

## PREVELANCE OF CHILD LABOUR: A CASE OF SRINAGAR DISTRICT OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR IN NORTH INDIA

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Child labour in India has emerged as a big menace in the recent decades. Despite legislation in vogue, child labour is increasing at an alarming rate. Owing to an unprecedented increase in child labour, the present study revisits the issue of child labour in the north Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. The study tries to explore the factors responsible for the widespread prevalence of child labour in the automobile and handicraft sectors in Srinagar district of Jammu and Kashmir. The empirical evidence suggests that one of the major factors responsible for the prevalence of child labour in Srinagar district is the socio-economic handicaps. The comparative analysis shows that the children working in handicraft sector belong to more economically .more downtrodden families than that of automobile sector. Further, the lack of proper implementation of the legislation coupled with the socio-economic vulnerability of the child labourers, forces them to work in extreme and unhygienic informal conditions, which caste severe repercussions on their health. The present study, therefore, undertakes a discussion of these findings, related policy implication and suggestive measures so as to tackle the menace of child labour.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Automobile Sector, Child Labour, Handicraft Sector, India, Kashmir, Srinagar*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Child labour is banned in virtually all countries, yet it continues to flourish. With the economic recession and its after-effects in the industrialized countries and persistent poverty in developing countries, the phenomenon is growing at a very fast rate. The problem has existed around the world since the very dawn of human civilization. However, the majority of the world's child labourers are found in Asia with 153 million children working (ILO, 1999). One such Asian country, India has the largest number of world's working children between 60 million to 115 million (Tucker & Ganesan, 1997; Kovacevic, 2009). Within India, in the northern state of Jammu & Kashmir, child labour has of late assumed new proportions due to several reasons, the main one being of political turmoil in the state in the last two decades. In Srinagar, the summer capital of Jammu & Kashmir, the phenomenon of child labour remains widespread at automobile workshops and petrol pumps. Similarly, many children also work as, domestic hands, bus conductors, carpet weavers, salesmen, agriculture helpers and so on... Given the sheer magnitude of child labour in the state as revealed by official statistics, Census (2001) as well as non-governmental agencies, studying child labour becomes an important exercise. This study hence aims to put in proper perspective the situation of child labour in India by reviewing the relevant literature and focusing on the issue of child labour in the northern Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. The aim is to understand whether the socio-economic status of the children's families is the only reason for child labour in Srinagar, and find out if

the working children's income is indispensable in running their households. We also examine the health and well-being of the children caught in child labour. Quantitative approach using the survey method is used to meet the objectives of the study.

## OBJECTIVES

- To understand whether the socio – economic status of families is the only reason for the child labour in Srinagar.
- To find out whether the child labourer's income is indispensable in running the household.
- To find out the effect of working conditions on child labourers, particularly on their health.

## CHILD LABOUR: GLOBAL SCENARIO

Any work, whether manual or mental, which is undertaken by a child below 14 years of age, for monetary consideration, is called child labour. Industrialized economies, especially of Europe, North America, and Australia, have largely reduced child labour. However, the problem of child labour as faced by the developing economies today has serious dimensions. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2007) estimates that the number of economically active children aged 5-14 years in the year 2000 were 211 million, while the number classified as child labourers was 186.3 million. Of these 120 million are estimated to be in full-time work. India, being the second most populated country in the world, is home to a huge number of such working children.

The table below shows in percentage terms the phenomenon of child labour across five continents.

**Table 1: Phenomenon of Child Labour across Five Continents**

%Region	Year 1980	Year 1985	Year 1990
Africa	17.0	18.0	21.3
America	4.7	5.6	N/A*
Asia	77.8	75.9	72.3
Europe	0.3	0.2	0.1
Oceania	0.2	0.2	0.2

*Source:* Siddiqi & Patrinos (1995)

*\*N/A: Not available*

According to Tucker & Ganesan (1997), India has the largest number of world's working children between 60 to 115 million. Siddiqi & Patrinos (1995) mention that India leads Asia in child labour with 44 million children working while Bhat (2009) states that 55 million children in India at present are in labour force. According to the International Labour Office (ILO, 2007), there are 25 million children employed in the agricultural sector, 20 million in service jobs (hotels, shops and as servants in home) and 5 million in the handloom, carpet making, gem cutting and match making industries. 91% of child labour in India occur in rural areas and 9% in urban areas Bhat & Rather (2009). In India, every third child is a working child and every fourth child in the age group 5-15 is employed. The informal sector contributes more to the child labour as it remains unchecked and unnoticed.

Jammu and Kashmir State in India is one such state where child labour is widespread. The state is divided into three Regions: Kashmir, Jammu and Ladakh. The state has 22 districts with a total population of 10.14 million. The population of the Kashmir Region is 5.48 million (53.9%), that of the Jammu Region is 4.43 million (43.7%) while the Ladakh region has a population of 236,539 (2.3%). The main district of the Kashmir Division, Srinagar has a total

population of 1,202,447 out of which 369,634 are children. 78,478 of these children fall in the age group of 0-4 years while 291,156 belong to age group 5-14 years (Census, 2001). The phenomenon of child labour in Jammu and Kashmir is not different from the rest of the country. According to the census of 2001, 175,630 child labourers were found in Jammu and Kashmir State. Given the political disturbances in the state from the past more than two decades, particularly in the Kashmir valley, child labour has increased exponentially in Jammu and Kashmir in general and in the Kashmir Province in particular. The conflict has children's education in shambles. While child labour remains a serious concern throughout the country, in Jammu and Kashmir this issue becomes more alarming as the government and the civil society at large give priority to issues related to the conflict.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Several studies document the phenomenon of child labour in different parts of India. Shandilya & Khan (2003) used mixed methods to look at child labour in Patna, the largest city in Bihar (one of the poorest states in India). Under-fed and under-paid, child labourers were found to work for as long as 14 hours a day with 90% of them working under pressure from their families. This study also revealed that the majority of the children (62%) reported multiple health problems.

Another study by Devi & Roy (2008) focused mainly on the prevalence of child labour among school children in the rural and urban areas of Pondicherry. They found that the overall prevalence of child labour among students was 32.5% (42.8% in rural and 24.9% in urban areas). Irrespective of the area, educational level of the mother, crowding in the family, families being in debt, the presence of a handicapped or alcoholic member in the family, gender and religion were significantly associated with the working child.

Many studies report that poverty is the main reason for child labour (Harper & Karen, 2003; Oyaide, 2000). Sarkar (2007) reported that extreme poverty led to the entry of children into the labour market and their exploitation became common. The author suggests that the employment of child workers in urban India is growing much faster than in rural India and that the four sectors that need to be targeted for the elimination of child labour are manufacturing, transport, storage and communication while wage-based agriculture in rural and urban India must not be ignored. Concurring with Sarkar (2007), Molankal (2008) reported that the core reason for child labour is poverty. Poverty coupled with a rapidly growing population, ignorance and increasing dependency load are behind the grim incidence of children employment in the villages and towns of developing countries. The author adds that in India, child labour is not a new phenomenon. It has been in existence since time immemorial in one form or the other and has been changing from time to time. In the context of Jammu and Kashmir, Shah (1992, pp. 97-101) looked at the informal sector using a mixture of quantitative and qualitative approaches. As is the case in the rest of India, the author found children working for long hours ranging from 9-20 hours a day depending on the industry in which they worked. In addition the children were found to be typically underpaid. In contrast to these studies, however, Boyden, Ling, & Myers (1998) suggest that it is too simplistic to attribute child labour to poverty alone. Other factors that have been found to generate child labour include the inadequacy of the school system, geographical location of the family (Kelly, 1998); large family size (Kamocho, Munalula, & Miti, 1997) and family dysfunction due to HIV/AIDS or divorce (Lungwangwa & Macwan'gi, 2004). There are numerous studies on working children from around the world. However a review of these studies reveals that the children tend to work prolonged and irregular hours, without rest, play, or recreation, suffer from abuse and often live in hazardous

conditions (Oyaide, 2000a). The next section presents the methodology used in this study to look at child labour in the northern state of Jammu and Kashmir in India.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The step wise methodology adopted for the present study can be discussed as:

### **Research Design**

Pursuant to an extensive review of the related literature to understand child labour in India, a quantitative approach using the survey method was used to answer the objectives of this study the survey, carried out by using interview schedule, targeted child labourers operating in Srinagar city who were working in Automobile workshops and as Hook embroidery workers (Handicraft industry). Local languages, namely Kashmiri and Urdu were used for communication. Aware of the problems translating the languages may cause, we followed the back-translation procedure recommended by Brislin (1970) to ensure validity of the interview schedule.

### **Research Site**

Several areas of Srinagar namely Batamaloo, Barzulla, Rambagh and Hyderpora Bye-pass were surveyed to collect data from children working in automobile workshops. These places were chosen as most of the automobile workshops in the Srinagar city are located in these areas. To collect data from child labourers working as embroidery workers (Handicraft industry), the areas of Palpora and Parampora were chosen. These two areas were chosen particularly because the National Child Labour Project (NCLP, 1988) sponsored by the Government of India works in these areas on child labour issues. Sampling constraints were applied and the data were collected only from qualified respondents; those who were 14 or below years of age. In three weeks, 130 interview schedules were conducted out of which 100 responses were found to be usable and taken for further data analysis.

### **Method**

Divided into three sections, the interview schedule used in this study was designed to be quantitative in nature. This was done to obtain valid and reliable measures of the variables. For this, previously validated scales were used to measure the variables of interest the details of which are provided at the end under Appendix A.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

The collected interview schedules were screened for completeness and the unqualified responses were eliminated. In total, out of 130 responses, 30 were found to be unusable as they were incomplete and did not provide complete information regarding the variables of interest. Thus 100 responses were included in the final data analysis. SPSS® v.16 was used for data analysis. We checked normality of the data and found it to be normally distributed. Descriptive statistics including frequency tests were conducted to answer the objectives of this study. The results of these statistical tests are discussed in the next section.

## **RESULTS**

### **Respondent Profile**

60 % male and 40 % female respondents participated in this study. 88% of the respondents were in the age group

of 12–14 years, whereas 12 % in the age group of 9–11 years. 52% of the respondents were engaged in an automobile work while 48 % worked as embroidery workers. The table below indicates that 96% and 4% of the respondents lived in nuclear and joint families respectively. Sixty-eight % of the children had 4–7 family members in their family while 32% had 8–11 family members. 64% of the child labourers had 1–4 siblings and 36% had 5–8 siblings. The monthly income of 94% of the respondents was Rupees 500–1500 while only 4% of these children were earning more than 1500 rupees per month. The monthly family income of 62% of the respondents was below 4000 rupees, for 24% it was below 6000 rupees whereas for 12% it was below 8000 rupees and only for 2% of the respondents the monthly family income was above 8000 rupees.

**Table 2: Demographic Information of the Respondents**

Item		%
Gender	Male	60
	Female	40
Age	9 – 11	12
	12 – 14	88
Occupation	Automobile worker	52
	Embroidery worker	48
Family Structure	Nuclear Family	96
	Joint Family	04
No. of family members	4 – 7	68
	8 – 11	32
No. of siblings	1– 4	64
	5 – 8	36
Child Monthly Income (in Indian Rupees)	500 - 1500	94
	1500- 2500	06
Family Monthly income (in Indian Rupees)	2000 – 4000	62
	4100 – 6000	24
	6100 – 8000	12
	Above 8000	02

## WORK, EDUCATION & SOCIO – ECONOMIC STATUS OF WORKING CHILDREN

To answer the objectives of this study, we analyzed the data using descriptive statistics. It was found that 60% of children started working at the age of 9 – 12 years, whereas 40% of children started working between the age of 5 – 8 years. It was revealed that 64% of children had attended the school, whereas 36% had not attended the school at any level. Results indicate that 64% of children were unable to afford schooling, 22 % of children were not interested in schooling, 10% of the children mentioned that their family did not allow them to go to school and 4% of the children mentioned that they did not attend the school because they needed to work for money. Looking at the legal aspect of child labour, a huge 78% of children did not know that it was prohibited under the law while 22% of the children knew that it was prohibited. The result also shows that 70% of the working children give their earnings to their parents, 20% of children spend it on family needs by themselves and just 10% of children spend their earnings on their personal needs. Sixty % of children were found to get no other work-related benefits besides their wages, 26%, however said that they got food/meals from the employer and 14% mentioned that they got clothes from their employer. This study also tried to find out if the children were happy working and found that 64% of children were not happy to work at the younger age, 14% were unable to answer this question and 22% were happy working at the younger age. Regarding working hours, the result indicates that 52% of children work for 8–9 hours, 42% work for 10 – 12 hours whereas 6 % of children worked for more than 12 hours. After analyzing the data, it emerged that 56% of children worked for 6 days in a week, 42% worked for the entire

week i.e.7 days whereas only 2% of children mentioned that they worked 5 days a week. This reflects a very hard work schedule for these children. Complicating the issue further, 52% of children said that they even worked at home after working for the entire day at workplace while as, 48 % of children said that they don't work at home after working for the entire day at workplace.

An assessment of work safety indicated that 92% of children did not use safety equipment during work while only 8 % used the safety equipment during work. This study also tried to find out if the working children faced abuse at the workplace and found that 62 % of children abused by the employer, while 38% of children said their employer did not abuse them. That paints a grim picture of the situation. The results also reveal that 60 % of children lived in semi-concrete houses, 30% in concrete houses and 10% of children lived in sheds. An attempt was also made in this study to find out how important the working children's wages are to the family. It was revealed that 54 % of children's income was indispensable for their family, whereas 44% of children mention it was not. It was also found that 74% of children did not want to send their siblings to work at the younger age because of many negative effects of child labour; however, 14% of children were willing to send their siblings to work at the younger age and 12% of children were indecisive on this. A brief overview of this is given in the table below.

**Table 3: Work, Education & Socio – Economic Status of Respondents**

At what age did you started working?	5 – 8	<b>40</b>
	9 – 12	<b>60</b>
Have you ever been to school?	YES	<b>64</b>
	No	<b>36</b>
Reason for not attending school?	Can't afford schooling	<b>64</b>
	Not interested in schooling	<b>22</b>
	Family doesn't allow schooling	<b>10</b>
	To work for money	<b>4</b>
What is you highest level of education?	None	<b>32</b>
	Primary	<b>52</b>
	Middle	<b>16</b>
Do you know Child labour is prohibited under law?	Yes	<b>22</b>
	No	<b>78</b>
What do you do with your earnings?	Spend on personal needs	<b>10</b>
	Spend on family needs	<b>20</b>
	Give to father / mother	<b>70</b>
What other benefits do you get?	Food/Meals	<b>26</b>
	Clothing	<b>14</b>
	None	<b>60</b>
Do you feel it is good to work at younger age?	Yes	<b>22</b>
	No	<b>64</b>
	Can't say	<b>14</b>
What is the nature of work?	Skilled	<b>52</b>
	Semi-skilled	<b>40</b>
	Un-skilled	<b>8</b>
How many hours a day do you work?	8-9	<b>52</b>
	10-12	<b>42</b>
	13-16	<b>6</b>
How many days a week do you work?	5 days	<b>2</b>
	6 days	<b>56</b>
	7 days	<b>42</b>
If given a chance, would you go to school?	Yes	<b>52</b>
	No	<b>48</b>

Do you perform any other work at home?	Yes	<b>14</b>
	No	<b>40</b>
	Sometimes	<b>46</b>
Do you use safety equipments during work?	Yes	<b>8</b>
	No	<b>92</b>

## HEALTH AND HYGIENE

Another objective of this study was to examine the health and hygiene of the working children. The result shows that 56 % of children did not wash their hands before eating, 42 % washed with water and only 2 % of children washed their hands with soap and water before eating food. This points to unhygienic conditions which led to 90 % of children falling ill sometimes, 8 % falling ill every month and 2 % of them falling ill often. All the children interviewed mentioned that they get a medical check-up only when they fall ill, otherwise they never see a doctor. Eighty-four % of children suffered from one or more disease while only 16 % were free from disease. Of these working children, 36 % suffered from headache/ eye problems usually, 32 % suffered from cold and cough usually, 16 % suffered from stomach ache and 16 % had skin problems. Replying to another indicator of hygiene, 72 % of respondents mentioned that they changed their clothes once a week, 20 % mentioned that they changed clothes every day and 8 % mentioned that they changed their clothes after a fortnight. These statistics are briefly mentioned in the table below.

**Table 4: Health & Hygiene of Respondents**

<b>Item</b>	<b>%Age</b>	
How many times a day you eat food?	Twice a day	<b>98.0</b>
	Thrice a day	<b>2.0</b>
How do you wash hands before eating?	Only with water	<b>42.0</b>
	With soap	<b>2.0</b>
	Without washing	<b>56.0</b>
Is anyone from your family seriously ill?	Yes	<b>22.0</b>
	No	<b>78.0</b>
How often do you fall ill?	Sometimes	<b>90.0</b>
	Every month	<b>8.0</b>
	Often	<b>2.0</b>
When do you get medical checkup?	When ever get ill	<b>100</b>
Did you suffer from any disease recently?	Yes	<b>84.0</b>
	No	<b>16.0</b>
What usually is the nature of disease?	Cold & cough	<b>32.0</b>
	Stomach ache	<b>16.0</b>
	Skin problem	<b>16.0</b>
	Head ache/eye problem	<b>36.0</b>
How often do you change your clothes?	Every day	<b>20.0</b>
	After a week	<b>72.0</b>
	Fortnightly	<b>8.0</b>

## DISCUSSIONS

The current study shows that poverty is one of the major reasons of child labour in Kashmir: 64% of the interviewed children cited unaffordability as the reason for dropping out of the school. This finding is consistent with many past studies. For instance, Chaudhri and Wilson (1997) mention that poverty is one of the reasons of child labour in India.

Shandilya (2003) in his study conducted at Patna in India reveals that the poor economic condition of child labourers' families is the reason for child labour. Equally Sarkar (2007) highlights extreme poverty as a reason for the entry of children into the labour market. Another study conducted by Molankal (2008) mentions poverty as the core reason for child labour. This study also suggests that poverty coupled with a rapidly growing population, ignorance and increasing dependency are behind children's employment in villages and towns in developing countries. In the present study, 68% of the children mentioned that they had 4-7 family members, whereas 32% mentioned that they had 8 - 11 family members. Moreover, 96% of the working children lived in nuclear families. Kamocha, Munalula and Miti's (1997) made similar findings in their study conducted on child labour in Zambia, wherein they found large family size as a cause of child labour. Their findings indicate that child labour predominates in large households and that 28% of all working children come from households with 6-7 persons. The current study also indicates that the children worked longer days and hours in comparison to adults. Ninety four % of children interviewed for this study worked for 8- 12 hours while 98% worked 6-7 days a week. This finding concurs with Shandilya (2003) who found children working for 14 hours a day in Patna in India. In addition, Shah (1992) found children working for 9-15 hours daily in Kashmir. The current study further shows that working children are usually prone to diseases as 84% of children had suffered from disease recently and almost 100% of them had suffered from cold and cough, stomach ache, skin problem and headache/ eye problems. Similar findings were reported by Shandilya (2003); 62% of the working children examined in his study were found suffering from multiple health problems.

## **SUGGESTIVE MEASURES**

Based on the review of literature and field experience, we conclude that child labour cannot be straight away banned in developing countries; it can however be controlled. This is primarily due to the embeddedness of child labour in the socio-economic structures and set up by the society. Basu & Van (1998), Dessy (2000) and Soares (2010) too realized this and suggested that banning child labour alone is not likely to be effective in practice. A ban on child labour would be difficult to enforce, especially in the rural areas of the country (Brown, 2001). In India, a sizable 5% of the economy is supported by child labour (Basu, 1999). Therefore a ban on this practice, besides being difficult to enforce, will not even serve the purpose of ensuring improvement in children's welfare as 54% of the child labourers studied in this paper indicated child labourers' income as indispensable to their families. The authorities can, nevertheless, sensitize the public on the nature of crime committed by employing a child either as domestic help or otherwise. The authorities can also improve the condition of the child labourers by introducing attractive and free pre-primary and primary education to woo children. Imparting skill-based education at the school can reduce worries of unemployment among parents and discourage child labour. Authorities can also regulate children working as child labourers for last 4-5 years and ensure that the employers pay them fixed wages, provide them with benefits like medical facilities, provident fund facilities, and other benefits enjoyed by regular adult workers.

Community based school extension programmes, brought in as a result of effective policy-making, can raise awareness about the benefits and necessity of education and encourage children to go to school. Torres (2003) suggests that mandatory school attendance coupled with policies aimed at improving access to and the quality of schools, is important interventions that would primarily affect children who are not facing subsistence poverty. In line with the suggestion of Edmonds & Pavcnik (2005), the government of Jammu and Kashmir can make policies targeted at improving school

infrastructure and reducing the cost of schooling. In addition, the stated government can strictly implement the federally legislated Right to Education Act 2009 to bring prospective child labourers back into school. Lastly, policy makers can thwart the practice of child labour by developing a mechanism to monitor the informal sector for child labour so as to make it accountable.

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