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## **Child Labor: Parents Live through Their Children**

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### ***Abstract:***

*Child labor is a big problem in developing countries. It creates opportunity to them and threat to the developed countries due to free trading, competitions and globalization. The children are working in various occupations to produce commodities, engage in economic activities that are detrimental to their health and education. It reduces human capital formation of children. Yet there is no study to analyze the earning of the child workers in handloom industry. Hence this paper investigates the expenditure of the households and earning of the working children in handloom industry. Based on the analysis of primary data collected from the field survey of 327 households engaged in handloom industry of Ramna Etbar Nagar of Domkal Block, a village of Murshidabad district within the state of West Bengal, India, we find that the children give up their entire earning to parents for survival of their family. Thus the parents live through their children.*

**Keywords:** *Child labor, Handloom industry, Ramna Etbar Nagar, and Survival of the family*

### **1. Introduction**

Child labor is an intricate problem; it exists in both the developed and developing countries. It is harmful and accompanied with the problems of children's education, health, working conditions and exploitation that have drawn the attention of all stakeholders. In course of time, this was effectively addressed to a large extent in industrially advanced countries by enacting appropriate intervention strategies, such as law of compulsory education for all. However, it is still widespread in various forms in developing countries. It is an evil of the society, not only hamper children's education but also seriously affects their healthy growth as an individual (Pal et al., 2011a) with serious implications for the society. It creates division between and among human beings and further widens the scope of deep rooted inequality in the society. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), in 2000, about 352 million children aged between 5-17 years were engaged in some form of economic activity in the world. The 2001 census of India estimated 12.66 million (1.23%) working children in the country which had increased from the 1991 census figure of 11.28 million (1.34%) but had decreased in terms of percent. Census 2011 estimated 4.35 million decreasing 65 percent (8.22 million including marginal working children for 3-6 months) child workers in the country, 0.23 million in West Bengal, more than 26000 are working in national capital, Delhi, between the ages 5-14 years. The number of child labor is probably highest in India. The estimates of child labor in India vary from 8 million to 100 million. Everyday, some 60 million children work hard to support their families or to support themselves. Fig.1 describes child workers in a shabby dress, picking rags from a bin, in the city of Kharagpur, West Bengal, India. They are collecting disposable plastics, plastic containers, cans for earning their livelihood. It is evident from the appearance of the children that they are happy in collecting rags with three bags full, they love their vocation; prefer to work at a tender age when their body is supple. The disparity of economic wealth in the society is evident from the image; in the background we can see a car in front of the dwelling house. What we cannot see in the image is the harmful wastages inside the bin which may cause injury to the body and health of the poor children.



Figure 1: Rag-pickers picking rags

## 2. Definition of Child Labor

Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC) & Statistical Information and Monitoring Programme on Child Labor (SIMPOC) defines child labor as any work done by the children below the age of 18 years which is hazardous, exploitative and inappropriate for their age. While ILO considers all children under 15 years of age who are economically active excluding (i) those who are under five years old, and (ii) those between 12-14 years old who spends less than 14 hours a week on their jobs, perform light work, unless their activities or occupations are hazardous by nature or circumstance.

## 3. Literature Review

Most prominent fields where children commonly work are rag-picking (Fig.1), agricultural operations, industries of different nature, hotels and restaurants, tea, *pan* (betel leaf that people chew), and cigarette shops, petty trading, business activities and household chores. They work as artisans, potters, blacksmiths, rope and basket makers, and handloom weavers (Fig.2), etc. Child labor, in urban areas, is concentrated in small and cottage industries, workshops, factories, loading and unloading of goods and commodities in both organized and the unorganized sectors of the economy. In rural India, their main concentration is in agricultural operations, household activities, local hotels and restaurants and petty business, etc. Several laws have been enacted against the use of child labor and several incentives have been provided to poor households to promote children's education and health, in spite, children are found openly sweeping running trains, working in *dhaba* (road side eateries), and for domestic help. The government servants too, do not lag behind in employing (Pandey, 2011; DHNS, 2012) them in domestic work (Neetha, 2002; Chandra, 2008).

In socially and economically poor households, children do not enjoy humane consideration. They start working at an early age, like any other members of the family, which is detrimental to their upbringing and schooling. They suffer from serious malnutrition and health problems because of their unhealthy and unhygienic work environment. These children mostly come from the deprived, lower castes and poor households of the society. The normative socioeconomic structures of the society further debar them from availing of societal facilities of education and force them to work as child labor. This has become 'the way of life' to working children and their parents in the caste-ridden Indian society. In addition, natural calamities such as drought, flood, caste carnage, and political violence further drive them out to look for life elsewhere. Potential employers being aware of such conditions, fully exploit the situation to the extent they can without any hesitation, reservation, or fear of legal action.

The history of child labor is as old as possibly the history of mankind itself. Children are found taking active part in households' activities since ages, be it social or economic, along with their parents. However, this was neither considered, nor acknowledged as child labor. The serious debate against the child labor started with the children's employment in industries as wage labor by the end of 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But the real momentum took-off with the ILO in lead role around 1973, when the minimum age for entry into employment was decided in its Convention 138. The scope of the debate on child labor centers around two major concerns. One is the concern for healthy growth of children in order to realize their potential, and the second is for socio-economic development of the country. Accordingly, different perspectives are in vogue to address these concerns – the 'contextual relevance', 'ideological positions', being the dominant ones. The protagonists of contextual relevance favor to combine both children's work as well as their schooling in view of households' socio-economic conditions at the micro level, and the status of socio-economic development of the country, at the macro level. It is argued that if child labor is eliminated, this will have serious adverse effect on households and the country as a whole resulting in further compromises with children's well being and the survival of the family will be at stake.

The economic factor is the most important determinant of the child labor. Families with economic hardships are unable to meet their requirements and compelled to send their children to work to supplement family's livelihood (Edmonds & Turk, 2002). It is also seen that parents who worked as child labor usually send their children to work in absence of stable livelihood (Wahba, 2000; Emerson &

Souza, 2002), nevertheless they prefer children's schooling for better future (Akhileswari, 2003). Traditions, ignorance, illiteracy, lack of nearby schools are the stumbling blocks for the parents for sending children to schools. Besides, there are various social and political factors that are proliferating child labor.

#### 4. Materials and Methods

Using Simple Random Sampling without replacement (SRSWOR) technique primary data were collected through field visits to the handloom units in each household as well as interviews and discussions with parents and children working with handloom units at Ramna Etbar Nagar, in the district of Murshidabad, West Bengal, India. Among 1345 households, we visited a total numbers of 327 households, mostly inhabited by minority community, during the period of March 2008 to August 2008. We used the Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) to analyze the data.

#### 5. Results and Discussions

Child workers are generally working in unhealthy and unhygienic conditions; Fig.2 depicts the plight of the children working with handloom in the Ramna Etbar Nagar within the district of Murshidabad, West Bengal, India. The image reveals the socioeconomic status and the working conditions of the children. The girl is weaving *gamchha* (a kind of indigenous napkin) with a wooden handloom in a corner of a household with insufficient light, she exhibits full vigor, working with a smiling face, and a kid is standing in the right corner, probably he is afraid of his sister's work. The girl earns about Rs.300.00 (about USD 5.00) per month for working three hours per day. Table 1 shows the total family income from all the sources and the earning of the children from weaving *gamchha*. Only 6.1 percent of the children are earning more than Rs.500.00 (USD 8.00) per month after a daily drudgery of 5-6 hrs, while 0.3 percent of the family is earning more than Rs.4000.00 (USD 67.00) per month from all sources like part time assignments etcetera, 75.20 percent earning only Rs.2000.00 (USD 33.00) per month. It is, therefore, hardship for them to maintain their family properly with this meager amount of earning.



Figure 2: Girl weaving 'gamchha' with a handloom

Family income per month	Number of family	Percent	Cumulative percent	Earning of children pm	Number of children	Percent	Cumulative percent
Rs.1000	3	0.9	0.9	Rs.100.00	85	26.0	26.0
Rs.2000	246	75.2	76.1	Rs.200.00	52	15.9	41.9
Rs.3000	71	21.7	97.9	Rs.300.00	115	35.2	77.1
Rs.4000	6	1.8	99.7	Rs.400.00	20	6.1	83.2
More than Rs.4000	1	0.3	100.0	More than Rs.400.00	55	16.8	100.0

Table 1: Family income per month from all sources & earning of children per month

Income and expenditure is an indicator of the economic prosperity, it is evident that the expenditure of the family is more than the income. We asked respondents whether they are able to maintain their family properly, some of them replied it is very hardship for them to maintain; sometimes they borrow money from their friends and relatives. Table 2 shows the total expenses and the expenses on children's education of the respondents. It is also evident that they are less interested about their children's education; about 92.40 percent of the households' expenses on education are Rs.200.00 (USD 3.50) per month. In fact, education is free upto twelfth grade in state government sponsored schools in West Bengal; it is more costly in private schools. Therefore, parents prefer government sponsored schools. Pal et al. (2011b) studied children's education in households engaged in handloom industry. He found a negative

relationship between the awareness index of the parents and the school going children, but a positive relationship with the standard of living index of the households. Perhaps parents understand that children's education is less profitable than working in future, and the skills developed in the childhood will help them in future for long run.

During data collection we asked the children why they are working. It is important to know the reasons for their working at an early age and schedule of working hours, 77.70 percent replied that to supplement their family income, while 19.00 percent working at their tender age for learning skills. They work before and after the school hours, however, Pal (2013) found that girls work more compared to boys for small schedule of work, but boys work longer hours for higher schedule. It is also found that larger is the size of the family higher is the allocation of the working time among the working children.

Total expenses pm	Number of family	Percent	Cumulative percent	Educational expenses pm	Number of family	Percent	Cumulative percent
Rs.1000.00	3	0.9	0.9	Rs.200.00	302	92.4	92.4
Rs.2000.00	258	78.9	79.8	Rs.400.00	20	6.1	98.5
Rs.3000.00	61	18.7	98.5	Rs.600.00	4	1.2	99.7
More than Rs.4000	5	1.5	100.0	Rs.800.00	1	0.3	100.0

Table 2: Total family expenses and expenses on children's education per month

We also asked children how they spend their earning, 94.50 percent replied that they give it to their parents because the survival of their family would be at stake if they stop working, 2.10 percent defrayed it for personal consumption, while 0.9 percent only used it for their own education. It is, therefore, clear that the children are not serious about their education. Basu (1999) found that parents send their children to schools if their income is above the subsistence level and they will send their children to labor market if their income is below the subsistence level. Hence, child labor is associated with the poverty, deprivation and exploitation (Mizen et al., 1999). In urban areas, due to the extreme poverty, parents do not hesitate to send their children, even to the worst form of work for earning more and well being of the family (Dessey & Pallage, 2002). Table 3 shows how the children spend their income and the reasons for their work. It indicates that the parents live through their children, send them to the labor market for earning to supplement family income.

How children spend income	Number of children	Percent	Cumulative percent	Reason for Work	Number of children	Percent	Cumulative percent
Give it to parents	309	94.5	94.5	To supplement family income	254	77.7	77.7
Personal consumption	7	2.1	96.6	To pay family debt	4	1.2	78.9
Spend for education	3	0.9	97.5	To learn skill	62	19.0	97.9
Other purpose	8	2.5	100.0	Other purpose	7	2.1	100.0

Table 3: How children spend income and reason for working

## 6. Conclusions

Eradication of child labor is a big problem since the parents live through the earning of their children. While eradicating child labor in Bangladesh garment industry, scholars found that banning child labor pushed them in a more harmful job where they were invisible. Sometimes they are employed for breaking bricks (brick chips) or engaged in child prostitution. ILO launched the International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor (IPEC) throughout the world, India launched National Child Labor Project (NCLP) in 250 districts, yet it exists in various forms in the world. UNICEF, therefore, stressed on achieving universal primary education, eradicating extreme poverty and hunger by 2015 through millennium development goals. Do the readers think that it will be completely eradicate within 2015? The answer is no, due to the complex nature of the problem. We cannot eradicate it within an overnight. The best way for its eradication is to send them to schools where they are easily visible and monitored. But sending them to school will cause loss of family income and their survival will be at stake, they will not get the minimum nutritional food, and it will affect their health. Readers should think for a viable solution for sending them to schools without disturbing survival of poor family as 94.50 percent of the children in the handloom industry of Ramna Etbar Nagar are giving up their entire earning to the parents that is utilized for existence of the family. We need to implement various projects for its eradication. The government must arrange awareness program with all the stakeholders emphasizing the harmful nature of engaging children, establish schools where the child labors are concentrated, introduce various poverty alleviation programs, albeit the children are withdrawn from economic activities their family should not suffer. Before withdrawing children from the economic activities we should keep in mind the harsh question that the poor children are working for their survival, contributing country's economy and it will eradicate in course of time with the economic growth of the country.

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