Chapter- II
CAUSES & EFFECTS OF CHILD LABOUR

There is more than one reason for which children are working in a country like India. Review of literature shows the major reasons as poverty, illiteracy, insufficient legislative protection, absence of labour union, lack of awareness, traditional custom and migration.

The most powerful force driving children into hazardous work or employment is poverty. According to textbook on economics, by sending their children into the labour market, poor families may not appear to be following rational economic behaviour, but in fact they have very little alternative. Their options between short-term survival and long-term development are extremely limited. Poverty thus begets child labour, which in turn perpetuates poverty, inequality and discrimination. Partial evidence suggests that children in poor families sometimes contribute up to a quarter of household income. Since poor households spend a large proportion of their income on food, child labour can indeed be critical to their survival.1

In India 26.10% of total population lives below the poverty line. In some states like Bihar, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Assam more than 30% of the population live below the poverty line. These poor people have no other alternative but to send their children to work at an early age. The literacy rate in India is still very low compared to other countries, which is roughly 66%. Here also regional disparity is alarming. In fact the problem of illiteracy is directly linked
with the problem of poverty. Till date India is unable to provide free education to all 
the people. Because of poverty the incidence of school dropout takes place and the 
dropout children are often goes to work. Since the parents are also illiterate they 
don't know the real value of education and send their children to work so that they 
can earn extra money.

Being poor and illiterate the child labourer or his/her family 
cannot ask for fair working condition, proper wage or working time limit. Again 
there are few govt. officers who implement the laws in true spirit and for the benefits 
of child labourer. We have laws but enforcement of the same is not there, since there 
are little or no punishment for employment of children the incidence of child labour 
is increasing.

In the organized sector like — bidi, glass, matchbox, carpet, etc 
child workers are preferred, as they cannot constitute trade union because of their 
tender age and knowledge. Lack of trade union means no bargaining power, in fact 
employee prefers children as a low cost labour.

Children are employed in a variety of work situations and for a 
wide range of reasons. Children work because they must- because of poverty and the 
non-availability of schools compounded by the poor quality of education, rapid 
rural-urban migration and social and cultural attitudes. Employers find child workers 
especially attractive on account of their innate or perceived characteristics such as 
docility, speed and visual acuity, because they can be paid low wages, and because 
they offer flexibility in situations of fluctuating or unstable market conditions. 
Finally, in some countries the political will required for effective action is lacking, 
while regulation and enforcement are constrained in many others by the shortage of
qualified inspectors and inadequacy of logistical support (Bequela & Boyden, 1988).²

There are several causes for continuation of child labour in India. But main causes are poor economic condition, traditional authority of father, high fertility rate, lack of status of the child in the society, low level of adult and child literacy, lack of social security and cheapness of human labour. And at the same time the lack of vigilance of the society to see that all the laws enacted for betterment of the children are really enforced properly is not less responsible for continuation of child labour in India (Shandilya & Khan, 2003).³

The major causes of child labour are as propounded by Kamna (2003)⁴ are: the slow advance of protective labour legislation, absence of legislation in some areas of employment, the evasion of existing laws for the protection of children due to inadequate inspection machinery evolved by the state, absence of proper child welfare programmes, inadequate facilities of schooling and population problem due to illiteracy of parents.

The existence of child labour negatively correlates with per capita income, infrastructure development, school enrolment ratio, and the position of women in society and female participation in non-agricultural work. It positively correlates with parental poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, underemployment, and the percentage of the labour force in agriculture. Analysis of the incidence of child labour boils down to the composition of the household, the number of earning members, total earning vis-à-vis liabilities, and consumption pattern. In an extreme situation of a household below the poverty line with a meagre potential for earning, all members regardless of age and sex are bound to work and have little freedom to

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do otherwise. In a normal situation, however, a child’s non-leisure time is available either for schooling or home-based work, income-earning work in the market (Chopra, 2005)\(^5\).

To Jain (2006)\(^6\), the following are the major causes of child labour in India:

- The problem of child labour is inherent in the cycle of poverty, unemployment, underemployment and low wages, caused by inequitable distribution of resources, unleashed by a centralized and lopsided economy and the backward nature of agriculture.

- In some areas, community exploitation results in child labour and bonded labour. The largest number of child labourers in fact belongs to the Schedule Castes and Tribes.

- The non-accessibility to schools, an irrelevant school curriculum and the costs incurred for education, push the child towards the labour force.

- Children constitute cheap labour. They are not able to organize themselves against exploitation; hence they can be and are exploited. Child labour contributes to adult unemployment and at the same time, perpetuates child labour as children grow up as unskilled, enfeebled adults, not even fit to be employed in the industry they earlier worked in.

- The ineffective implementation of legislation pertaining to child labour results in the continued exploitation of child labour.

- Child labour is the cause and effect of illiteracy and of ignorance, of poor standards of living and levels of family and community life and cultural attitudes.
To Shrivastav (2006), the major causes of child labour are:

- Economic reasons (poverty, unequal distribution of land and property, lack of opportunity for adult employment, and non-payment of minimum wage, etc.)
- Lethargic attitude of the law implementing agency and flaws in the laws
- Profit motive tendency and lack of social-responsibility of the employers
- Feudalistic and caste system
- Lack of awareness among parents and guardians
- Absence of proper free and compulsory schooling facilities
- Lack of social security
- The concept of "nimble finger"
- Public apathy towards this social evil
- Social acceptance for learning parental occupations

From the general review of literature it shows that child labour in India persists as a result of poverty, caste and cultural traditions, benefits on the part of the employers, weak enforcement of existing laws prohibiting child labour, and the lack of a compulsory education. Even when legal action is taken against child labour, there are few implications for the perpetrators. Laws cannot overcome the necessity of income from child labour and the bondage of poor families.
In general the ILO (2002) classified the major causes of child labour into the following three points:

1. **Immediate causes:**
   Limited or no cash or food stocks; increase in price of basic goods, Family indebtedness, Household shocks, e.g. death or illness of income earner, crop failure, No schools; or schools of poor quality or irrelevant, Demand for cheap labour in informal micro enterprises, Family business or farm cannot afford hired labour.

2. **Underlying causes:**
   Breakdown of extended family and informal social protection systems, Uneducated parents; high fertility rates, Cultural expectations regarding children, work and education, Discriminatory attitudes based on gender, caste, ethnicity, national origin, etc, Perceived poverty; desire for consumer goods and better living standards, Sense of obligation of children to their families, and of “rich” people to the “poor” people.

3. **Structural or root causes:**
   Low/declining national income, Inequalities between nations and regions; adverse terms of trade, Societal shocks, e.g. war, financial and economic crises, transition, HIV/AIDS, Insufficient financial or political commitments for education, basic services and social protection; “bad” governance, Social exclusion of marginal groups and/or lack of legislation and/or effective enforcement, Lack of decent work for adults.
According to a study of NHRC (2004)\(^9\) employers believe that children have some of the requisite qualities best suited to their industry. Employment of child labourers is considered to be economically viable because a child labourer puts in more hours as compared to an adult worker engaged in similar work for which the child gets paid comparatively low wages. They further believe that:

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### Table 6: Reasons for child labour

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Internal factors</th>
<th>External factors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Difficult family situations:</td>
<td>• Belonging to a minority population (racial or ethnic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-parent family</td>
<td>and suffering social exclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family illness or incapacity to work</td>
<td>• Strong peer group and external influences with material values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dysfunctional families</td>
<td>• Socio-economic dislocation (economic crisis, political and social transition)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsupportive or unprotected families</td>
<td>• The effects of HIV/AIDS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Poor family values</td>
<td>• The special situation of girls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Low level of education (of the child or the parents)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Low parental skill level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ILO, 2004
• Children are quick learners, and pick up skills in doing minute work. For example, in the carpet weaving industry, children are preferred for employment because of their nimble fingers.

• They do not protest, as they are ignorant about their rights. Moreover, they do not absent themselves from work.

• Being gullible and innocent they can be easily manipulated.

• They are unable to bargain or determine their appropriate wages and hence are inexpensive.

• Being ignorant they do not realise the hazards of the job they are doing.

• They can be removed as and when their services are not required.

• Their maintenance cost is very low.

The supply and demand (push and pull) factors for the incidents of child labour are the most general and can be applied in any location. In this study area it is found that the following factors affect the supply of child labour:

• Poverty is the greatest single force, which creates the flow of children into the workplace. It forces many children to work full time for their own and their families' survival.

• In some areas we do not have adequate school facilities, so children have to work. Even in many places one of the most important reasons for children work is to earn money to pay for their own school expenses. In fact, many schools are of such poor quality that the expected return is not equal to the sacrifice made. While it is true that many children drop out of school because
they have to work, it is equally true that many become so discouraged by school that they prefer to dropout and work.

Factors affecting the demand for child work:

- It is generally found that children are employed because their labour is less expensive than that of adults. Child workers are paid less than their adult counterparts are true in most cases. As we know, in India child workers are, either for technical or for economic reasons, irreplaceable in certain industries that would become uncompetitive without them like the hand-woven carpet, glass bracelet (bangles), diamond polishing, gem polishing, slate, limestone and mosaic chip quarrying industries.

- To the "nimble fingers" argument - it claims that only children can do certain jobs like hand-woven carpet, or that they can do them better than adults. In our field study, in chocolate factory, this argument was found to be true.

- Sometime employers admit children into the workplace for social and non-economic reasons. Some employer feels they render a useful service by providing jobs to children from poor families.

- Parents are another major source of demand for the work of children from their own families. Huge numbers of children work as unpaid workers in family farms, shops and stores that depend on family labour for their economic viability.

Again to determine the major causes of child labour, we may draw on sociology and economics. As for sociologist, there are "internal" and "external" forces. Internal forces are those acting within a family to produce particular outcomes such as child labour. External forces are those working on
families from the outside, i.e. the influence of society. On the other hand, economists prefer to sort factors according to whether they operate on the "supply side" or "demand side" of markets. In the case of child labour, the market includes those who provide child labour, such as the households the children live in, and those who utilize it. So demand-side factors refer to those things that make households more or less willing to offer children's labour, while employers of this labour influence the supply side.

The socio-cultural conditions of a particular region and community, caste equations, gender biasness also contributes to the cause of child labour. In a backward society it is often seen that people have no awareness because of low literacy rate. Illiteracy leads to underdevelopment as people have no awareness about ill effects of child labour and their rights and duties. We the general people too turn a blind eye towards the child labour. Thus lack of awareness on the part of parents and general people contributes towards the incidents of child labour.

**Causes of child labour in Nalbari district**

Investigation on the field of Nalbari district reveals that the following are the major causes of child labour. Firstly, children are working because they are not studying (46%). Poverty is the second biggest factor for child labour. Poverty leads to only one option i.e. to work. The Planning Commission estimate (2001) shows that in Assam the percentage of population below poverty line are 36.09%, which are, much more than national level (26.10%). As we know because of poverty children drops out from school, which shows, there is a direct link
between poverty and no continuation of education. In fact 6% of the child labourer said that they are working to know new skills and 8% have no idea because of their tender age.

**Table (7): Causes of child labour**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Causes</th>
<th>No. of Child Labour</th>
<th>% Of total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop out from school</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To know new skill</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No other option</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No idea</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Deeper study of the child labourer reveals that illiteracy of parents; particularly of mothers have adversely effects the literacy level of children. As majority of parents are illiterates they cannot visualise the importance of education, at the same time it is seen that parents have little faith over the existing
system of education, which is not job oriented and in the long run will lead to nowhere. On the demand side, it is found that an adult get three times wage than a children, for this reason employer, in some cases prefer children as labourer. Besides, large family size, traditional family skills as found in case of brick making and chocolate labelling, migration from rural areas to urban areas are some other internal causes of child labour. Lastly it is found that non-enforcement of laws (see table 18, 19 and 20) is another major contributing factor for child labour as it encourages the employer to employ children without any fear of punishment.

For a better understanding of the background of the child labourer in Nalbari district, the following tables analyse the religion, mother tongue and caste of the child labourer.

Regarding religion 76.3% of the child labour belong to Hinduism and others belong to Islamism. A small portion of the child labourer can speak both Assamese and Hindi. Ten-child labourer can speak both Bengali and Assamese. Twenty-six children who can speak Hindi, they are migrated from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and engaged in garage and brick kiln units. As per 1991 Census, in Nalbari district 77.48% are Hindus and 19.94% are Muslims, on the other hand 727808 people speak Assamese, 81592 speak Bengali and 95106 speak Hindi as their mother tongue. Although the following table shows more Hindi speaking children compared to Bengali but field study shows that those children are not permanent residents of Assam.
Table (8): Religion and mother tongue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Assamese</th>
<th>Bengali</th>
<th>Hindi</th>
<th>Bodo</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Schedule caste children form the majority group (46.6%) followed by General Caste (31.3%) and 21% belongs to other backward classes category. There are just 3 Schedule Tribe children as majority of them falls under the newly created Baksa district. Among the brick kilns workers majority of children were found from the general category (Muslims). The table shows that children belonging to lower castes are entering the labour market. The 1991 Census shows that in Nalbari district 8.78% people belong to S.C. category. Thus these tables show that poverty, socio-cultural background etc influence the causes of child labour.

Table (9): Caste of child labourer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>Economic Activity</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brick kiln</td>
<td>Hotel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.C.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S.T.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O.B.C.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gen.</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In general, the main causes for child labour can be summarised as follows:

- Unemployment, low family income and poverty
- Traditional family skills
- Absence of universal compulsory primary education
- Non-availability of schools
- Irrelevant school curriculum
- Preference of employers for children (as cheap labour)
- Ignorance of parents
- Apathy of general people towards child labour
- Migration from rural to urban areas
- Large families
- Occupational rigidities of caste system
• Ineffective enforcement of the legal provisions and low rate of conviction pertaining to child labour.

In fact child labour is such a complex problem that we cannot point out just one or two specific reasons. As child labour comes from poor families whose parents are either illiterate or dropout from school; these two elements can be regarded as the chief causes of child labour. They suffer from malnutrition, pessimism, inferiority, alienation and so on. Going to work at an early stage means closure of all paths to development at the latter age. The poor children are the highest wastage to the country. It deprives them of educational opportunities and physical development. All these kept them at a disadvantaged position in the society.

**Effects of child labour**

Child labour is a symptom of poverty and inequality in our society. It is also a cause of poverty; as in majority of cases children who join the workforce at an early stage do so without any education and skills which resist them to be upwardly mobile in future. They grow up as illiterates devoid of any skills for further development. In most cases, they are involved in monotonous and laborious tasks. Consequently they grow into low paid unskilled worker when they become adults.

It is often observed that children paid very little in comparison to adult workers. Again they are harassed, abused and employed for long working
hours. By acquiring money at a tender age, children often develop bad habits like - smoking and drinking, gambling, watching movies etc. Thus in many cases it is found that the wage used by the children for entertainment and not for survival.

Labouring at a young age has many adverse consequences for children. Children employed in carpet weaving, match and fire work, glass and bangles, slate/pencils, diamond cutting and polishing, abattoirs/slaughterhouses, lock making etc. are continuously exposed to various hazardous, including at times, physical, social, sexual, and psychological abuses. Children can be seen working underground, under water, at dangerous heights or in confined spaces, handling dangerous machines, equipment, tools and sometimes, heavy loads. There is continuous exposure to hazardous substances or extreme temperature or noise levels. They also work for long hours or during the night. Through child labour, the child’s potentials are put in improper use for the employers’ benefits (Singh and Sekar 2003). 11

George (1990) 12 mentions three possible effects that child labour may have on children like: material, physical and moral deterioration. By material deterioration, he suggests that the child acquiring distaste for regular employment; his chances of acquiring the skills for a trade are very limited and he tends to join a class of casual labourers. Physical deterioration results from keeping late hours, excessive fatigue, and exposure to the elements, irregularity of sleep and meals, use of addictives (cigarette, coffee and alcohol), and sexually transmitted diseases. Under “moral deterioration”, he suggests that the child may be encouraged to play pranks and truant; he may fall prey to cheap thrills on the street; he may drift into delinquency, and be led into the underworld of crime.
The impact of work on a child’s development is the key to determining when work becomes a problem. Work that is harmless to adults can be extremely harmful to children. Among the aspects of a child’s development that can be endangered by work are:

- Physical development — including overall health, coordination, strength, vision and hearing;
- Cognitive development — including literacy, numeracy and the acquisition of knowledge necessary to normal life;
- Emotional development — including adequate self-esteem, family attachment, feelings of love and acceptance;
- Social and moral development — including a sense of group identity, the ability to cooperate with others and the capacity to distinguish right from wrong.

The physical harm is, of course, the easiest to see. Carrying heavy loads or sitting for long periods in unnatural positions can permanently disable growing bodies. Hard physical labour over a period of years can stunt children’s physical stature by up to 30 per cent of their biological potential, as they expend stores of stamina that should last into adulthood. Children are also vulnerable psychologically: they can suffer devastating psychological damage from being in an environment in which they are demeaned or oppressed (UNICEF, 1997).
In Indian context Jain (2006) provides some selected consequences of child labour:

- Adult unemployment
- Perpetuation of poverty
- Increasing illiteracy
- Higher profit to the employer
- Increased morbidity
- Poor enforcement of minimum wage ruler
- Child labour becomes inter-generational

Galli (2001), in her study on child labour has lead her to the identification of at least six channels through which child labour might have a negative impact on long run growth: lower human capital accumulation, higher fertility, worse health, slower investment and technical change, higher income and gender inequality (see Figure 2).
Physical (health) consequences

The adverse consequences of children working in hazardous occupations are many. Firstly, it poses a challenge to the safety of the workers. Secondly, health hazards have more long-term implications in terms of making the person invalid for any work at an early age. Various studies have shown that the impact of the hazardous work begins to show in its severe form only after 2-3 years in terms of morbidity, fever, cold, cough, dysentery, body ache and weakness. T.B. and other respiratory problems (Bimal, 2000).  

The Sekar and Mohammad (2001) study on child labour in the home-based lock industry of Aligarh gives a very clear indication of the
impact on children. The most hazardous work in lock making and in other metal works are polishing, electroplating and spray painting. In polishing work, child workers inhale powder and metal dust continuously. This leads to respiratory and other lung related diseases. In electroplating, chemicals such as hydrochloric acid are used and the limbs of children get affected when they regularly dip the cross-section of the locks in these chemical solutions for electroplating. In most of the units, children work without wearing any footwear or gloves. The other hazardous impact of this work relates to the inhaling of noxious fumes, emitted from the chemical solutions when a current is passed through it. It affects both lungs and eyes.

The ILO (1983) observed that the vulnerability of working children to health hazards is increased by the high incidence of malnutrition and under-nourishment, in contrast to their increased requirement for energy utilisation to perform heavy work activities. The incidence of communicable diseases is always higher among these children. Children come into close contact in work situations with infective cases of tuberculosis and other similar diseases. Severe malnutrition, anaemia, hard labour, fatigue and inadequate sleep make them more susceptible to infectious diseases.

In this context, we can cite the International Council of Nurses (2000), which recognize the following negative manifestations of child labour on children’s health status:

- Delayed or stunted growth
- Hearing and/or sight loss
- Malnutrition and eating disorders
• Sexual abuse/harassment
• Abortion/teenage child birth
• Inappropriate risk behaviour
• Sleeping disorders
• Bone malformation, skin infections and allergies
• Respiratory infections, chemical poisoning
• Sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS
• Drug dependence
• Difficulty creating social relationships and depression

Children work for long hours often in dangerous and unhealthy conditions and are exposed to lasting physical and psychological harm. The NHRC (2004) study shows that child work tends to develop:

• Respiratory problems such as asthma, tuberculosis
• General weakness, stunted growth, body ache and joint pains
• Poor eyesight and other eye problems such as watering, irritation and reddening of eyes
• Loss of appetite
• Tumours and burns
• Disability by working on looms
• Susceptibility to arthritis as they grow older
• Mental disabilities.
Table 10: Some examples of hazardous occupations and their consequences on the health of working children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hazards</th>
<th>Health consequences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate or unprotected machinery and tools; driving tractors and farm vehicles; motor vehicle accidents; noise and vibration; risk of falls and suffocation in grain elevators and soils; dangerous animals; biological toxic agents; exposure to hazardous chemicals; arduous work; working without personal protective equipment; exposure to extreme temperatures; heavy loads.</td>
<td>Lacerations, cuts, injuries and death, fractures and amputations of fingers, limbs and toes, head injuries or other handicaps caused by equipment and farm machinery mishaps; induced hearing loss; eye injuries; parasitic infections and other infectious diseases; dermatitis; thermal stress; chemical poisoning (chronic and acute).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inhalation of wool dust contaminated with biological agents; bad working postures (squatting); inadequate lighting/ventilation; poor sanitation; hazardous chemicals; repetitive movements.</td>
<td>Musculo-skeletal disorders; eyestrain and defective vision; respiratory diseases; fatigue; chemical poisoning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radiant heat and thermal stress; stepping on or handling hot broken glass; inadequate ventilation; hazardous dust;</td>
<td>Burns; cuts from broken glass eye injuries; heat stress; respiratory diseases; lead poisoning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to lead.</td>
<td>Injuries from falls; cuts, abrasions from tools and saws; burns and scalds; Q fever; brucellosis; tuberculosis and other infectious diseases; thermal stress; eye injuries from flying bone splinters; physical strain; respiratory diseases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsafe machinery and equipment, exposure to biological agents, extreme temperature changes; poor sanitation, exposure to untreated liquid and solid waste; inadequate ventilation.</td>
<td>Decompression illness; death or injury from hypoxia; gastro-intestinal diseases; emphysema and cardiac disorders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to high atmospheric pressure; accidents due to oxygen deficiency (hypoxia); exposure to dangerous and poisonous fish; over crowded and unsanitary conditions; long hours.</td>
<td>Motor vehicle injuries; drug addiction; branded as outcasts (reconvicted criminals); fatigue; malnutrition; AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases; psychosocial disorders; unwanted pregnancy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Forastieri, V (2002), *Children at work: Health and safety risks*

As the table shows there are number of diseases which may occur due to child work and around the world millions of children are suffering from such diseases, injuries, disorders, malnutrition, illness, burns, cuts, stress, fatigue.
and even death. Although during the study, the physical impact is not tested because of non-availability of required instruments but minute observation of child work shows that long working hours and doing the same work with the same posture resulted in fatigue, headache and backache among the children. Because of this discomfort, the children cannot study at home and go to bed as early as possible.

**Psychological impact**

Many psychologists believe that childhood is the critical period for later development of personality and the exploitative situations of child labour exert strong influence on the child’s self-concept and self-esteem. Children growing up in such a negative atmosphere feel incompetent, rejected and unwanted. It leads to deficits in their physical, mental, social and emotional development. At times, street children and the self-employed children are charged with vague offences such as vagrancy or loitering. They are often arbitrarily rounded up and detained simply because they are on the street and appear to be homeless. These children are subjected to physical and emotional abuse. Emotional abuse may take a number of forms such as verbal assault, including threats of sexual or physical abuse, close confinement such as locking a child in a room, and withholding of food. 21

Adolescence and puberty is a period of profound mental and emotional changes in a child. Child's inadequate comprehension and imitation of adult world may lead to "pseudo" maturity. Creativeness and fantasies which characterize children are promptly replaced by the practical harsh realities that mark the world of work i.e. production and services. These in turn impoverish the whole mental world of working children. It has already been reported that many children felt elderly after joining labour force. These premature economic worries are
unhealthy for the present future well being of child. Employer may use different forms of abuses as physical punishment, humiliation or deduction of wages etc. or could be protective and affectionate or some where in these two extremes. If children do not get consideration or respect and because they lack understanding they take criticism to heart. It may affect their behaviour, attitude, expressions of childhood and their mental, psychological faculties may remain undeveloped (Dwivedi & Srinivasan, 1993). The following table shows how major psychological hazards are negatively linking with the well being of children, which in the long run can adversely affect the children.

**Figure 3:** Linking major psychosocial hazards to negative indicators of well-being

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Psychosocial Hazards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breakdown of social networks. Disruption to familiar surroundings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monotonous or inappropriate activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neglect, emotional, physical or sexual abuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isolation from peers, bullying, stigmatisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working conditions/workload, accidents and toxins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecurity, exploitation, Powerlessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unreasonable parental expectations, collusion with employers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incompatibility work versus school demands. Acute poverty, political/social upheaval</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Major Negative Indicators

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delayed development, narrow range of cognitive, technical and communication skills, maladaptive for future prospects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecurity, inhibition, low social confidence, conflictual relationships. Social exclusion or rejection, deviant or antisocial behaviour</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feelings of worthlessness, fear of failure, self-denigration, negative social comparisons, shame and stigma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learned helplessness, external locus of control, hopelessness, apathy, fatalism, feelings of confusion, betrayal, abandonment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress, trauma, fear, anxiety, depression, anger, distress, despair, disturbed sleep and eating, substance abuse, self harm</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>


In the study area of Nalbari district, it is observed that the behaviour of the child labourer is quite different from the other children who are not working. In some instances it is found that some child labourer are behaving like adults as they are having the habits like smoking and gambling, using abusive words etc. Because of harsh treatment from the employer and general people, low wage and harsh working conditions, stress, neglect, insecurity, hopelessness and shame those children are behaving differently.
Socio-economic impact

It is often asserted that poverty and child economic participation are mutually reinforcing, with poverty generating child labour and child labour perpetuating poverty. In this regard, it is reasonable to assume that work that precludes or seriously handicaps education and upward social mobility leads to poverty, since low educational attainment reduces lifetime earnings. It can also be surmised that work that impairs the health and safety and socialization of the child also has the same general effect.

Many researchers and practitioners have come to feel that most of the negative social effects of child labour come from specific working conditions that are inimical to the safety and development of the children involved. Perhaps the most telling social argument against child labour is that its effects are highly discriminatory, adding to the burden and disadvantage of individuals and groups already among the socially excluded while benefiting those who are privileged. For that reason, child labour is inconsistent with democracy and social justice (ILO, 1996). 23

Another consequence of child labour is an anti-social personality, generally seen among self-employed and street children, especially rag pickers. To increase the feeling of independence and project pseudo maturity, they start using abusive language, incur extravagant expenses and indulge in bad habits such as smoking, gambling etc. They are also exposed to social evils and crimes. The characteristics of anti-social personality are very much manifested in these children. When they grow up, many of them do not abide by the usual rules of society. They do not follow through on promises or obligations; they are perfectly
willing to deceive and defraud. They feel no close bonds with others but are often remarkably apt at convincing other people to help and trust them. Research studies have clearly indicated that most of time it is street children who stand in the court as juvenile delinquents (Pandey, 1993). 

Child labour can be a disorganising factor in the family, for those children who go away from home and parents to work and spend most of their working hours at their job. When one takes into account that children as young as six years of age are taken away in employment, one is left to wonder about the sources of nurturance, which are so essential to the child’s developmental process. School and recreation are luxuries for these children. For lack of any healthy exercise of mind and body, in a few years, the developmental process is retarded for those children. In the commercial sectors the child is ill prepared to deal with some of the complex work. He may be ill-treated and has to continue working when his adult counterparts are taking a break. In fact, child labour often retards any form of technological advance, as manufacturers, by employing children, are often able to retain and perpetuate the traditional methods of manufacture. The indigenous industries like beedi, chocolate, brick and textile manufacture are made possible only because of cheap availability of child labour. Only because of this policy of the employer, the whole community suffers and become backward both economically and socially.
Impact on education

Education helps a child develop cognitively, emotionally and socially, and it is an area often gravely jeopardized by child labour. Work can interfere with education in the following ways:

- It frequently absorbs so much time that school attendance is impossible;
- It often leaves children so exhausted that they lack the energy to attend school or cannot study effectively when in class;
- Some occupations, especially seasonal agricultural work, cause children to miss too many days of class even though they are enrolled in school;
- Children mistreated in the workplace may be so traumatized that they cannot concentrate on school work or are rejected by teachers as disruptive (UNICEF, 1997).25

Deprivation education and vocational training also has a telling effect on working children. The future of a working child is endangered, as he cannot go to school, or is bound to leave school prematurely, or is unable to coordinate the two activities. He lacks fundamental general and professional knowledge, which is required for normal mental and intellectual development and for making the child into a skilled worker and enabling him to prosper in social and occupational fields. Children thus find themselves locked in unskilled, low paying, unpleasant and unsafe working situations and permanently disadvantaged in the labour market. As adults they are not only unemployed but also unemployable (Ennew, 1986)26. As field study shows, majority of children have dropout from school and those who are still combining study with work have very little energy, time and interest to continue their education, thus in the long run they are bound to
discontinue their study. The general feeling among the children and their family is that because of lack of education they are fitted to remain in the present occupation. (The details of child labour and the issue of education has been discussed separately in the Chapter number 5).

From an ethical and evolutionary standpoint, every child should be accorded the right to an extended period of childhood. But it is found that child labour contributes to family disorganization, problem of recreation and socialization, as they have to work away from their homes and family members. They have to work in the heat of summer and cold of winter, penetrating dust, chemical fertilizers, pesticides etc. In some cases, they have to face police, anti-social elements (in case of self-employed children), in the transport sector, they are living dangerously as they have to perform duties in running vehicles (both bus and train) by climbing in the footstep. In brick making units they exposed to very high temperature and the sun throughout the day, which may leads to skin and eye diseases. In construction work they have to carry heavy load through out the day that resulted in backache. In hotels and garages most of the children have cuts / wounds, body aches etc. In the small enterprises they have to work in dark and dingy sheds with out proper ventilation and sitting capacity, lack of physical exercise and constant sitting on the same posture resulted into physical discomfort for the children.
Working conditions and their effects on children

There is not enough information available about the children engaged in physically, intellectually or emotionally injurious work or conditions, and to target protection for them. Official statistics contain very limited data in this area.

- **Age** at which children are put to work. There is cause for concern first of all because many children are put to work at a very early age, in particular in rural areas where they often begin to work as soon as they are 5 or 6 years old. The employment of very young children is an alarming problem; the younger the child, the more vulnerable he or she is to physical, chemical and other hazards at the workplace.

- **Hours of work.** A second reason for concern is the fact that work is often a permanent activity for children, which takes up long hours each day and is therefore difficult to reconcile with study under the proper conditions. Many children in the developing countries are faced with the pressing need to earn enough each day for their livelihood or survival and children are exposed to excessive hours of work.

- A question that often arises is that of the relationship between child labour and school attendance. In this regard, while it is true that many children who work continue to attend school, it is just as true that many others stop going to school altogether.

- **Fatigue** of child workers caused by excessive hours of work is a cause of accidents. Moreover, above a certain threshold - which varies according to
age and type of activity - work has a serious detrimental effect on children's ability to learn.

- **Psychosocial risks.** Some occupations can cause serious psychological and social adjustment problems to children. This risk is particularly serious for girls, who work as domestic servants and live away from their homes. They work very hard, among unloving adults and almost in total isolation from family and friends. The World Health Organisation reports that children employed as domestic servants suffer serious symptoms of withdrawal, regression, premature ageing and depression, among others.

- Another extremely serious problem is *child slavery*. The child becomes an asset, a thing that can be exchanged. The owner can have a child work directly for him or her or rent the child out to a third party. Available information points to the existence of traditional forms of child slavery in South Asia and the sub-Saharan strip of East Africa. A large number of child slaves are to be found in agriculture, domestic help, the sex industry, the carpet and textile industries, quarrying and brick making (ILO, 1996).

Considering the above-mentioned points, an evaluation was made at the study area of Nalbari district like:

1. Working hours: -

In Nalbari district the minimum working hour is 4—5 for vendors and some self-employed children. 19.3% of total children work for up to 8 hours per day. But 29.3% work for more than 12 hours per day, here hotel and garage boy are the worst sufferer. In fact for hotel boy there is no rest during and
after lunch. Thus it is clear that almost half of the total children are working eight or more hours per day which is an area of concern at the same time it is found that all the girls have to perform housework. Excessive hours of work develop fatigue and which some time causes accidents. Because of long working hours they go to bed as early as possible, which deprive them from playing and reading. All these developments, in the long run leads to poor performance at school and subsequent drop out. On the other hand, at the physical level long working hour is very much detrimental to their health.

Table (11): Working hour of children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hours (Per day)</th>
<th>Economic Activity</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brick kiln</td>
<td>Hotel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4—5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5—8</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8—12</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Age-sex distribution of child labourer:

Out of two hundred child labourers only 35 are girls. Girls are engaged only in chocolate factory and brick kilns, they are not found in other economic activities, here boys are dominant but what is found that girls have to perform housework. It means that girls are exploited both within and outside home compared to boys. Majority of the child labourer are from 11 to 14 years age. But majority of the girl child labourer are from 5—10 years age group. Some children are very young, who cannot respond properly to the researcher during investigation. It shows that employer openly violates the legal age standards regarding employment of children.

Table (12): Age-sex distribution of child labourer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total no. of child labourer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5—10</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11—14</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Level of income:-

The factory (chocolate) worker, handimen, and vendor get their income daily, for other it is monthly. None get less than 100 per month and only 11% get up to 200 rupees per month. Forty percent get up to 400 rupees per month. One handimen (his father is the owner of the auto rickshaw) and 16 self-employed children earn above 500 rupees monthly. The hotel boy, handimen and some shop assistants take their lunch provided by the employer. However it is found that the children get almost one-third amount as wage compared to adult workers.
Table (13): Monthly income of child labourer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monthly income (in rupee)</th>
<th>Economic Activity</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brick kiln</td>
<td>Hotel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below 100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100—200</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200—300</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>300—400</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>400—500</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above 500</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Nature of present residence:

A major section of the child labourer lives in poorhouse with no provision of electricity and water. Majority of the child labourer lives in
garage and hotel and with the employer. On the other hand, those children working in brick kiln units stay in temporary house with their parents. For those children the path of education is virtually closed, as they have to migrate from their own place to other. Some of the vendor and handimen live in rented house and some with the employer free of cost. Those who live with their employer have to perform extra housework; in fact they act as full time labourer. Since those children live away from own family member and among unloving adults, mentally and emotionally those children feel insecure, depressed and isolated. Thus, we can divide the child labourer by their nature of residence as – rented, owned, rent free and temporary.

**Table (14): Types of Residence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Residence</th>
<th>Brick kiln</th>
<th>Hotel</th>
<th>Transport</th>
<th>Garage</th>
<th>Shop</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rented</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owned</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent free</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. Child abuse:

Children are found to be abused in work place both mentally and physically as 86% of the total child labourer confirmed it. Although no incidence of sex abuse was found, physical abuse in the form of beating by both employer and customer was found. Scolding and rebuking is quite common on the part of employer for any lapse of work or wrongdoing. General people too often laugh at them regarding their work and plight.

6. Child slavery:

In Nalbari district, the practice of child slavery was not found. Although in some cases, it is found that some children are working away from their parents without getting any direct wage but the practice cannot be termed as slavery as parents have frequent contact with their children and receiving the wage from the employer.

All the above-mentioned indicators show that in the study area of Nalbari district, the incident of child labour has negative impact over the children. The general feeling among the children is that because of no alternative they are
They have lost the childhood, education, recreation, family affection, social status, an adequate standard of living, opportunities for developing their personality, talents, mental and physical abilities and so on. They are not enjoying their work but under compulsion they are working. The effects of child labour can be observed in the whole society and economy. It leads to underdevelopment of the country. In fact we are losing our future human resources as cheap labour at an early age and in the long run societies with large number of working children will be producing more and more illiterate citizens, who are devoid of the skills needed for development.

In general we can sum up the main consequences of child labour as: it stunted growth of future generation, fails to contribute to development, leads to adult unemployment and depreciation in wages, perpetuates poverty and inequality, child abuse, child malnourishment, illiteracy, early morbidity of citizens and so on. The overall conclusion is that child labour causes serious physical, mental and economical damage to the child and its family. Continuation of the practice of child labour has adverse effects in the long run to the society as a whole.

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27. ILO, 1996: Child Labour: What’s To Be Done? Document for Discussion at the Informal Tripartite Meeting at the Ministerial Level, Geneva

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