Chapter II
CHILD LABOUR IN INDIA

India is the seventh largest country in the world with a population of 846 million belonging to varied religious and cultural groups, spread over a diverse geographical area. The country’s population is now one billion according to United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA). The total child population in India is about 307 million, which is more than the total population of many countries of the world. While the informal sector as a major source of employment for the child labour is being increasingly recognised, not much is known about the contribution of child labour to the process of income generation.

The state that children live in as a result of them being working at too early an age and the effect that they are led to when child labour is abolished is given below.

CHILD LABOUR

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{NO EDUCATION} \quad \downarrow \\
\text{UNSKILLED JOBS} \quad \downarrow \\
\text{EXPLOITATIVE WAGES} \quad \downarrow \\
\text{DENIES ADULTS EMPLOYMENT} \quad \downarrow \\
\text{EARLY PHYSICAL DECAY} \quad \downarrow \\
\text{EARLY MARRIAGE - MANY CHILDREN} \quad \downarrow \\
\text{ECONOMIC INSECURITY} \quad \downarrow \\
\text{LOW QUALITY OF LIFE} \quad \downarrow \\
\text{PERPETUATES POVERTY} \quad \downarrow
\end{align*} \]

ABOLISH CHILD LABOUR

\[ \begin{align*}
\text{CHILD EDUCATION} \quad \downarrow \\
\text{SKILLED JOBS} \quad \downarrow \\
\text{BETTER WAGES} \quad \downarrow \\
\text{HIGHER ADULT EMPLOYMENT} \quad \downarrow \\
\text{DELAYED MARRIAGE - FEWER CHILDREN} \quad \downarrow \\
\text{ECONOMIC SECURITY} \quad \downarrow \\
\text{BETTER QUALITY OF LIFE} \quad \downarrow \\
\text{ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT} \quad \downarrow
\end{align*} \]


The Progress of Indian State. UNICEF India, 1996, New Delhi, p.63.
ORIGIN OF CHILD LABOUR

The use of child labour has its roots in two traditions a) from children learning their disciplines and skills of work from their parents and b) from bonded labour where a young child is given to a landlord in lieu of debt repayment and the landlord uses him or her as his bonded servant. Vagrant and illegal trades also attract a few youngsters as easy-money through low wages make their life temporarily comfortable. Urbanisation, rapid industrialization and growing unemployment amongst adults - all have a contributory effect on the employment of children.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

Employment of children in India in the form of slavery was mentioned in Kautilya's Arthashastra of the 3rd century B.C. where child-slaves of less than eight years of age were known to be working in many nobles' houses. In the medieval period, children were normally placed as trainees under artisans and craftsman. Certain crafts totally depended on the employment of children. The tradition still continues in carpet, cotton and silk weaving industries which provide employment to a large number of children even today. In the quasifeudal tradition of rural production, parents obligations often involved all members of the family working for the landlords. Glimpses of this form can still be seen in the form of bonded labour.

An attempt has been made in this chapter to identify various categories of children working in India and Chennai City in particular. The various aspects of the problems of child labour which have been discussed are myths about child labour, the nature and magnitude of the problem of child labour in India and Chennai City in particular including the problems of street children and their working conditions and earnings of child labourers.

MYTHS ABOUT CHILD LABOUR

The sudden increase of interest in child labour has contributed to three myths about child labour. The first is that child labour is uniquely a problem of the developing world. The second is that most child labourers are at work in sweatshops producing cheap goods for export to the stores of the rich world. And the third is that, there is a simple solution to the child labour problem - a 'trade sanction' or 'boycott' - that will end it once and for all.


It is a myth that child labour only happens in the poor world. While the vast majority of working children are found in developing countries, children routinely work in all countries. In every country, rich and poor, it is the nature of the work children do that determines whether or not they are harmed by it. When all forms of work are considered, the percentage of children working in industrialized countries can be surprisingly high. In the United Kingdom, for example, the most reliable estimates available show that between 15 and 26 percent of 11 year olds and between 36 and 66 percent of 15 year olds are working.

Most of the child workers in industrialized countries also attend school. But there is a naivety in the assumption that the only kind of work undertaken by children in the West is on the ‘pocket-money’ model. Industrialized nations tend to see themselves as having completely eradicated the harsher forms of child labour and thus preach that poorer countries should follow their example.

Yet hazardous forms of child labour can be found in most rich countries. In the US, for example, the majority of child workers are employed in agriculture. A study by the US General Accounting Office showed a 250 per cent increase in child labour violations between 1983 and 1990. In a three-day stint operation in 1990, the US Department of Labour discovered more than 11,000 children working illegally. The same year, a survey of Mexican-American children working in New York state farms showed that almost half had worked in fields with pesticides and more than a third had themselves been affected, either directly or indirectly.

The second myth is that child labour primarily occurs in export industries. Export industries are the most visible sector in which children work. But there are also tens of millions of children all around the world who work in non-export areas, often in hazardous or exploitative conditions. In fact, only a very small percentage of all child workers are employed in export-sector industries probably less than 5 percent.

Children are active in different kinds of jobs outside the export sector. These ranged from household work to brick-making, from stone-breaking to selling in shops and on streets, from bike-repairing to rag-picking.


The third myth is that, the only way to make headway against child labour is for consumers and governments to apply pressure through sanctions and boycotts. This myth is incorrect on two accounts. First, it implies that all the momentum for action on child labour is generated by Western Pressure - and that people, NGOs, the media and governments in developing countries have been ignoring or condoning the problem. In fact, activists and organisations, both local and international have been diligently at work in developing countries for years, exposing child labour abuses, developing local and national programmes and promoting consumer awareness in their own countries and in the West through international campaigns. The ILO International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour is one important example. Launched in 1991 to help children in six countries, it now works with NGOs and governments as partners in 19 countries. The IPEC programme has been dealt in detail in Chapter V.

Second, this myth implies that there is one clear highway, usually involving trade sanctions and consumer boycotts, to the resolution of the problem.

International commitment and pressure are undoubtedly important. But sanctions affect only export industries, which exploit a relatively small percentage of child labourers. And sanctions are also blunt instruments with long-term consequences that may not be foreseen, with the result that they harm, instead of helping children.

The Harkin Bill, was introduced into the US Congress in 1992 with the laudable aim of prohibiting the import of products made by children under 15. But the mere threat of such a measure panicked the garment industry and the child workers, most of them girls, were summarily dismissed from the garment factories. The unusual step was taken by an international organisation in tracing some of these children, to see what happened to them after their dismissal. Some were found working in more hazardous situations in unsafe workshops where they were paid less, or in prostitution.

In the pre-industrial revolution period, the phenomenon of child labour was prevalent all over the world, though having an altogether different nature and magnitude. This problem was not so visible as it is today because of low dispersion of child labour both within and between the economies. During the post industrial revolution period, child labour became a growing phenomenon upto the first half of this century in industrialised countries and it still continues to grow in developing countries. This problem also expected to become more acute with the economic recession, which has started to make its appearance in industrialised countries, and because of persistent poverty and the population explosion in the third world, in general and in India in particular.
However, the nature and magnitude of the problem of child labour are now largely different, though still today some of the past characteristics of this problem are present, particularly in India. Every where in the world, children are exploited through wage employment and self-employment. Even then, almost nowhere else does this problem feature so high in the priority of governmental and non-governmental organisation.\[9\]

The expansion of the urban sector has been very fast and the growth rate of population particularly below the poverty line, is also very high, thereby giving rise to several complex urban problems, including expansion of slums - (ie) unauthorised settlements.

Rapid urbanisation has made the problem of child labour more visible because of its association with work outside the family context and high rate of rural - urban migration of both the family and individual types. In a developing country like India, children are mainly found working in small manufacturing units as cheap labour. Similarly, technical innovations in urban sector often forces children into street trades turning child labour into casual labour.\[10\]

THE SCENARIO OF CHILD LABOUR

Estimates supplied by multi-agencies regarding the size of child labour in India does not offer a uniform picture. According to the 1971 census, 10.74 million children were in the labour force. The number of child workers in India was estimated at 15.1 million in 1975\[11\]. The National Statistical Survey (NSS) 32nd round (1977-78) estimated child workers in the age group of 5-14 at being 16.25 million in 1978. According to the 1981 census, 13.6 million children were in the labour force (11.2 million as main workers and 2.4 million as marginal workers). In 1983, the planning commission projected the number of child workers at 17.4 million. The findings of the operations Research Group, Baroda in 1983, came up with an estimate of 44 million working children in India. The Balai Data Bank, Manila, estimated about 111 million child workers in India. Further, it states that if nearly half of India's population lives in poverty, the number of working children are likely to be over 100 million. The 1991 census has put the figure of child labour at 11.29 million. The Labour Minister, while announcing a plan, in August 1994, to liberate 2 million working children said that

\[9\] Mahaveer Jain. Child Labour in India. A Select Bibliography, National Labour Institute, Noida, UP, 1994, p.3.

\[10\] Ibid, p.5.

there were 20 million child workers in India. According to the Labour Force and the planning commission, the number of child labour would increase to 25 million by the year 2000. A 1995 report by the Government appointed commission on Labour Standards and International Trade, states that child labour has been increasing at the rate of 4 percent a year in India. According to an estimate of ILO (1996), there were 12.66 million children working full time and 10.50 million engaged in part-time work. The very recent UNICEF report (1997) reveals that, of the 250 million child labour sufferers in the world, over one-third are in India.

However, every estimate of child labour falls far short of the actual. There are such general limitations as multiplicity of concepts, methods of estimation and the sources of data. These are further compounded in the developing countries by the vast unorganised informal and unregulated sector of the economy and a corresponding level of labour market. In India, for instance, it is here that child labour mostly operates without being adequately represented in the official labour statistics.

Referring to the child labour position in India, the UNICEF represented various studies to say that child labour was increasing in urban areas and decreasing in rural areas, although the absolute numbers of child labourers in rural areas was higher than in urban areas. Further, special attention must be paid to the forgotten or invisible areas of child labour, such as within the home, on the family farm or in domestic service. However, some startling facts about child labour in India are as follows:

1. The number of full-time child workers increased from 13,400,000 in 1951 to 14,500,000 in 1961 and then decreased to 12,700,000.
2. The marginal child labour increased from 2,400,000 in 1981, to 10,500,000 in 1991.
3. There is a massive group of children referred to as "nowhere children" which appear neither in official labour statistics nor in the education statistics. The ILO estimates that, the number of children in the age group 5 to 14 years, who are neither in school nor in the labour force, is 24,000,000.
4. The combined total of full-time child workers, marginal child workers and "nowhere children", amounts to over 97,000,000 or almost 40 percent of the 5 to 14 years child population.

---

14 Child Labour in India, A dossier. Compiled by Campaign Against Child Labour, Published by Yuva, Bombay.
It is observed that, about 18 million children constitute a part of the labour-force out of 159 million child population in India\textsuperscript{15}. The definition of child labour varies from one state to that of another, in the sense that in Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, a child would mean and include a person under sixteen years age, while in Gujarat and West Bengal a person under eighteen years, in a state of Andhra Pradesh a child means a person of fourteen years or less than that, under the Children's Act 1960 applicable to Union Territories a child is defined as a boy under sixteen years and a girl under eighteen years in age\textsuperscript{16}.

Street child labour, virtually unheard of previously is now a growing problem. The numbers of children working on the streets, selling food and other products have increased. Many have dropped out of school or never attended classes. Some are able to combine some schooling with their street work, but nevertheless many are exploited and cheated by adults and peers and must spend many hours earning for their survival. Many suffer from malnutrition and illness including tuberculosis. Self-esteem is often low, despite the superficial air of exaggerated self-confidence they may assume to appear street smart\textsuperscript{17}.

The paucity of reliable and comparable data from all parts of the country or from different countries is a definite obstacle towards a realistic problem definition and it holds true for all the countries of the region. These estimates on extent and nature differ primarily because there is no uniform definition, lack of information from unorganised sector, under-reporting in industries where child labour is regulated, non-inclusion of domestic workers and diverse sources of data.

Surveys rarely attempt to identify working children under specified age and generally fail to disaggregate the over 12 years working children. Children who do full-time unpaid work within the home are not covered in the national census data as working child. Such children form a large segment of child population in these countries. As an example of sheer problem of numbers in India, there are contrasting estimates with regard to the magnitude of the problem. As per official estimates, the percentage of children in the age group of 6-14 (179 million for population projected for 1994-95) who are attending school is around 49 percent. Even assuming that all working children do not go to school there is an unexplained gap of atleast 72 million children whose status is that of non-working, non-


\textsuperscript{17} \textit{The state} of the World's Children, Op.Cit, p.41.
school going child when compared with the figure, of 20 million child labourers according to official government estimates. The target to protect 2 million thus falls well short of its target. Some of the reasons for lack of systematic information about working children in South Asian countries are that employment surveys are generally concerned with the formal sectors neglecting informal sectors. Surveys rarely attempt to identify working children under age 12, quantification for some informal sectors is difficult like agriculture, domestic work etc.

In Chennai, children are found as self-employed and as wage earners. Differences exist between self-employed child and wage earning child in service for an employer. Children who are self-employed experience a greater degree of freedom than those children who labour for an employer, in terms of operating independently, fixing and earning a wage, hours of work, kind of work and so on. They are, however, only relatively free, for they are constantly sought after and harassed by financial dependents like family. Their freedom is a precarious one, for it is contingent upon various other factors. In general, self-employed children have irregular income patterns. Since most of these children are engaged in some form of street trading, their incomes are dependent on several factors: location of their area, season of the year, time of the month, the demand for the goods on sale, the purchasing power at the disposal of the buyer, percentage of the profits that the children are allowed to retain if they are working for a third party and various other related factors. Frequently, these children also operate from within very hazardous environments. If they are in a mobile occupation, or engaged in street trading of some sort, they are out until late at night, exposed to the weather, to the dust and dirt of city streets, to traffic hazards, and are in constant danger of being detained by the police on grounds of vagrancy.

The manner in which the children are treated and the conditions under which they toil are usually left to the employer's whims and fancies. He decides on employment conditions arbitrarily. In many cases, there is not even a formal contract of employment that ensures the protection of the child. The employer hires and fires at will. Quite often children who work for their family undertakings receive no payments for their services, since their family income is considered to be one indivisible whole. This is also the case when families are employed by third parties - the children take part in the employment, but the family receives the total earnings and the children are deprived of enjoying what might only be a mere token of the fruit of their labours. In this instance, the children are basically unpaid employees.

As wage earners, their wages are derisory tokens in relation to the value of their output. The employers justify this practice by arguing that the child is lacking in experience, the child has no financial obligations towards the maintenance of the family and the costs of training the child can be recovered only by a proportionate cut in the child's earnings.
A more meaningful and effective education policy was called for which should ensure change of curriculum and promote integration of educational requirements with local crafts which should also ensure greater involvement of voluntary agencies and changes and adjustments in the schedule of vocations and holidays to coincide with environmental requirements\(^\text{18}\).

**NATURE OF THE PROBLEM**

Child labour has existed in one form or another in all historical times. However, what is new, is its hazardous nature and graver magnitude that has made its perception as a social problem. There has been a distinct change in the recent past in the value orientation and attitudinal ethos of the legitimizing groups of society vis-a-vis child labour because of various developments. In the pre-industrial agricultural Society of India, Children worked as helpers and learners in hereditarily determined family occupations under the benign supervision of adult family members. The work place was an extension of the home and work was characterized by personal and informal relationships. The tasks and technology that work involved were simple and non-hazardous which could learn smoothly, almost unconsciously, over the year through imitation and associations. The child’s interests and welfare were well protected in the family and the family guaranteed maximum security in all eventualities.

The social scenario, however, changed radically with the advent of industrialization and urbanisation. Under the impact of the newly generated forces, there was an unbroken stream of the rural poor migrating to urban countries, in search of livelihood. The new habitat vouch safed them survival but reduced their life to a heap of miseries. The family members no longer worked as a team and in caste-sanctioned occupations. The child had to work as an individual person either under an employer or independently without enjoying the benevolent protection of his guardian. His work place was totally dissimilar from his home. His job exposed him to various kinds of health hazards emanating from the extensive use of chemicals and poisonous substances in industries and the pollutants discharged by them. His work was repetitive, monotonous and unpromising. His hours of work stretched long but his earnings were meagre. His employer, in most of the instances, mal-treated him and exploited him unscrupulously. His work environment thus endangered his physical health and mental growth. The protection and welfare of these children, therefore, becomes an issue of paramount significance which society could have glossed over at great peril\(^\text{19}\).

---


19 Ram Avtar. "Lectures on Labour Problems and Social Welfare in India". New Delhi, 1979, p.75-78.
Child labour, of late, has evoked deep concern among all who link the future of the country with the present of the child. However, a distinction between child labour as distinguished from work experience has mostly negative attributes. It can now be asserted on scientific grounds that work as a direct fulfillment of child's natural abilities and creative potentialities is always conducive to his healthy growth. But work when taken up as a means for the fulfillment of some other needs, becomes enslaving in character and deleterious in its impact.\(^{20}\)

Children have to do action jobs which are not mentally stimulating and career promoting. After their initial interest wears off, they soon discover that the job is leading them nowhere and these children seeking a precarious living, therefore, tend to shift about frequently from one job to another with consequent idleness interspersed between jobs. Long hours of work, late hours of night employment, continuous standing, sitting or use of single set of muscles, emphasis on the finer neuro-muscular coordinations with nervous strain, pressure of speed in the performance of simple mechanical acts, exposure to inclement weather are unsuitable occupations and provide harmful conditions for the growing child susceptible to certain deformities and diseases.\(^{21}\)

Yet another factor highlighting the evil aspect of child labour was the recent advancements in various sciences having a bearing on the child. In olden days, it is true that the child was viewed with a tender feeling and reared with love and compassion. But the fund of knowledge about his development needs and the consequences of their deprivation was rather meagre. Today, scientific knowledge has revolutionized the outlook on child care and his developmental imperatives. The diffusion of this knowledge has created a new awareness in the major institutions of society as the relationship the child should have with his milieu, his needs, objectives and his work etc. Against this backdrop of modern scientific knowledge about the child, child labour appeared to play a totally dysfunctional role in society.\(^{22}\)

The nature of the urban working children is very complex, particularly in India. Most of the urban working children are found in unorganised manufacturing sector and in marginal occupations on the street and unfortunately both these areas have been constantly


\(^{21}\) Ibid.

\(^{22}\) Desai. A profile of an Indian Slum, University of Bombay, 1972, p.67-68.
neglected. These areas are truly termed as 'unexplored areas'. In fact, many aspects of the problem of urban working children in India have not yet been explored and therefore not known. However, while analysing the nature of the problem of urban child labour in India, eight kinds of childhood activities\(^2\) could be mentioned. They are 1. Domestic work. 2. Non-domestic work. 3. Non-monetary work. 4. Tied or bonded labour. 5. Wage labour. 6. Marginal economic activities. 7. Idleness and Unemployment. 8. Productive activities. Out of the above activities, children in Indian urban areas are mostly found performing activities of types 1, 5, 6 and 8.

According to ILO, some of the domestic jobs of a child should not be termed as child labour because these form part of the socialization process of the child. But, such activities become 'Social Exploitation' when children are deprived of their rights to play, to learn and to enjoy a normal and healthy childhood. Though some kinds of domestic work of children do not generate direct income, these help adults to go out to work for money. Domestic work of children can certainly be termed as social exploitation if it deprives children of their childhood. Besides, out-of-family paid domestic work in urban areas takes on a different dimension which can undoubtedly be termed as child labour.

Children working in unorganised manufacturing units and in transport and trade sectors are the most deprived ones. As the employers in these sectors operate in competitive markets, the market-share of their product varies from time to time and during the slack season, these children are the first ones to be thrown out of their occupation. Employers of such units do not make adequate health care and other welfare provisions for working children. The most difficult problem is faced in urban India when it comes to document the case of children engaged in marginal activities on the streets (ie) car washing, shoe-shining, trading, rag-picking, etc.

**SIZE OF CHILD LABOUR**

The estimates of child labour in the country differ, but undoubtedly the country has been faced with rising number of child labour. Table 1.1 provides an idea of estimates of child labour in the country.

TABLE 1.1
PROJECTION OF CHILD WORKERS IN INDIA: 1981 TO 2000 A.D.

(In Millions)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Child labour (5 to 15 yrs of age)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>13.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983</td>
<td>17.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>17.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>18.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>20.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


According to a Survey carried out by Arivoli Iyakkam (Mass Literacy Campaign) in 1,218 slums of Chennai City, the northern part of Chennai had nearly 76 percent child workers. Tondiarpet, Pulianthope, Ayanavaram and Kilpauk together accounted for nearly 70 percent of the total number of child workers. It was estimated that 5,555 child labourers were found to be working in nine of the 10 corporation zones.

TABLE 1.2
PROJECTION OF CHILD WORKERS IN TEN ZONES OF Chennai City

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zone</th>
<th>Child Labourers</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tondiarpet</td>
<td>721</td>
<td>421</td>
<td>1142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basin Bridge</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulianthope</td>
<td>994</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>1108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayanavaram</td>
<td>488</td>
<td>531</td>
<td>1019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kilpauk</td>
<td>449</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>702</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice House</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nungambakkam</td>
<td></td>
<td>data not available</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kodambakkam</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saidapet</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mylapore</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3633</td>
<td>1922</td>
<td>5555</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table shows that, Tondiarpet has the highest incidence of child labour with an estimated 1,142 boys and girls from the slums in the zone deployed in the city's work force. While boys out number girls in eight of the nine zones for which statistics were collected, in Ayanavaram, the number of girl workers was higher than the boys.

Child labour in urban India leads to poor health, makes children susceptible to infectious diseases, creates bone lesions and postural deformity, leads to loss of eyesight and adversely affects physical and psycho-social development. Children working on the streets are more prone to traffic accidents and street violence. Excessive noise in the work place also impairs the hearing of children. Heat, damp or dusty conditions lead to the transmission of communicable diseases. In most manufacturing units, children are also exposed to toxic substances which adversely affects their health. Long hours of work in hazardous and unfavourable working conditions breaks down the child’s family and social relationships and the traumatisation leaves behind incurable scars in them. These poor and often unskilled children become poor and unskilled adults and form a group which deviates from accepted social behaviour. This group perpetuates in labour - market segments even in their adulthood along lines of class, age and gender. Thus, the problem of urban child labour is both a symptom and a cause of extreme poverty of some sections of the population in urban India and is associated with greater inequality in the distribution of income and wealth. However, all child labour is not the result of poverty.

**NATURE OF WORK**

Children are engaged in a number of activities in India - visible and invisible, formal and informal, paid and unpaid. Besides, children’s work varies between rural and urban areas and between sectors. Moreover, both in rural and urban areas, child work varies between boys and girls. (Appendix IV shows the activity and Gender-wise distribution of child workers in rural and urban areas in India).

Children work in the match-stick and fire-work industries of Sivakasi in Tamil Nadu like pasting, packing, labelling, stamping etc, diamond polishing industry in Surat, precious stone polishing industry in Jaipur, glass industry of Ferozabad, brassware industry of Moradabad, carpet industry of Mirzapur and Bhadohi, lock-making industry in Aligarh, slate Industry of Mandasour (MP) and Markapur (AP). Children are employed in a number of activities in Tamilnadu. The following map of Tamilnadu shows the percentage of children employed in different categories of work in various districts of Tamilnadu. Besides, the prevalence of child labourer is noticed in the unorganised, informal and unregulated sectors of the economy. The unorganised sector accounts for a whole army of child labour working as domestic servants, helpers or assistants in hotels, restaurants, wayside shops,
CHILD LABOUR MAP
TAMIL NADU

KARNATAKA

ANDHRA PRADESH

NORTH ARCOT

CHENGALPATTU MOR

MADRAS

BAY OF BENGAL

PALK STRAIT

KERALA

GULF OF MANNAR

INDIAN OCEAN

THIRUVANNAJALI

DHARMAPURI

VILLUPURAM

SALEM

VALLALAR

PONDY

DINDIGAL

PUDUKKOTTAI

KAMARAJ

RAMANATHAPURAM

TIRUNELVELI

CHIDAMBARAM

KANYAKUMARI

KARNATAKA

ANDHRA PRADESH

NORTH ARCOT

CHENGALPATTU MOR

MADRAS

BAY OF BENGAL

PALK STRAIT

KERALA

GULF OF MANNAR

INDIAN OCEAN

THIS MAP IS BASED ON A REVIEW OF SURVEYS/STUDIES CONDUCTED TO DATE ON THE INCIDENCE OF CHILD LABOUR IN TAMIL NADU (DECEMBER 1994)

- Less than 5000 Child Labourers
- 5000 - 15,000 Child Labourers
- 15,000 - 30,000 Child Labourers
- 30,000 - 50,000 Child Labourers
- > 50,000 Child Labourers
- Bonded Child Labour
- Hazardous Child Labour

Indicates percentage of girl child labourers

Note: These figures are an estimate and should be considered as indicative only.
canteens, and similar establishments; hawkers, paper vendors, porters, shoe-shine boys, sweepers; children working in small workshops and repair shops; and helpers at construction sites engaged in breaking stones, unloading goods etc. The employment of children are also noticed in wood carving works, mining sector, leather tanneries, beedi-making etc. In India, it is in these sectors that child labour mostly operate and these are not adequately represented in the official labour statistics.

However, in India, some of the specific types of work in which children are more concentrated have been analysed in terms of the following criteria:

A. Within the family (unpaid)
   i. Domestic or household tasks (e.g. cooking, childcare, fetching water, cleaning utensils, washing clothes and poultry). These are termed 'invisible work'.
   ii. Handicrafts/cottage industries (viz. weaving, basketry, leather work, wood work and household industries in the urban informal sector).

B. Within the family but outside the home
   i. Domestic service
   ii. Construction work (e.g.; buildings, roads)
   iii. Mining (e.g. quarry mines)
   iv. 'Informal Economy' (e.g; laundry, recycling rubbish)
      a. Employed by others
      b. Self-employed: informal sector work (e.g.; shoe-shining, car-washing, recycling rubbish and selling newspapers).
      c. Outside the family
         i. Employed by others
            a. Tied/bonded/slave
            b. Apprentices
            c. Skilled trades (e.g. carpets, embroidery, brassware works, gem polishing)
            d. Industries / unskilled occupation, mines etc.
            e. Domestics (e.g.; maids-of-all work)
            f. Commercial (e.g.; shops, restaurants)

Most of the working children are concentrated in the informal manufacturing sector on the streets and in households.

In Chennai, children are found performing such works as A (i); B (ii) (iii) and (iv); C (b), (e), (f). Apart from this, there are peculiar categories of work performed by children in particular areas of Chennai City. They are plastic cup collectors in Park Town (Central Station), Wooden box making in Santhome, Collecting rags and metals from dumping yard in Ezhil Nagar (Kodungaiyur), Collecting hairs to make wigs in Raja Annamalaipuram, Sundal vendors in Beach, prawn processing unit in Old washermenpet and metal and iron scrap collectors in Harbour. Thus, urbanisation in India has brought with it a qualitative change in the nature of children’s work. They perform diverse tasks ranging from intra-family work to apprenticeship outside the family, domestic service, wage labour, odd jobs and independent activities in the street.

**MAGNITUDE OF THE PROBLEM**

Before discussing the magnitude of the problem of urban working children in India, it is pertinent to glance over the problems of poverty and expansion of the slum sector, because the problem of working children is positively correlated with these problems.

According to planning commission estimates in 1995, 28.1 percent of India’s urban population live below the poverty line. However, this figure is less than that of the figure for rural India (40.4 percent). The incidence of urban poverty is the highest in Uttar Pradesh (40.3 percent), Bihar (37.0 percent) and Madhya Pradesh (31.1 percent). In South Indian states, Tamilnadu, Karnataka and Kerala also appear to have higher incidence of poverty. Moreover, urban poverty is greater in the less urbanised states and those with a low per capita income. More urbanised states are marked by a lower incidence of urban poverty.

The Task Force on Housing and Urban Development appointed by the Planning Commission has given two estimates of the urban population living in the slums in India. The low estimate indicated that at least 20 percent of the urban population in India resided in slums. If a more liberal and high estimate is made, this figure would increase to 26 percent of the total urban population in India.

In Chennai there are 13,057 child labourers living in 10,596 slum house-holds in the city out of 1,500 odd slums spread over the ten zones in the city, of which 10,699 children are in the age group of 11 to 14 and 2,216 between 8 and 10 years. The remaining 142 are in the age group of 5 to 7 years.

---


The actual magnitude of the problem of child labour, particularly urban working children (which includes street children) is not known. Several factors are partly responsible for this, since work of a large section of urban children - such as street children, children engaged in part-time and other casual occupations - cannot be documented, at least exhaustively. Second, the definition of child labour varies from investigator to investigator and this creates a practical problem while collecting data on child labour. Moreover, the definitions of "employment" and "unemployment" vary between census, thereby sometimes underestimating the actual figure on child labour. Third, some part of the problem of child labour such as the psychological stress and future benefits forgone by them cannot be quantifiable, or represented through quantitative data. Thus, whatever data on the phenomenon of child labour are available in India, they are just guesstimates. The data to assess the magnitude of the problem and state-wise distribution of child labour in India over the past three decades have been given in Appendix (V and VI).

Urban working children in India are mainly concentrated in about nine states - Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan & Orissa and in some of the metropolis such as Delhi, Calcutta, Bombay, Chennai, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Kanpur etc.

Thus, the magnitude of the problem of urban working children is alarming as it has been growing steadily during the past three decades. Moreover, according to planning commission projections, considering the rate at which child labour is increasing, the total number of child labour would increase to around 20.25 million by the year 2000 (Appendix VII). However, the problem of working children seems to be more acute when the nature of occupations of children and their working conditions are analysed.

Since it is difficult to organise the unorganised labour as they are spread all over the country, a single policy prescription cannot be applied to the whole range of unorganised labour. The group is too large and too amorphous to be treated as a single category. It therefore necessitates a wide variation of policy measures for each sub-category. It is not possible for the government to adopt similar prescriptions for artisans, workers illegally manufacturing fire works, sellers of basic food stuffs and other items etc. The legislative approach, though certainly necessary, is not sufficient to combat child labour. The coverage is limited and many national laws tend to exclude the informal sector and agriculture where most children work.

The types of child workers given below gives an idea of the magnitude of the problem of child labour in India in different activities.
Millions of children are working in exploitative conditions that are harmful to their physical, mental and moral development and in violation of national laws and international conventions and standards. The exploitation and subjugation of children, at work and through work, is perhaps the single most common form of child abuse in much of the world today.
There is a strong link between child labour and world population growth. Today the demand for child workers is growing, as is the supply of children for work. In the developing world, where 95 percent of world population growth is occurring, neither food production nor educational systems can keep pace with the expanding number of children. Indeed, it may be the commonly perceived economic value of children which is helping to stimulate population growth in many countries.28

In order to solve the problem of child labour, it is necessary to identify the causes for employment of children in India.

CAUSES OF CHILD LABOUR

No single cause can be isolated for the prevalence of child labour. It is inherent in the cycle of poverty and unemployment brought about by asymmetrical approaches to development. Poverty in itself does not cause child labour. It's a myth that child labour is the result of widespread poverty. This myth has to be dispelled. Child labour is one of the factors which perpetuate poverty and it is not right to condone it as a necessary concomitant of poverty.29

Child labour is caused by an inequitable economic system which ensures that the benefits of economic growth are not shared by all. This results in poverty and other socio-economic problems. The disprivileged majority in India pays in terms of:

- **Chronic Poverty**: Nobody is certain how many Indians are poor, or what exactly poor means. By a conservative estimate 210 million Indians survive below even the destitution line.30
- **Lack of land reform and appropriate rural development**: Land is the major source of livelihood for the majority of Indians. One survey reported that 10% of the population owns 90% of the land; the rest have to submit to the dictates of this minority.

---

29 CACL Newsletter, September - December 1993, Bombay, p.2
Those and other consequences of an unequal system are factors which eventually lead to child labour. At the level of the individual child, labour is forced by various related factors:

- A poverty-affected family which forces each member to take on an economic function.
- Broken homes which cause children to run away and find means to support themselves.
- Death of earning members of the family.
- Work as a form of repayment of family debt.
- If it is not to repay debt, parents are lured by the hope that the meagre family income will be supplemented by the child's earnings and that the child will learn a skill which might ensure a better job in the future.
- Environmental degradation
- Lack of uniform legislation
- Traditional occupation being threatened, family disintegration, single women family.

The evils of employment of children in industrial and other sectors in India, is a product of economic, social and among others, inadequate legislative measures. The social evil involved in the employment of children may be due to illiteracy and occasionally shifting towards lack of development of child's personality which continues beyond his childhood and/or adulthood. The most common cause of child labour in this regard perhaps due to the sinister attitude or improper appreciation on the part of the parents in respect of child's education, capabilities, intelligence or that education could help in stabilizing or improving their economic conditions or would become significant in the future earnings of their children. Also the parents show an improper appreciation of their employment prospectus or otherwise help in their standard of living through such education and employment31.

The Indian Education System does not offer job-oriented courses for the children in rural and urban areas; rather, the existing education system prepares the child only for white collared jobs and those are offered only to a few of them, and that too only with an under graduate degree, due to a lot of unemployment prevailing in India. So due to these reasons parents as well as children do not take any interest in education. Infact, most of them do not bother even to acquaint themselves with the Indian education system by studying upto the primary level, and as a result most of the child labourers remain

---

illiterate. Such ignorance operates as a curse thereby seriously hampering the interest of
the child labour. There is an urgent need that such ignorance on the part of the parents
should be wiped off from their minds and they should be made to realise that children are
not in fact a source of income for them, as is evident from the number of children they have.
Instead a feeling has to be inculcated in their mind that it is their duty and responsibility
towards their children to ensuring that they should acquire proper qualifications so that
they may be in a position to earn a reasonable livelihood so as to ensure in turn the same
treatment to their own children.

In Indian urban slum area, children who have never attended school, or have
dropped out subsequently, form a high proportion of child workers. Female-headed
households are most likely to have working children, especially those with single female
heads. Absence of father is also found to be a critical factor in child labour. Poverty is not
the only significant cause of child labour. Ignorance, unemployment, migration, poor
standard of living, deep social prejudices, disinterest in study, attraction towards city life
on the part of children, negative attitude of the parents towards child welfare, education,
unattractive primary educational systems, traditional family occupation, irresponsibility of
the male members in the family due to drug-addiction, alcoholism, loose filial bonds, family
disintegration, inadequate measures of social security and ineffective law enforcement
machinery are the other responsible factors contributing to the emergence of the social
segment called child labour.

PROBLEMS OF CHILD LABOUR IN INDIA

There is always a question asked why child participation in labour force is a
hindrance to their development and why one must curtail it. Work as a direct fulfillment
of a child's natural abilities and creative potentialities is also conducive to its healthy
growth. But work, when taken up as a means for fulfillment of some other needs, become
enslaving in character and deleterious in its impact. The latter type is harmful because the
energy that should have been spent on nurturing talent, capacity and power is used for the
purpose of bare survival, it becomes a total evil when the energy generated by a child is
appropriated by some others and the child is left with a fraction of it, which cannot meet
even the basic survival needs. Child labour, therefore, assumes the character of a social
problem in so far as it arrests or distorts the natural growth process of a child to full
adulthood. The use of children as a source of labour force, raise many other questions with
demographic and economic implications. Demographically speaking, the economic
contribution of children is an important contributing factor in the demand for more children
and consequently leads to population growth. Among other implications, child labour
deprives children of educational opportunities, minimises their chance for vocational
training and forces them to remain unskilled labourers with low wages as long as they are economically active. Thus, the participation of children in labour force, runs contrary to the whole thesis of human resource development which is so essential for the overall socio-economic development of a nation.

**CHILD LABOUR - A COMPLEX PROBLEM**

Efforts have been made since long, not only at national level but also at international level consistently for improving the condition of child labour by formulating various policies and schemes (from time to time). In this regard, International Labour Organisation since its inception in the year 1919 has paid special attention to child labour and correspondingly the member countries have also adopted and enforced its recommendations by enacting and enforcing statutory enactments on the subject of child labour. India was one of the founder members of the ILO and was a signatory to the first convention on the prohibition of child labour in 1919. Since then a number of Acts have been passed in India dealing with child labour. However, unfortunately, results achieved so far have proved to be quite unsatisfactory due to various reasons viz defective drafting of statutory enactments and the gap involved there in, lack of effective implementation process, indifferent attitude of the general public etc. It could be safely stated that their position has improved a lot with the advent of time in industrially advanced countries of Europe and other Western countries, but the plight of child labour continues to be as usual in a traditional manner in developing countries. It has been ultimately realised that it is an uphill task having multifarious dimensions and the problem involves many complexities and intricacies. Due to these reasons it has become imperative to tackle this problem in a planned and systematic manner. At this juncture it becomes necessary to put forth that some international organisations and funding agencies, namely, ILO, UNESCO, UNICEF, etc. have taken the problem of child labour as an open challenge and have initiated process of evolving various strategies and formulating useful and effective policies in order to combat the problem of child labour and some of the advanced countries have provided financial assistance to these bodies in order to enable them to accomplish the long-cherished goal of providing improved working conditions and payment of adequate wages to them.

Measures taken to combat child labour would not prove to be so much effective unless social awakening is created among the common masses and public opinion is built up against the employer exploiting child labour.
CHILD LABOUR NOT A PROBLEM OF ASIA ALONE

There is a conscious attempt to brand all the South Asian people and government as child abusers. No one can say that there is no child labour in Newyork City or Rome. It is alleged in some quarters that since products coming from South Asia are quite competitive, it has led to a feeling that the products in South Asia are cheaper due to availability of cheap labour and that too child labour. The proponents of Harkins Bill are no Saviour of child labourers. Harkins Bill of the U.S.A. bans import of product made by children. Since the Harkins Bill, many children could not find jobs in the carpet industry, and without work are on the streets. This very bill has gone against their welfare.

THE PROBLEM TODAY

The fact is that most of the activities where children are employed do not come under the purview of the Factories Act for various reasons and hence are outside the purview of such restrictive legislation. But even with the new laws it has been a difficult exercise to contain the employment of children for the sheer lack of popular will to prevent the oppression of the child workers in the society. Most of them are employed in the unorganised sector and in places difficult to reach. This is so because society still finds no voice to articulate the rights of the citizen and also their duties. And in a caste-based occupational pattern, it has been to the advantage of capital to consistently utilize the benefit of the carpet weavers or the glass makers or the large, abundant, surplus, pauperized agrarian landless in their ventures. To evade rules they have resorted to methods, such as, putting out to the households and other difficult-to-trace methods of organizing home-based production. The problem also stems from the state not taking on the role of welfare work for its citizenry, by providing its future generation with the basic necessities to become a potential high-skilled work-force in the course of such training and education.

CONSEQUENCES OF CHILD LABOUR

Being exposed to adult life at an early age creates numerous problems for the child labour. They are exposed to infectious diseases or develop some deformity. They soon pick up habits like smoking and liquor drinking. Some of them also become drug addicts and spend time in gambling, smuggling or similar criminal activities.

While framing policies or programmes for child labours, it is always better to know, how many children are involved in harmful work. This is the group of children that policies and programmes need to reach most urgently. Without this clearer information the true
scale of the problem will remain unknown. What has long hidden in the shadows will only emerge into the light, fully and finally, when one can measure it, and thus systematically move to control it. It can be said that, the phenomenon of child labour is so complex and deep-rooted in the socio-economic fabric of the society that it may not be wise to rely on one single approach to dealing with it. There are many causes of this complex problem, so a comprehensive integrated approach is required. There is no touch-and-vanish type of solution of the problem. One will have to design an action plan keeping in view short-term and long-term perspective. One should first take measures for immediate improvement in conditions of work, because in near future, in the existing socio-economic climate, chances of complete eradication of child labour problem seems a remote possibility. There are some short-term measures along with which long-term plan should be chalked out. One should take all out effort for enhancing earnings of the families and, also, of child labourers themselves. For raising earnings of child labour, arrangements for their proper training and skill formation should receive proper attention. The most enduring and desirable step would be to improve the economic condition of the families of child labourers. There is an urgent need for attitudinal change, social awareness, family counselling and aggressive campaign against the scourge of child labour. It is natural obligations to ensure physical and mental development of these young ones. The eradication of child labour problem is a long process which requires intensive efforts on many fronts, especially the family and also creation of general social awareness and cooperation from different sections of society.

Now having seen the magnitude of the problem of child labour and also the chief reason for its persistence and the consequences of child labour, one feels the need for launching a determined attack to solve the problem of child labour in India. Following are some of the remedial measures to rectify the problems of child labour in India.

1. The legislative measures aiming at the welfare of the child labour should be fully implemented in occupations where employment of children is permitted.

2. The government should provide financial assistance to the non-governmental and voluntary organisations for imparting non-formal education, health care, nutrition and vocational training to the child labourers and family counselling to the parents.

3. Efforts should also be undertaken by non-governmental organisation to involve the local public and parents/guardians of child labourers and train them on child development. They should also be made aware of the efforts taken by the government and non-governmental organisations for the upliftment of child labour.