DIMENSIONS AND DETERMINANTS OF CHILD LABOUR IN SMALL SCALE COMMERCIAL ESTABLISHMENTS: A STUDY IN DELHI

ABSTRACT
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ABSTRACT

In the present work, ‘Dimensions and Determinants of Child Labour in Small Scale Commercial Establishments: A Study in Delhi’ an attempt has been made to scientifically present the various aspects pertaining to working and living conditions of child labourers and factors contributing to the incidence of child labour engaged in small scale commercial establishments. The problem of child labour is no longer a matter of merely regional and national concern, but it has become an issue of serious debate at various international forums as it is linked to the violation of children’s rights. The issue of child labour has already been placed firmly in the dialectical universe of human rights. In recent years, the issue has increasingly drawn the attention of policy-makers, governments, non-governmental organizations and international agencies. India has the dubious distinction of being a nation with the largest number of child labourers in the world. A large number of children in India are engaged in labour that is hindering their education, development and livelihood, and many of them are involved in the worst forms of child labour that cause serious physical-psychological damage, and even threaten their lives. The fact that, not the mere work but it is the labour that the children are coerced to do, has manifold repercussions for them, their families and for the society as a whole. The Government of India has been making efforts to curb the menace of child labour but the problem continues to pose a challenge before the nation.

Objectives: The present study on child labour aims at examining the factors contributing to the incidence of child labour; living and working conditions of the children engaged in small scale commercial establishments in Delhi, as well as critically examine the various provisions of all legislations prohibiting and regulating child labour.

Methodology: In order to accomplish the objectives of the study, combination of both qualitative and quantitative research methods have been adopted. The design of the study is descriptive. The Non-Probability sampling method was used to draw the required sample of child labourers. It was done by using Quota sampling techniques. The sample size consisted of 120 child labourers working in shops, subzi mandis
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(vegetable markets), motor garages and dhabas/tea stalls (30 from each stratum). Besides these respondents, the qualitative data was collected using narrative analysis as a method of data collection. Ten cases were identified from all the four strata for the narrative analysis. A sample of parents and employers was selected by Using Non-probability method of Purposive sampling. Total sample size was 40 parents (selecting 10 from each stratum) and 40 employers (selecting 10 from each stratum). Besides that, the lawyers, social activists and social workers selecting 5 from each category were interviewed for the purpose of for formulating the recommendations for reducing the incidence of child labour. The data was collected using self administered interview schedule with the child labourers and interview guide with the parents and employers. The secondary sources were tapped and information procured from them was analyzed. This was primarily pertaining to the constitutional provisions, various legislations, census data, ILO reports, and relevant reports of Ministry of Labour, Government of India, Reports of Government of Delhi, Books, Journals, Periodicals and Reports of Non-governmental organizations.

Major Findings: The findings of the study reflected that, along with a series of enactments of child labour legislations, a number of welfare programmes, policies have been implemented. Along with this, a series of committees and commissions have been appointed by Government of India, either specifically on the question of child labour or on labour conditions in general to enquire into the causes or consequences of the problem and to suggest measures to reduce the incidence of child labour and to ameliorate the conditions of child labourers. Though the laws exist to regulate and prohibit employment of children in hazardous occupations, there is neither blanket prohibition on the use of child labour nor is there any universal minimum age that has been set for child labourers. The inadequate legislation as well as insufficient enforcement is responsible for the continuation and perpetuation of the phenomenon of child labour.

The study reveals that the most important factor which led the children (respondents) to work was to supplement family income. Besides that, family pressure, poverty, lack of interest in studies and school drop out, migration of parents, self desire, death of parent/s were found as other important determinants (as reported by child labourers).
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In addition to these, illiteracy of parents, occupation of parents in petty jobs, employers’ preference for hiring children were reported to be primary reasons for children’s engagement in jobs.

The study reveals that the working conditions of child labourers were very appalling. Majority of such children were found to be engaged in unskilled jobs doing full time work with petty wages. The children were put through longer hours of work by their employers, in some cases even more than 12 hours. The living conditions of the child labourers were very deplorable, with most of them staying in slum clusters in unhygienic atmosphere without proper sanitation facilities. The study manifests the denial of rights of those children engaged in small scale commercial establishments in terms of survival and development, education, leisure and play, opportunity for developing physical and mental talents, and protection from abuse and neglect which eventually impair their growth and development.

Child labour is a complex socio-economic demographic problem which can be reduced and eliminated by multiplicity of actions, both by the Government and the civil society sector. The study has emphasized on the promotion of income generation activities, provision of social safety nets, educational opportunities for all, awareness generation, strict implementation of the legislations, involvement of local governance institutions, implementation of fair trade labeling initiatives, provision of proper housing/avenues for recreation/purposeful utilization of leisure time. There is an urgent need for attitudinal change, political mobilization and aggressive campaign against the scourge of child labour. The coordinated efforts of Government, Non-governmental organizations, employers and social workers through active public support are likely to help in ameliorating or controlling the problem. Social workers should provide guidance and counseling to the child labourers in confronting their problems and tackling them. Counseling is also needed for the families of the child labourers as well as those who are on the verge of sending their children to the labour market. Counseling and guidance are also needed for those children who are poor in studies and are truants so that they are prevented from dropping out of the school and entering into the labour market. Social work intervention is necessary at the family level, especially where the fathers are drug addicts or are unemployed. Social workers
should work with children to bring about a change from an essentially welfare-based, charitable approach to a more children-centered, rights based approach. They should take systematic efforts to ensure that work places and communities remain child labour free. This can be facilitated by awareness raising activities by using participatory approach involving employers, parents, and adult workers in the work places, community leaders, service providers and enforcement agencies.