

Quadrant II – Transcript and Related Materials

Programme: Bachelor of Arts (Third Year)

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Course Title: Indian Society: Issues and Concerns

Unit: 03 Delinquency and Child Abuse

Module Name: Child Labour: Nature, Causes and Effects

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Notes

Child Labour: Nature, Causes and Effects

Introduction

Children (0-14 years) comprise one third of the total population in the Indian country. Despite various initiatives, laws and protective measures, the condition of children remains a cause of concern in the country. Child labour is one such social issue and is recognised as a serious and complex social problem in India. Child labourers are denied their right to survival and development, education, leisure and play, an opportunity to develop themselves, and protection from abuse and neglect.

Meaning of child labour

Child labour is the practice of having children engage in economic activity, on part or full time basis, paid or unpaid, before attaining 14 years of age. The practice deprives children of their childhood and is harmful to their physical and mental development. Child labour is fundamentally different from casual work done by children, like gardening, helping others. Child labourers are exploited, exposed to hazardous work conditions and paid a small amount for their long hours of work.

Definition of child labour

The International Labour Organisation refers to children as those who are under 15 years of age. ILO define child labour as “work that deprives children of their dignity and that is harmful to physical and mental development. It refers to work, that is, mentally, physically, socially dangerous and harmful to children or whose schedule interferes with their ability to attend regular school.

Nature of child labour

1. A majority of child labourers are concentrated in the rural areas. About 60 per cent of them are below the age of 10 years.
 2. The number of children in urban areas who work in canteens and restaurants, engaged in picking rags and hawking goods, is vast but unrecorded.
 3. Children employed in hazardous industries are more unfortunate, for instance,
 - The fireworks and matchbox units in Sivakasi in Ramanathapuram district in Tamil Nadu employ around 45,000 children.
 - In the slate pencil industry of Mandsaur in Madhya Pradesh, out of total workforce of 12,000 workers, 1000 are children below the age of 14 years.
 - In Kashmir children are found working in craft industry, the fine hand embroidery requires children to maintain same posture for long hours and strain their eyes on intricate designs, thus leading to permanent physical deformities and eye damage.
 - In Surat boys in their early teens are engaged in large numbers in diamond-cutting operations which causes irreparable damage to eyes.
 4. Child labour is linked to bonded labour.
 - In Andhra Pradesh 21 per cent of the bonded labourers are under 16 years, as per the study conducted children enter bondage as early as five years old.
 5. In Orissa one common way of clearing debt is to sell daughters right to 10 years old, as maid servants to the creditor.
 6. In the tea gardens of Assam where employment of children below 12 years is prohibited, girls who bring food to their working parents are encouraged to stay back and help with the work. Boys are also found playing important role in the mining operations.
- Preferences for child workers are most common in the unorganised sector because, it is relatively easy for employers to disobey laws. Children are hidden from factory inspectors during inspection.
- Hence the working conditions of child labourers are horrible. They work under intolerable conditions, in private houses as domestic servants, in tea shops and restaurants as waiters and vessel, in mining and industrial units as young labourers and so on.

Causes of child labour

1. Poverty

Developing country like India where over 40 per cent of the population is living in condition of acute poverty, child labour is a issue. Without the earnings of children the standard of living of their families would decline further. Large numbers of them do not have families or cannot count on them for support. In these situations, the alternative to work may be idleness, destitution, crime. Children of poor families are forced to work particularly when the working members of the family become disabled due to physical and mental deformities, diseases or accident.

2. Possibility of extracting more work for fewer wages

Most of the employers prefer children for work because they can be easily cheated. Child labourers do not have trade union of their own and hence can't demand more wages.

3. Familial factors: such as divorce, desertion, rigid family relations cruelty at home, parent-child conflicts, criminal tendencies of parents force children to run away from the unpleasant family environment. The need for money forces the child to work.

4. **Employers justification:** employers give certain justification for employing children to support their guilt feelings. They argue that the work keeps children away from starvation. They are prevented from committing crimes which they would have involved in if they had no jobs.
5. The bureaucrats say that total eradication of child labour is not feasible because government cannot provide alternative employment to them.
6. Vested interest is another reason for child labour; child labour is often seen as cheap, thus benefitting the industries.
7. Young workers are unaware of their rights and less likely to complain or revolt.
8. The International sex Trade places great value on child prostitutes. Girls and boys are kidnapped from their homes or sold to network of child traffickers supplying overseas.
9. Unemployment of elders encourages child workers. Some parents send their child to work instead of school. Interestingly, children get work easily because they can be paid less than adults, children are also easy to exploit.
10. Access to compulsory, free education is limited.

Effects of child labour

1. Child labourers often face health problems because of working in dangerous harmful conditions. Most of these child labourers who are malnourished are not cared by their employers. They continue to work for long hours.
2. Children who cannot find work to feed their families resort to begging on the streets and in many cases also fall prey to prostitution. It also has a negative impact on the welfare of a nation. Existing laws or code of conduct are often violated.
3. Child labour increases illiteracy as children are involved in work. It thus hampers the overall economic growth of the country, reflecting poor human development.
4. As the children do not get education. When they turn into adults, finding jobs becomes difficult, since they do not possess the necessary skills and training. This leads to unemployment.
5. Child labourers are deprived of their basic rights of freedom and education and they are compelled to start work at a very early age.
6. Children lose their childhood as they start working before attaining 14 years of age.
7. Exhaustion and malnutrition are a result of underdeveloped children performing heavy manual labour, working long hours in an unbearable conditions and not earning enough to feed themselves adequately.
8. Among the one million children forced into prostitution every year pregnancy, drug addiction and mental illness are also common among child prostitutes.
9. Physical injuries are caused by badly maintained machinery on the farms and factories. Also children face many physical dangers and death from forced labour.
10. Immature and inexperienced child labourers may be completely unaware of the short and long term risks involved in their work. Many become unemployable at the age of 20, if injured they are discarded mercilessly by their employers.
11. Earn a small amount and work in unsafe conditions.
12. Children suffer from lung diseases, eye diseases asthma, etc. some are injured in fire accidents.

13. It affects every aspect of life from health, education, socio-economic status thus automatically affecting the family and the whole society.

Conclusion

Hence, child labour typically means the employment of children before attaining the age 14 years in any manual work with or without payment. It refers to work that is mentally, physically, socially and morally dangerous and harmful to children and interferes with their schooling by depriving them of the opportunity to attend school. Economic, familial and other causes force children to take up employment before the age of 14 years thus depriving of them of their childhood. It forces them to work in harmful conditions thus having many negative consequences in every aspect of their life from health to education, socio-economic status thus affecting family and the whole society.