

CHILD LABOUR-Impact, Laws and Implications

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1) Introduction

Recently, on our way to Mohali to watch an enthralling IPL match, we stopped by a Dhaba. The sight of a young boy caught my eye; he wouldn't have been more than 12 years of age. The owner called him "chotu", bossing him around and throwing orders at him. This particular incident stuck with me, bringing feelings of gratitude as well as pity. I felt upset over my inability to help his situation.

There are numerous such "Chotus" and "Chotis" in our country, forced into undesirable situations. Every nation links its future with the present status of its children. Due to lots of unfavourable factors, across India, Children are used in some severe forms of child labour such as bonded labour (Bandhua), child soldiers and trafficking.

2) Causes

There exist several factors which give rise to child labour. Poverty is the greatest cause of child labour in India. Impoverished parents make their children work at factories, homes or shops to earn wages in order to increase the income of their families. Additionally, socially backward and uneducated parents don't send their children for schooling, unaware of laws and schemes pertaining to education. The lure and greed of cheap labour is an essential driving factor for shopkeepers to employ children.

3) Comparison with the other countries

According to a report by the United Nations¹, 160 million children worldwide are engaged in child labour. That is almost one in ten children worldwide. Africa ranks highest among regions in the absolute number of children in child labour — 72 million. Asia and the Pacific ranks second highest — 7% of all children are in child labour there. A report by risk analysis firm Maplecroft², which ranks 197 countries, identifies Eritrea, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Myanmar, Sudan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Zimbabwe and Yemen as the 10 places where child labour is most prevalent. India is ranked 48th and sits within the high risk category.

¹United Nations: (World day Against Child Labour, 12 June, 2023):

<https://www.un.org/en/observances/world-day-against-child-labour#:~:text=Prevalence%20of%20child%20labour&text=Today%2C%20160%20million%20children%20are,in%20child%20labour%20%E2%80%94%2072%20million.>

² <https://www.maplecroft.com/risk-indices/child-labour-index/>

4) Situation at the National level

According to data from Census 2011³, the number of child labourers in India is 10.1 million of which 5.6 million are boys and 4.5 million are girls. They can be found in a variety of industries: brick kilns, carpet weaving, garment making, domestic service, food and refreshment services, agriculture, fisheries and mining. About 26% of child labour is engaged in cultivation work, and 32.9% are agriculture labourers, according to Census 2011. The incidence of child labour in India has decreased in India by 2.6 million between 2001 and 2011. However, the decline was more visible in rural areas, while number of child workers has increased in urban areas. Together, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh constitute nearly 55% of the total working children in India.

There have been several initiatives taken by the governments to reduce child labour, though their enforcement has been ambiguous, as child labour prevails. Some of these are-The Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act of 1986, National Policy on Child Labour (1987), National Child Labour Project Scheme, and the Pencil (pencil.gov.in) platform.

5) Impact of the issue

Tender minds fail to comprehend the overall view of a situation, are easily influenced and compelled into believing that child labour puts them in a better and well-off situation. The most direct and crushing impact of child labour is on their education and hence on their mental health. It prevents children from gaining the skills and education they require to have opportunities for decent work when they become an adult. Simultaneously, when a child is employed, it snatches the job opportunity for an adult, thus increasing unemployment. Children are exposed to physical and also, at times, sexual abuse at work. All in all, existence of a large number of child labourers has long term effect on the economy and it is a serious obstacle to the socio-economic welfare of the country.

6) What can I do as a volunteer?

As a volunteer, at an individual level, I shall refuse to employ a child as my house-help or in my dad's factory. Furthermore, I will report any case of child labour I come across and decide to take a stand to uplift the oppressed children. I can volunteer to teach the underprivileged children at the trusts and organisations near my home, At a bigger level, spreading awareness through campaigns, unions and movements is a great way to attract attention to this issue.

³ <https://labour.gov.in/childlabour/about-child-labour>

REFERENCES

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