The topic of the present research is “Abuse of working children and its impact on their moral judgement and values.” Child abuse is a complex widespread phenomenon and has detrimental effects at physiological, social and psychological levels. Workplaces generally represent environment where physical, sexual and economic abuse of child workers occur frequently. This bruises them psychologically and may hamper their normal personality progression during the crucial years of development.

Development of moral judgement is one of the most important aspects of development because it paves way for morally motivated behaviour. Internalisation of moral concepts is expressed in the form of moral practice. The individual’s personal values also play a role in giving direction to the individual’s behaviour in the society.

In order to study the impact of abuse on moral judgement, on moral practices and on values, two groups were taken up for study namely, abused working children and non-abused working children from amongst children employed in various non-organised settings of Aligarh city.
Eleven research questions were formulated which probed into the impact of abuse on moral judgement, moral practice and values, taking into consideration age, gender and severity of total abuse.

The sample of the study consisted of 250 subjects drawn from the child labourers who represent very low socio-economic strata. 125 of these were those who fall in the category of abused children and the remaining 125 were those who were non-abused children. Method of purposive sampling was followed to draw out this sample. To measure development of moral judgement, Moral Judgement Test developed by Singh and Verma (1968) was used. No appropriate scale to measure children's actual moral practices and their values were available. Therefore, the investigators developed measures in the form of questionnaire, using the rational-empirical approach. To assess and evaluate details of abuse, "National India Study Data Form" constructed under "National study of the incidence of Child Abuse and Neglect", NCCAN, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services was adopted and modified according to the lifestyles of working children. Subjects were contacted either at their work places or their living places. Questionnaires were administered individually in the form of interview schedule.

Non-parametric methods were utilised to analyse the data. To test the significance of difference between the groups Mann-Whitney U and Chi-Square were used according to the requirement of the data.
The main findings of the study are:

- There was significant difference between abused and non-abused children on moral judgement, moral practice and values.
- Abused children were found inferior on all three factors as compared to non-abused children.
- Gender differences within the groups were found.
- Age played a role in moral judgement in the sense that moral judgement became better with age.
- Severity of total abuse did not affect moral judgement and values but influenced moral practices.
- Physical abuse was found to have a particularly greater detrimental effect on moral judgement and actual moral practices of working children.

While carrying out this research, the investigator experienced that knowledge regarding the impact of abuse of working children would be greatly enriched if qualitative data in the form of narratives would be forthcoming. Complexities could be probed with finer analysis, permitting contemplation of appropriate interventions.

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