

Study of Social Problems and Working Conditions of Child Labourers in Rural Area of Wardha

Nimbarte Sanjay*, Selokar Deepak*, Wagh V V**

Abstract

Children under fourteen constitute around 3.6% of the total labour force in India. The objective of the present study was to study the socio-economic determinants and to assess the working conditions of child labourer in the small town Seloo area in Wardha district. The child labourers were interviewed in their work places using a predesigned and pre-tested questionnaire. Data was collected and analyzed using epi_info 6.04d. A total of 150 child labourers participated in the study. The male/female ratio was 1:1.77. Child labour was most prevalent (80%) among 11-13 year age group. Child labour increases with decreasing parental socio-economic status. A little less than half (46.7%) of the child labourers had to work for more than 6 hours a day. Average duration of work as 6.1 days per week. There is need to protect children from child labour specially girl children. It is advocated that reduction in family size is conducive to promote economic empowerment/education.

Key Words: Child labourers, Working conditions, Working environment

Introduction

Child labour covers all economic activities carried out by children regardless of their occupational status.^[1] It has probably been in existence since the history of mankind. Economic activity is a broad concept that encompasses most productive activities of children. It includes both, the kind of work that is permissible under the International Labour Organizations (ILO) conventions and also that which is not permissible.^[2] Child labour is preventable. It is present worldwide, occurring both in developing and developed countries.^[3,4] It is estimated that about 352 million children are engaged in some form of economic activity in the world.^[2] ILO estimates put the number of children fully at work in developing countries at 120 million and those who are working and schooling at 250 million.^[5]

Children under the age of fourteen year in India are more in number than the entire population of the United States. The great challenge of India, as a developing country, is to provide nutrition, education and health care to these children. They constitute around 3.6% of the total labour force in India. Nine out of every ten of them work in their own rural family settings. Nearly 85% are engaged in traditional agricultural activities. Less than 9% work in manufacturing, services and repairs. Only about 0.8% works in factories.^[6] Their work environment is unkind, uncomfortable and often physically hazardous. They are ill paid and conditions of work are often exploitative.

Methodology

Study setting

The present study was a cross-sectional study conducted in the small town Seloo area in Wardha district. The study included about 150 child labourers working at various locations of Seloo over a period of six months (June – December 2009). According to 2001 census, 22.9%^[8] of the total population were children of 5-14 years of age group and 2.4%

* Assist Prof Dept of Community Medicine, JN Medical College

** Prof Dept of Community Medicine, JN Medical College

Address for correspondence:

Dr Sanjay Nimbarte, Assistant professor Dept of Community Medicine, JN Medical College, DMIMSU Sawangi (M) Wardha
Email: sanju_nimbarte1231@yahoo.co.in

of them were child labourers. Total estimated population in the study area was 1, 10,000. Based on the above information, total number of child labourers was 605 in the study area. Twenty percent of them i.e. 121 were considered as the minimum sample size required for the study. We took 150 child laborers as a sample size.

Data Collection

The child labourers were interviewed in their work places using a predesigned and pre-tested questionnaire. Information regarding age, sex, religion, origin, occupation, working hours, rest period, education, abuse by employer, use of protective equipments while working, expenditure of money, current or past illness, working environment, knowledge about child labour act was obtained during the interview. The environment at the working places like type of construction, ventilation lighting were assessed by direct observation. Relevant history regarding present/past illness if any was also obtained. Data was collected and analysed using SPSS 16.0

Results

A total of 150 child labourers aged between 7 to 13 years participated in the study. The male/female ratio was 1:1.77. Child labour was most prevalent (80%) among 11-13 years age group. Most (80%) belonged to local area while rests were from the other districts and states. Those in primary schools were 88 (58.7%) while 32 (21.3%) were illiterate (Table 1). Maximum numbers of Hindu children (72%) were involved in child labour. Comparison between different religion for prevalence of child labour was mainly limited to Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist because there were very few from other religions. Most (74%) belonged to nuclear families. The incidence of child labour rates increases with decreasing parental socioeconomic status. Socio-economic status of families was categorized based on Modified B.G.Prasad's classification. There were 57.7% children in social class V followed by 45.3% in social class IV.

Table 1: Socio-economic determinants of child labourers (n=150) No.(%)

Determinants	Child labourers (%)
Socioeconomic status	
Social class V	76 (50.7)
Social class IV	68 (45.3)
Social class III	6 (4)
Parental literacy	
Father illiterate	69 (46)
Mother illiterate	104 (69.3)
Type of family	
Nuclear	110 (74)
Joint	40 (26)
No of family members	
< 5	59 (39.3)
>5	91 (60.7)
Child labourers according to origin	
Localities	120 (80)
Migrants	30 (20)
Level of schooling	
Illiterate	32 (21.3)
Primary	88 (58.7)
Higher secondary	30 (20)
Religion	
Hindu	108 (72)
Muslim	18 (12)
Buddhist	24 (16)

Indian Child Labour (Prohibition and regulation) Act, 1986 had recommended that the child workers would work for maximum six hours a day with 1 hour rest after 3 hours of work and they would get one weekly holiday. Table 2 shows that 46.7% of the child labourers had to work for more than 6 hours a day. The present study

observed that their average duration of work as 6.1 days per week. Mean working hours in a day were found to be 7.9 hours as a whole. This study also observed that 12% of working children did not get any rest and 14% got one hour rest after 3 hours of continuous work as per recommendation. There were no incentives to 17%, but 28% got clothing. Domestic helpers were less exploited than other categories. Eighty percent child labourers were quite satisfied with their working conditions while 5% complained of ill treatment by the employer.

Table 2: Type of occupation and working hours

Occupation	Working hours			
	< 6	6-10	>10	Total
Farmer	15 (62.5)	8 (33.3)	1 (4.2)	24(100)
Garage worker	3(25)	6(50)	3 (25)	12(100)
Rag picker	1(16.7)	3(50)	2(33.3)	6((100)
Hotel boys	11(36.7)	16(53.3)	3(10)	30(100)
Shop helper	10(55.6)	6(33.3)	2(11.1)	18(100)
Daily Labourers	32(76.2)	9(21.4)	1(2.4)	42(100)
Others	8(44.5)	6(33.3)	4(22.2)	18(100)
Total	80(53.3)	54(36)	16(10.7)	150 (100)

Figures in parenthesis indicate percentages.

Discussion

Child labour is defined as any type of economic task, paid, unpaid, or exploitative, engaged in by a child less than 14 years of age, which places the interests of the beneficiary well above those of the child and is detrimental to the physical, mental, social, educational and moral development of the child.^[1] Child labour is an issue of global concern but statistics on the subject are often underestimated

partly because of practical difficulties and also because of differences in the design and implementation of surveys.^[5] According to the World Health Report (1995), 15% of children aged 10-14 years were working in Asia and India had the largest percentage of child labourers in the world. Child labour contributes to about 20% of India's GNP and mostly operates in the unorganized, informal, and unregulated sectors of the economy and is not being adequately reported. The most powerful force driving children into labor is exploitation of poverty. They begin to work at a very young age. These child labourers are engaged in various types of working situations in unorganized urban sectors. Poor and unsafe working conditions adversely affect these children and they may suffer from poor physical, mental, and social development. They have to work in an unkind, uncomfortable, and often physically hazardous environment for long hours. Present study revealed that 80% of children involved in child labour belonged to the age group of 11-13 years. Similar findings were observed by Malik S^[7] and IPER.^[11] The study also indicates the poor educational status among the child workers. In a study by Nath and Majumdar^[12], 44.8% of child labour never attended the school and similar study by Banerjee 10 reports the incidence at 56%. However in our Scenario, 21.3% of children involved in child labour never attended the school. The present study focused on children within the compulsory age of schooling, which is also probably the peak age for child labour. Also the study unlike previous local ones was school based. The children were the primary responders and interviews were conducted away from the influence of interference by parents.

There was a higher representation of girls than boys among working children also in accordance with previous observations.^[13,14] It is attractive to conjecture that the finding reflects gender bias in upbringing aimed at preparing the girls for traditional roles of small-scale economic trades to boost family economy. It may also be speculated that girls in rural Wardha are more amenable and responsive to parental control and as such are assigned economic tasks more often.

There was an increasing trend of engagement of child labourers with increasing number of children within the family (60.7% belonged to family with more than 5 children). This observation is consistent with that of

Banerjee.^[10] It may be, as has been suggested by other workers^[15] that the desire for large family size is based on potential economic considerations.

Considering the different parental factors responsible for child labour, Banerjee SR^[10] found in Kolkata that 82.7% of fathers and 93.9% of mothers of working children were illiterate, whereas, Kunungo¹⁶ in Bhubaneswar found it to be 75% and 100% respectively. The present study observed it as 46% and 69.3% respectively showing a better educational status amongst the parents.

In the present study, 46.7% of the child workers had to work for more than 6 hours a day which was found as 97% and 90% respectively by Pati and Swain^[17] and Mehta^[18] respectively. Nath and Majumder^[12] observed the average duration of work as 6.8 days a week, whereas the present study found it as 6.1 day per week. The prevalence of child labour increased with decreasing parental education and socio-economic class. These findings are similar to other studies.^[10, 13] The reasons for these observations are quite obvious. Educated parents are more likely to understand the need for a growing child to concentrate on activities capable of enhancing realization of their full potential and the need to avoid potentially 'harmful' activities. Also, better socio-economic standing removes the pressure on parents to put their children to work.

Conclusion and recommendation

Child labour cannot be totally eradicated by legislation alone, unless supplemented by socio-economic and educational upliftment of the underprivileged section of the society. It was seen most prevalent (80%) among 11-13 year age group. It increases with decreasing parental socio-economic status. A little less than half (46.7%) of the child labourers had to work for more than 6 hours a day. Average duration of work as 6.1 days per week. There is a need to protect girl child, advocate reduction in family size and promote parental education/economic empowerment in order to reduce the urge on children to perform economic

roles. Early implementation of the child labour law with appointment of more inspectors to detect violation of law is necessary.

References

1. Oloko SBA: Child labour: the hidden workforce – children domestic labour. *The Progress of Nigerian Children* 1997:48-51.
2. ILO-IPEC Action against child labor – Highlights 2002, Geneva. 2002:11.
3. Scanlon TJ, Prior V, Lamarao MLN, Lynch MA, Scanlon F: Child labour. *BMJ* 2002, 325:401-403.
4. Zierold KM, Garman S, Anderson H: Summer work and injury among middle school students, aged 10–14 years. *Occup Environ Med* 2004, 61(6):518-522.
5. World of Work: Fighting Child labour: From dream to reality. ILO 1997, 22:18-24.
6. International Labour Organization (ILO) - International Program on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC). *Child Labour Statistics, SIMPOC: 2000*.
7. Malik S, Biswas B, Mitra S, Coudhary N. Some Socio-economic determinants and working environmental conditions of child labourers in a slum area of Kolkata. *Indian J of Community Medicine* 2002; 27: 161-165.
8. Park K. *Textbook of Preventive and social medicine*, 20th Ed (2009), Publ. Banarsidas Bhahot, Jabalpur.
9. International Labour Organization. 1995. *World Labour Report*. Geneva: International Labour Organization.
10. Banerjee SR. Study of child labour in suburban areas of Calcutta, Paper submitted in workshop on child labour organized by Indian Academy of Pediatrics in Kolkata 1989: 43-48.

11. IPER (Institute for Psychological and Educational Research), Humanising Child Labour: A Report on the IPER Project on Child Labour in India, Ed A. Ghosh, 1985.
12. Nath P, Majumder K. Working Children in India In: Rehabilitation of Child Labourers in India, Ed. R.N. Pati, New Delhi, 1991: 165-169.
13. Thapa S, Chhetry D, Aryal RH: Poverty, literacy and child labour in Nepal: a district-level analysis. Asia Pac Popul J 1996, 11:3-14.
14. Oyedeji GA: The effect of socio-economic factors on the incidence and severity of gastroenteritis in Nigerian children. Niger Med J 1987, 17:229-232.
15. Caldwell JC: The socio-economic explanation of high fertility, Canberra, The Australian National University Press; 1976.
16. Kanungo J. The young girls helping in our household works In: Rehabilitation of Child Labourers in India, Ed R.N. Pati, New Delhi 1991: 218-238.

