60
Total	500	100.00

A mere 9.00 percent of the total 500 working children are given weekly holidays by their employers. Employers use these children without a day of rest. Lack of enough rest leads to ill health and fatigue which has a long term toll on unhealthy child who grows into an unhealthy adult. Out of total 500 children, 88.60 percent work in the day and 11.40 percent work at night. Night work increases the occupational hazards risking the safety of children. Sometimes these children are also supposed to work at night. This is especially in case of petha manufacturing units.

TABLE No.6: Weekly Holiday To The Working Children

RESPONSE	NO. OF WORKERS	PERCENTAGE
Holiday Given	45	9.0
Holiday Denied	455	91.0%

TABLE No. 7: Time Of Work

TIME	NO. OF WORKERS	PERCENTAGE
Day	443	88.6
Night	57	11.4

The favourite means of recreation among children is playing. A little more than 71 percent prefer to play. 27 percent enjoy roaming around 17.40 percent think it wise to rest in the leisure time they get. Very few utilise their free time for reading. This shows that neither the children nor their families are education-oriented. All such perceptions of the working children in fact

present confusion among them because of the conditions in which they live and work .

TABLE NO. 8: Ways Of Spending Leisure Time

WAYS OF SPENDING LEISURE TIME	CHILD WORKERS	
	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Playing	357	71.40
Walking/Roaming	135	27.00
Taking Rest	87	17.40
Reading	3	0.60
Gossiping	-	-

CONCLUSIONS

- 1.The working children’s perception and attitude towards their work reveals that about 81 percent of them do not like to work due to a number of causes such as injurious nature of work, low wages, night work and wish to attend school. The most noteworthy reason in this regard is the dangerous and injurious nature of work as about 75 percent of them have reported this.
- 2.About 98 percent of those children who like to work, have reported so because they want to earn money. In fact their liking for work conceals their disliking but they were not open to express it because of their compulsion to earn wage money.
- 3.This becomes clear when 393 child labourers out of 500 were explicit in reporting their socio-economic compulsions at the households level. They work due to poverty, as stated by approximately 74 percent of them. The rest of these working children have given other compelling reasons due to which they work in the early childhood.
- 4.The children work very hard despite having no liking for work and put in more than six ours per day. They also do their household work in some form or the other. In addition, they do not get leisure during working period, nor are given weekly holidays. About 89 percent of the working children reported this.
- 5.The child labourers do not have recreation facilities and most of them play and roam here and there. All this shows the pitiable conditions in which the children work and child labour is exploited in the trades and manufacturing units. It also indicates how the given socio-economic system reproduced child labour and how the child labour is abused in an urban setting.

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