Chapter IV

Data Issues and its Implication

4.1 Introduction

The study proposes to take up certain issues related to child labour in India. To understand incidence, characteristics and determinants of child labour in India one can take up two approaches. One is through secondary data and the second by conducting primary survey. The current study has done the both.

Initially, secondary data is used to comprehend the time trend of incidence of child labour in India and change in characteristics of them over time. The primary survey is used to analyse qualitative issues such as reasons for dropping out from school, role of parent's education, income of the household, availability of school and asset holdings. Also, data on average working hours, nature of work and average salary of the children is collected. These qualitative information are important for policy implications as increasingly it is understood that only schooling and poverty reduction may not be sufficient to address the issue of child labour. Policies should have flexibilities to accommodate the differences in culture, economic opportunities and attitude of people living in different regions of the country.

This chapter highlights the major data related issues in the context of the secondary data available on child labour. Also it will briefly touch upon the some data related aspects concerning primary survey.
4.2 Counting Child Labour in India

There are three main data source on Child Labour: First, is the Census of India publication based on complete enumeration every 10 years. Second source is the data collected by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) through the household sample survey. The third is the primary data collected by researchers from sector-specific field based studies.

Untill 1986, there was no general law related to child labour in India. With the Child Labour Prohibition Act (CLPRA) 1986, coming into force, it became mandatory on the part of the government to conduct surveys for identifying the extent of the problem. With the 1991 census showing a reduction in the total number of child labour in India (compared to that in 1981) it arouse the interest of not only the policy makers but also the academics and civil society organizations as well on this issue. But the Census due to its limitations does not give us enough information on the nature and causes of child labour. Moreover, there was also an overall concern about the correct estimate of child labour in India. In this backdrop, the Department of Statistics (GOI) undertook the responsibility to collect data relating to child labour (including a separate set of questions not included in the earlier large sample rounds) through the NSSO (1993-94) in its fifth quinquennial round with the objective “to make available useful information relating to child labour and its causes”.

The Census and NSS data are not comparable or for that matter even the same data source for various years are not strictly comparable. For example, if one looks at the census data, one might conclude that between 1971 and 1991, incidence of
child labour has increased to 11.3 million in 1991 from 10.8 million in 1971. Or between 1981 and 1991, there has been a significant decline from 13.6 to 11.3 million. A close scrutiny reveals that the data for 1991 is not comparable to earlier Census data because for 1971 and 1981, children in the age group 6-14 were considered while in 1991 the corresponding age group is 5-14 years. However, as per 2001 census the number of working children in the age group 5-14, are around 12.6 million; showing a clear increase in child labour in absolute form. It is important to note here that work participation rate (WPR) defined as number of working children as a percentage of total children in the same age group has gone down slightly from 5.37% to 5.00% during 1991-2001.

The Census and NSSO data are not comparable for obvious reasons as one uses ‘complete enumeration’ method and other one is based on sample survey. Moreover, census data on child labour appears to underestimate the incidence. Census does not consider children who are currently sick (for more than 15 days) or not working due to ‘other reasons’ but have regular jobs as working children. NSS considers them working. NSS captures this as through current weekly work status. However, it is mentioned in the NSS reports that compared to the census population or projections thereof, population estimates from NSSO surveys are in general, on the lower side. This is due to the differences in methods and coverage by NSSO in comparison to census. Thus, in order to estimate an absolute number in any category of the NSS ratios (such as WPR for total children) it is advised to apply the survey estimates of such ratios to the census population for that category.
When we look into the last three large sample NSS data - July 1987-June 1988 (43rd Round), July 1993-June 1994 (50th Round) we find that since 1987-88 there has been a drastic fall in the total number of child labour in India. Let us first look into the method of data collection by NSS in these two rounds. In the 50th round apart from the collection of data on various aspects of employment, efforts were also made to collect data on the activity profile of children. This was done by inclusion of a set of questions for children in the age group of 5-14 years (Block - 8) in the Survey. This was quite distinct from the other NSS rounds.

In this round, NSSO attempted, for the first time to generate an education and activity profile of children (5-14 years). NSS 1993-94 gave us information on school attendance, engagement in household chores and other activities. In order to identify participation of children in economic activity, a deviation from the 'usual status' approach known as the 'major time' criterion was followed. As a result, a child was considered 'working' if he/she has spent some time even though nominal, in any work seasonal or with some regularity. As the 1986 law prohibits employment of children in specific hazardous industries and processes, NSS considered it important to highlight the processes in which children were involved. There were other important aspects related to the reasons for seeking work/available for work and for not attending school.

Let us now look into the estimates of child labour from these two sources. NSS 50th round data (1993-94) shows that there were about 13.9 million children working. We may point out here that if we deduct the number of children engaged in subsidiary occupation (about 3 million) from the total number of child labourers in
NSS 1993-94 then the total number of child labourers stand at around 11 million (close to census estimate of 11.3 in 1991). As per NSS, a person whose principal usual status was determined on the basis of the major time criterion could have pursued some economic activity for a relatively shorter (minor time) during the reference period of 365 days preceding the date of survey. The status in which such economic activity was pursued was the subsidiary economic activity status of that person. On the other hand, Census also considers main (full-time) worker and marginal worker (depending whether he/she worked for more or less part of the year (183 days). However, NSS takes into account even activities of smaller duration depending on the current weekly or daily status and hence the possibility to capture more child workers compared to Census, which depends only on recall of the economic activity in last 365 days. Finally, we need to remember that the objective of the Census is to provide population statistics with some basic characteristics. On the other hand, NSS employment/unemployment survey is specially designed to collect detailed information about the work profile of people. Hence, relevant information on child labour is collected through NSSO. For example, we can mention that work profile in NSS can be described by different categories of economic activities (for details refer to activity codes of NSS). This process help us to narrow down the actual “nowhere children” through activity code ‘others’ (code 97). This code deals with the residual population who are not involved in any other recognized activity including schooling and they are not disabled, sick or beggars, etc. In the current study, the NSS data has been used extensively to understand various issues related to child labour in India.
4.3 Use of NSS data in the Current Study

The nature and characteristics of child labour are scrutinized considering the frequency of child labour across age and sex. The state wise data are used to understand the economic activities of children. For this purpose, three large round surveys of NSS - 47th (July 1987-June 1988), 50th (July 1993 to June 1994) and 55th (July 1999- June 2000) 50th and 55th Round) are used to understand the trend in various issues. As pointed out earlier, the NSS data on employment/unemployment gives the economic activity for all living individuals including children.

The conceptual framework of NSS employment/unemployment is derived from the Dantwala Committee Report on employment estimates in 1970. Apart from large round surveys, NSS also organize small surveys regularly to collect information on certain key items of on employment and unemployment from limited set of households. The NSS survey used the interview method of data collection from a sample of randomly selected households. The sample design is basically a stratified multi stage random sampling both for rural and urban areas. Through this method ‘first stage units’ (FSU) or villages/urban areas are selected. In 1999-00 survey a total number of 10384 FSUs were selected. Big FSUs were further divided into subgroups and then households were selected randomly.

To understand the incidence of child labour, the study extracts the data considering the economic activity code of children in the age group 5-14 years from the NSS raw data pertaining to each round. Also state wise residence (rural or

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urban), and gender (male or female) distribution has been calculated. NSS multiplier has been used to estimate the required population in the age group. The value of NSS multiplier is a function of the population size of different stratum in the sample. For analyzing the characteristics of child worker, the current study mostly rely on the specific results of the 1993-94 survey which include several joint activity status such school going and working, school going and household work, etc. It is to be noted that data on school attendance status of the children from 43rd round and 55th round are also used to understand the trend of the nowhere children.

For understanding the state wise determinants of child labour state wise reduction of poverty rate, increase in schooling status, along with the growth in State Domestic product (SDP) are used.

4.4 Data Issues in the Primary Survey

Primary survey has also been conducted towards understanding the influence of economic well being of a household in deciding about whether a child should be in school or not. Household sample from four states have been collected for this purpose: Assam, Chhattisgarh, Delhi and Karnataka. Assam and Chhattisgarh provide the characteristics of child labour in rural areas and other two provides information about child labour in urban areas. It is to be noted that the sample is collected from those areas where the incidence of child labourers is high. Survey was conducted at two stages. At the first stage, information about the area, its population, major occupation of the inhabitants etc. is collected. In the next stage, interview based on the questionnaire prepared for the survey was conducted in the
households selected. A random survey was conducted for the purpose. Attempt was made to collect information from maximum number of households. Information was collected about the economic profile of the family, their assets such as houses, land holding, indebtedness and education of the adults in the family. These information have been used extensively to understand role of family in taking decision to send child to school or to work. Also, survey focused on the issues such as the reason of children dropping out from school, distance of schools, fees, etc. The survey process was tedious, as it required pursuance to motivate the household members to reveal the information. Repeated visits were made in many of the households. Along with this, informal discussion with the children and female members helped in comprehending the qualitative aspects. The survey collected both quantitative and qualitative information about children and try to validate the results derived from the secondary sources.

It is important to note that most of the primary survey based studies in India are industry specific. These studies mainly focus on industry environment, age and gender profile of children, average hours of work, etc. Apart from this, safety of workers, unpaid work, caste etc. are generally covered. The current study covers rural areas where agriculture is the major occupation (such as Chattisgarh). In most of the cases, child labour is entangled with the family labour and no specific extra payment is made to children. Their income is part of the total family income. Also in such cases, children don’t work continuously for long hours (in contrast to children working in factories). In many cases, where children work in agricultural land of others, quite often minimum wage is not ensured. The current study makes
an attempt to highlight these issues. Also, in some areas such as in Karnataka, few organizations (NGOs) work to rehabilitate child labour. The study also highlights these issues. Due to rapid urbanisation economic opportunities are increasing in places like Delhi and people from neighboring states are migrating to this place and settling in the outskirts. The survey in Delhi highlights the migrating issues and their impact on child labour in a number of odd jobs. It also focuses on rising the pressure on infrastructure such as schools in those areas and its impact on the children. In Assam, the focus is on the socio economic dynamics of the plantation areas. Survey was done mainly in the tea plantation area. Children are found to help parents in leaf plucking and other such activities, often without any remuneration. Again, others are found to work in informal sector activities around the tea garden area. Further, NSS data indicates that the percentage of child labour in Delhi has increased from less than 1 % (1993-94) to more than 8% (1999-2000), Assam also registers a rise during the same period and the fall in the percentage in Karnataka is less than 1%. NSS data on Chattisgarh is not available separately for this period, (as this state was a part of Madhya Pradesh) however, this state was in the news for last few years due to the practice of child marriage.

There are a host of individual, family, socio-economic and region driven characteristics including the employment status of the household that affects the decision towards child’s participation in economic activities. Through the primary survey in four different states, attempts have been made to logically link some of these aspects with the incidence and characteristics of child labour.