

# Child Labour in India: Causes and Consequences

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**Abstract:** *This paper focuses on various concepts and studies associated with child labour, their socio-economic issues, the World and Indian scenario of child labour. It analyses the driving factors responsible for child labour in India and World. The various forms of child labour and health hazards they are faced. Various causes of child labour like the curse of poverty, lack of educational resources, Social and economic backwardness, Addiction, disease or disability, The lure of cheap labour, Family tradition, Discrimination between boys and girls. Consequences of Child Labour such as General child injuries and abuses like cuts, burns, and lacerations, fractures, tiredness and dizziness, excessive fears and nightmares. Sexual abuse, particularly sexual exploitation of girls by adults, rape, prostitution, early and unwanted pregnancy, abortion, Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS, drugs and alcoholism. Physical abuse involves corporal punishment, emotional maltreatment such as blaming, belittling, verbal attacks, and bad remarks. Emotional neglect such as deprivation of family love and affection, resulting in loneliness, and hopelessness. Physical neglect like lack of adequate provision of food, clothing, shelter and medical treatment. Lack of schooling results in missing educational qualifications and higher skills thus perpetuating their life in poverty. We suggest for a new approach that puts people and the work they do at the center of economic and social policy and business practice: a human-centered agenda for the future of work.*

**Keywords:** poverty, Illiteracy, health hazardous, sexual abuses.

## 1. Introduction

**Definitions of Child Labour:** (i). Children who are engaged in work unsuitable for their capacities as children or in work that may jeopardize their health, education or moral development and whose age is below 14 years. Children who practice and engage in economic activities, on a part or full-time basis. (ii). The practice deprives children of their childhood and is harmful to their physical and mental development and (iii). Child labourers constitute a group of working children who are either too young to work or are engaged in hazardous activities- that is, work that is potentially harmful to their physical, social, psychological or educational development, UNICEF (2013).

## 2. Review of Literature

The prevalence of child labour is one of the most important problems confronting the world at large, especially developing countries such as India. Millions of children are engaged in hazardous situations, or conditions, such as working in mines, working with chemicals and pesticides in agriculture or working with dangerous machinery, Lal (2016).

Child Labour is a global phenomenon. It exists both in the developing and the developed countries though with a difference in cause and magnitude. Its prevalence is more in the developing countries as compared to the developed ones, because the families, to which the working children belong, are in an urgent need of income of child labour for their subsistence, whereas children in the developed countries are often working for pocket money, Lal (2006).

There are indications of high numbers of worst forms of child labour among indigenous peoples in certain countries in South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Latin America. Indigenous and tribal children are found to make up a large part of child labourers in certain risk areas, such as debt-bondage in South Asia, migratory agricultural wage labour in Central America and Mexico, and trafficking in Southeast

Asia. In Latin America, it is estimated that indigenous children are twice as likely to work as their peers, B. Suresh Lal, (2019a).

Amongst various causes of child labour, unemployment, poverty, and indebtedness of the households are the most important. Many parents secure advances from the landlords or the employers and repay the loans in terms of their child labour. In some cases, the children are compelled to migrate temporarily to the nearest cities or the urban areas of adjoining states to earn the necessary subsistence, Lal (2006).

The poverty of Family: Women and female children are often denied equal access to common resources when a family is in poverty. Female members, mainly female children are victimized by the poverty of the family. A poor family naturally jeopardizes female children. Every chance is used for avoiding the burden of a female. So poor families naturally resort to child marriage to avoid all sorts of the burden of a female child. Sometimes it can also be perceived that poor families selling girls and child marriage are a hidden form of selling the girl. Marring child to gods as a tradition is also originates from family poverty, Lal (2015).

Family poverty, ignorance of the parents, lack of support by parents, community passivity and children's passivity towards education are the key factors responsible for child labouring in the village. The discriminating attitude of parents towards the education of the girl child is adding the number of child labourers in the village. People prefer to keep their girl children away from education as compared to male children. So most of the child labourers in case of never admitted are of female children. Both the never admitted and drop-out children, in turn, get trapped into the child labouring, Naseer(2013).

The working children themselves may not be productive but are capable of relieving the adults for productive employment by engaging themselves in domestic chores and looking after younger children in the home. This way, they

allow their parents to spend more time, on income generating activities. They also free adults to enable their migration to the areas of high employment, Lal(2016).

In the urban areas, child labour exists both in the formal as well as informal sector enterprises, though its presence in the latter is more frequent. In small manufacturing enterprises, which are spread over wide locations and can ignore legal restrictions, the children often work along with their elder relatives and friends. They are possibly not paid directly but indirectly through a supplementary wage paid to the main worker Lal(2006).

In most of the developing countries, parents depend on their children to assist them in performing important work at home or outside. In the absence of any social security measures, dependence on children increases and in many cases the working children are the main or the only support for many parents. In this way, children of the poor are economically valuable to their parents as a source of labour contributing to household income and social security in their old age also, Lal(2006).

Many adolescent girls miss one in four weeks of school because of a lack of facilities to deal with menstrual hygiene. Menstrual hygiene is a problem for many adolescent girls and women, who lack the privacy to properly wash and dry menstrual rags. In some rural areas, superstition and tradition mean that rags are dried in the dark, away from male view. About two in five rural women commonly experience vaginal infections caused by damp rags, Lal (2013).

Tribal people migrated to urban areas usually get unskilled wage employment in the construction sector which is uncertain. They also work as domestic bits of help, in shops, in commercial outlets and also engaged in other miscellaneous works for livelihood. They face many problems at workplace and a place of stay, B. Suresh (2015).

Myrdal (1968) in his book "*Asian Drama*" devotes one of the three volumes mainly to the issue of school education and human resource development as a major ingredient of modernization in Asia. It shows the experience of South Asia, which is qualitatively different from East Asia. The whole of India would be seriously misleading because the contrast between Kerala and Bihar in school educational effort and outcomes is much sharper than between East Asia and India. Agricultural and rural child labour, as discussed above, has not been an important concern of the policy-makers and pressure groups dealing with the issue of its elimination historically or in the contemporary world, Haq (1997).

They are withdrawing child from school, started doing degrading jobs, old family members sent out, increased land mortgage, reduction in food consumption, depletion in mulch animals, increased debt, increased intensity of migration, unpaid hospital bills, fodder availability reduced and short term land transitions, Lal (2007).

Increase of slums, increase of health problems due to leaving in slums, increase of pollution, low-wages, increase of

crimes and suicides, reduce in nutritional food consumption, an increase of trafficking and accidents and in-secured life, Lal (2007).

The study explains the expenditure on food items and non-food items is almost the same. About 72% of the respondents are spending on food items between Rs. 3000 to Rs.6000 per annum, reveals the utter poverty prevails in them, Lal (2010).

It really shows the backwardness of the people in the area. The food items mostly are rice, vegetables, milk, oil, and pulses, etc. The nonfood items, we mean expenditure on clothes, shelter, and education to children, etc Lal (2010).

Under TB and malaria, the tribals suffer disproportionately to their population - the rate of incidence of TB among tribals is estimated to be double and under malaria, case incidence is estimated to be over 18 per 1,000, most of the P Falciparum variety, accounting for 75 percent of the state's total deaths on account of malaria, Lal (2011).

Most of these infections are due to indiscriminate defecation in the open field, barefoot walking and lack of health awareness and hygiene. These are preventable with repeated administration of antihelminthic and protozoal treatment at 4 months interval which can be used effectively in the national parasitic infection control program, B. Suresh (2011).

A study done by B. Suresh(2015) throws light on concerns of alcohol misuse and associated problems. The use of alcohol results in a large range of personal, social and health problems. Alcohol use and abuse can contribute to a variety of medical problems such as cardiovascular diseases, Heart attack, and stroke, Hematological diseases, Cancer, Urinary system and Nervous system, etc.

In addition to the above health problems, micronutrient deficiency, deficiency of iodine and deficiency of dietary components are prevalent in both the villages, leading to impaired mental function, poor intellectual performance, lowered I.Q and malnutrition, Lal (2006a).

Anaemia was found to be the most important clinical finding in tribal population followed by fever and other diseases such as malaria, upper respiratory tract infection commonly prevalent in Narlapur and Papaiahpally villages and the cases reported and recorded during November-2005 year in PHC Govindaraopet are 45 and 36 respectively, Lal (2006a).

### 3. Objectives and Methods

The study broadly examines an economic perspective of child labour in India. The objectives are:

- 1) To investigate the socio-economic background of child labour in India.
- 2) To identify the factors responsible for child labour in India and World.
- 3) To examine the forms of child labour and health hazards, and
- 4) To study the consequences of child labour.

The study is based on secondary data includes various reports and documents of World Banks, International Labour Organisation, Save Children and UNICEF and also different studies carried out by researchers in India and abroad.

#### 4. India and World Scenario

The global estimates indicate that 152 million children – 64 million girls and 88 million boys – are in child labour globally, accounting for almost one in ten of all children worldwide. Seventy-one percent of children in child labour work in the agricultural sector and 69 percent perform unpaid work within their own family unit. Nearly half of all those in child labour – 73 million children in absolute terms – are in hazardous work that directly endangers their health, safety, and moral development. Children in employment, a broader measure comprising both child labour and employment of children above the legal working age, number 218 million. Children in forced labour, the worst form of child labour that is estimated using a separate methodology, number 4.3 million, ILO (2017).

According to Global childhood report 2019; 4.4 million fewer child deaths per year, 49 million fewer stunted children, 115 million fewer children out of school, 94 million fewer child labourers, 11 million fewer married girls, 3 million fewer teen births per year, 12,000 fewer child homicides per year.

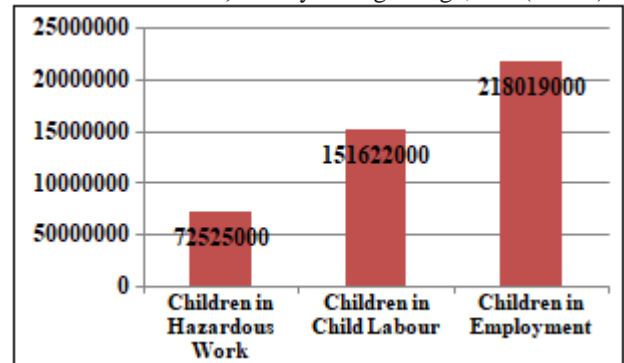
According to census 2011, there were 255 million economically active children in the age group of 5-14 years. In India, the extent of child labour is not as large as in Turkey, Thailand, Bangladesh. Brazil, Pakistan, Indonesia, Mexico, and Egypt.

It is estimated around 5.2 percent of the total labour force in India as against 27.3 percent in Turkey, 20.7 percent in Thailand. 19.5 percent in Bangladesh. 18.8 percent in Brazil, 16.6 percent in Pakistan, 12.4 percent in Indonesia, 11.5 percent in Mexico and 8.2 percent in Egypt. However, in Srilanka, child labour accounts for only 4.4 percent of the total labour force. Even the workforce participation rate of children in the age group 10-14 years in India (10.4 percent) is less than Bangladesh (33.3 percent), Nepal (22 per cent) and Pakistan (11.6 percent), but greater than Indonesia (8 per cent) and Srilanka (1.8 per cent), Lal (2015a).

1 in every 11 children in India works to earn a living, India's 2011 census revealed that more than 10.2 million "economically active" children in the age group of five to 14 years- 5.6 million boys and 4.5 million girls. Eight million children were working in rural areas, and 2 million in urban areas. Although in rural settings the number of child workers reduced from 11 million to 8 million between

the 2001 and 2011 censuses, over the same period, the number of children working in urban settings rose from 1.3 million to 2 million, Lal (2019).

#### An absolute number of children in employment, child, and hazardous work, 5–17 years age range, ILO(2017a).



#### 5. Who are the Children at Risk in the World?

**Risk-1: One billion children live in countries plagued by poverty.** Children living in poverty face a higher risk of death before age 5, malnutrition that stunts their growth, being out of school, being forced into child labour or early marriage, and giving birth while they are still children themselves.

**Risk-2:** At least 240 million children live in countries affected by conflict and fragility. 3 these children are at heightened risk of death before age 5, stunted growth due to malnutrition, being out of school, being forced to work, and being forced from their homes under dangerous and frightening circumstances.

**Risk-3: 575 million girls live in countries characterized by discrimination against girls,** often placing them at heightened risk of death before age 5, being denied education, being forced into early marriage, and/or giving birth before they are emotionally and physically ready.

Because of who they are and where they live, these children risk being robbed of their childhoods and future potential. This assault on childhood also deprives nations of energy and talent they need to progress, Save the Children (2018).

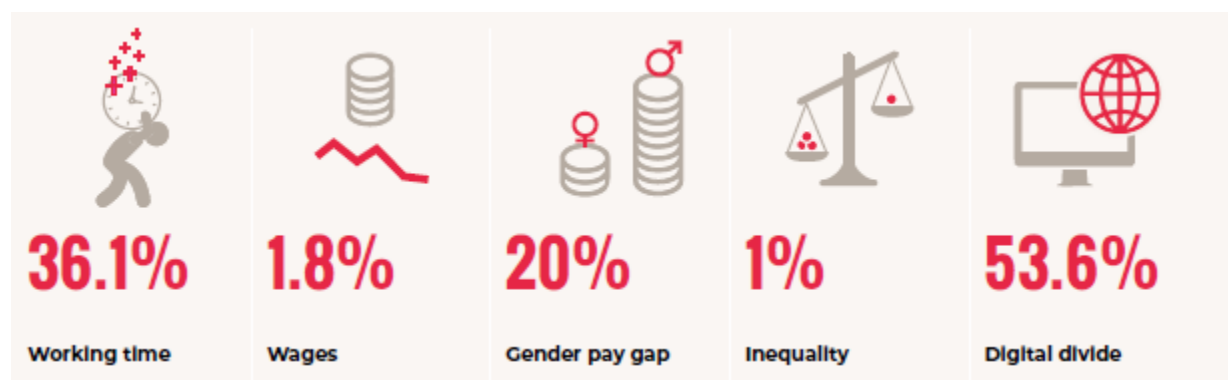
#### 6. Results and Discussion

We gave elaborative analysis on different aspects of child labour in present day scenario as well as future requirement to eliminate child labour from the world.



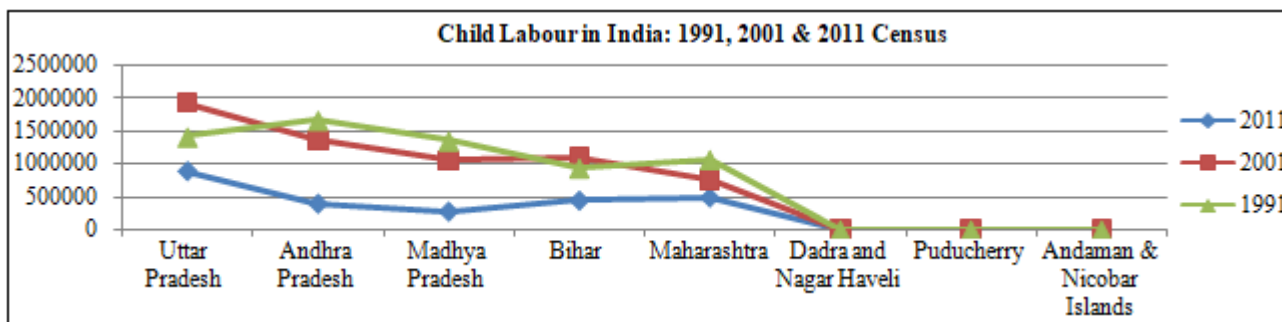
The above figure reveals the global scenario of future works that, **Employment:** 344 million jobs need to be created by 2030, in addition to the 190 million jobs needed to address unemployment today, **Unemployment:** 190 million people are unemployed, of whom 64.8 million are youth. **Informal employment:** 2 billion people make their living in the informal economy. **Working poverty:** 300 million workers

live in extreme poverty (<\$1.90/day). **Fatal work-related injuries and illnesses:** 2.78 million people die every year as a result of occupational accidents or work-related illnesses, ILO Economic Trends Model (May 2018), ILO-2018a, 2018b.



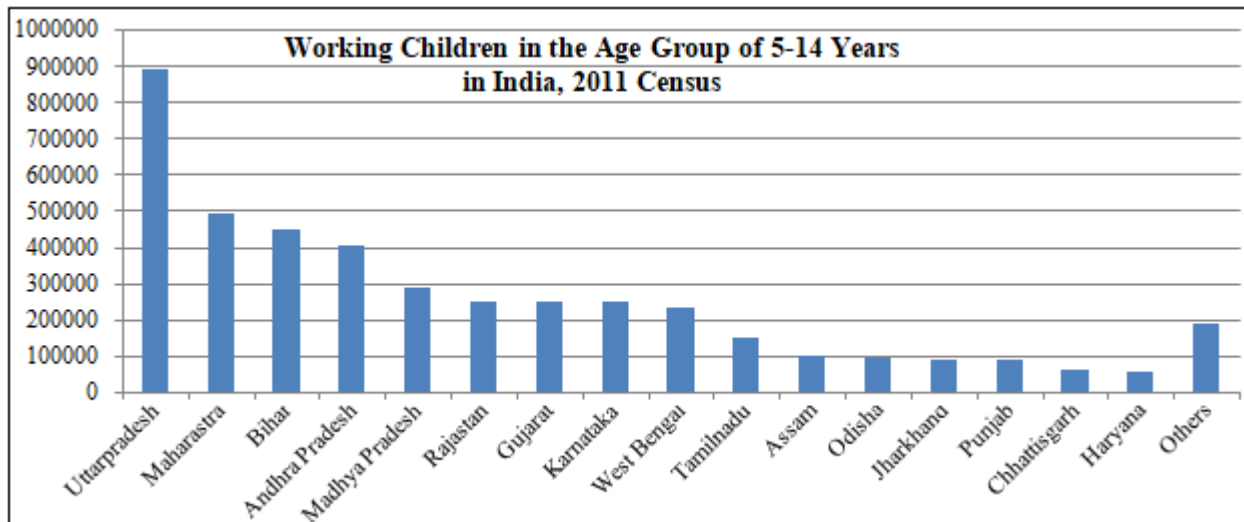
Working time: 36.1 % of the global workforce works excessive hours (more than 48 hours per week). Wages: Wage growth declined from 2.4% to 1.8% between 2016 and 2017. Gender pay gap: Women are paid around 20% less than men. Inequality: Between 1980 and 2016, the richest 1% of the world’s population received 27% of global income growth whereas the poorest 50% received only 12%. Digital divide: Only 53.6% of all households have internet access. In emerging countries, the share is only 15%, Messenger (2018), ILO(2018d), Alvarado (2018), ITU (2017).

The scenario of child labour in India varies from state to state. In states like Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Puducherry and Andaman & Nicobar, the issue of child labour is an important point of debate for the social watchers as it has assumed unbearable proportions. But the silver lining is that in these states also the phenomenon of child labour is reducing gradually from 1991 to 2001 and 2011. Below we give the details of states with the highest and lowest number of child labour and the ratio of child labour to the total population in these states.



Source: Census Database of 2011.

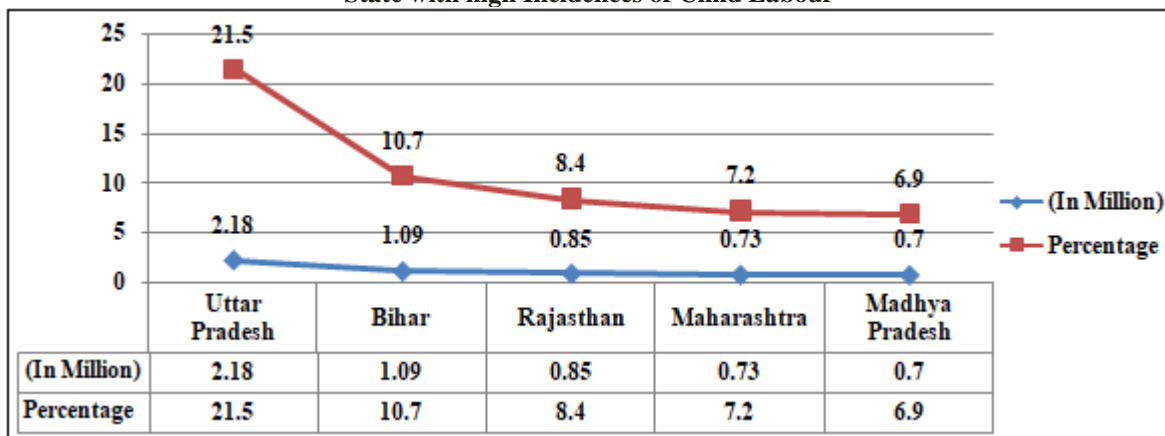




The working children in the age group of 5-14 years in India. In Indian state like Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Karnataka, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Assam, Odisha,

Jharkhand, Punjab, Chhattisgarh, and other, these states are witnessing more child labour than any other Indian states.

State with high Incidences of Child Labour

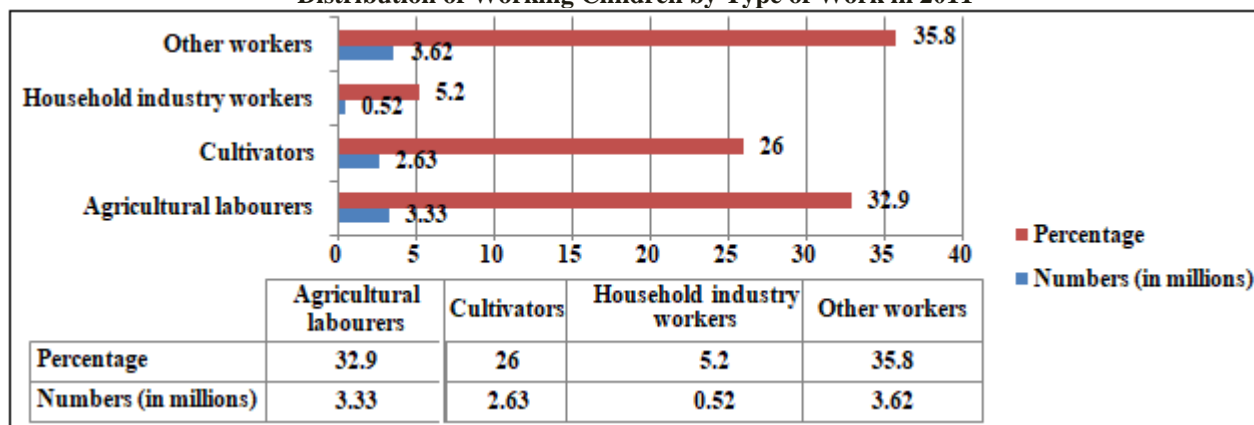


Source – Census 2011

Incidence of child labour in India and the top five states, such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, and

Madhya Pradesh constitute nearly 55% of total working children in India.

Distribution of Working Children by Type of Work in 2011



\*Source – Census 2011.

Note: ‘Other workers’: Workers other than cultivators, agricultural labourers or workers in household industries.

Child labour has been distributed as per their working type, the highest percentage has been recorded in agriculture followed by cultivator and household workers. It shows that

agriculture is engaging more child labour than any other sectors in India. The reason is the agriculture sector doesn't require any skills to work in.

### Forms of Child Labour

The worst forms of child labour are slavery and similar issues such as the trafficking of children, debt bondage, serfdom, children in armed conflict. Slavery is where one person is owned by and made to work for another person without having any say over what happened to them.

In factories like carpet-making, lock-making, brassware, export-oriented garment units, gem polishing export industry, leather units and, diamond industry, etc.

- In Shops and small scale vendors
- In Household
- In farms
- In mines (Labour)
- Near furnaces, welding, hazardous materials
- Children engaged in illegal activities smuggling, prostitution, child pornography, etc.
- In countries including some parts of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Afghanistan children are engaged in terrorist activities.
- Begging (more common in India) ILO (2017).

## 7. Causes of Child Labour

**The curse of poverty:** The main reason for child labour in India is poverty. Most of the country's population suffers from poverty. Due to poverty, parents cannot afford the studies of their children and make them earn their wages from a tender age. In fact, they are well aware of the grief of losing their loved ones to poverty many times. They send their small children to work in factories, homes, and shops. They are made to work to increase the income of their poor families at the earliest. These decisions are taken only for the purpose of eking out a living for their family. But such decisions shatter children's physical and mental state as they lose their childhood at an early age.

**Lack of educational resources:** Even after 72 years of our country's independence, there are instances where children are deprived of their fundamental right to education. There are thousands of villages in our country where there are no proper facilities for education. And if there is any, it is miles away. Such administrative laxity is also responsible for child labour in India. The worst sufferers are the poor families for whom getting their children educated is a dream. Sometimes the lack of affordable school for the education of poor children leaves them illiterate and helpless. Children are forced to live without studying. And sometimes such compulsions push them into the trap of child labour in India.

**Social and economic backwardness:** Social and economic backwardness is also the main reason for child labour in India. Socially backward parents do not send their children to receive an education. Consequently, their children are trapped in child labour. Due to illiteracy, many times parents are not aware of various information and schemes for child education. Lack of education, illiteracy and consequently the lack of awareness of their rights among them have

encouraged child labour. Also, uneducated parents do not know about the impact of child labour on their children. The conditions of poverty and unemployment give rural families a compulsive basis for engaging children in various tasks. In fact, feudal, zamindari system and its existing remnants continue to perpetuate the problem of child labour in India.

**Addiction, disease or disability:** In many families, due to alcohol addiction, disease or disability, there is no earning, and the child's wages are the sole means of family's sustenance. Population growth is also increasing unemployment, which has an adverse impact on child labour prevention. So, parents, instead of sending their children to school, are willing to send them to work to increase family income.

**The lure of cheap labour:** In the greed of cheap labour, some shopkeepers, companies and factory owners employ children so that they have to pay less to them and it amounts to employing cheap labour. Shopkeepers and small businessmen make children work as much as they do to the elder ones but pay half the wages. In the case of child labour, there is less chance for theft, greed or misappropriation of money too. With the development of globalization, privatization, and consumerist culture, the need for cheap labour and its linkage with the economic needs of poor families have encouraged child labour in India.

**Family tradition:** It is a shocking but bitter truth that in our society it is very easy to give child labour the name of tradition or custom in many families. The cultural and traditional family values play their role in increasing the problem of child labour in India at the voluntary level. Many families believe that a good life is not their destiny, and the age-old tradition of labour is the only source of their earning and livelihood.

Small businessmen also waste the lives of their children in the greediness of perpetuating their family trade with lower production costs. Some families also believe that working from childhood onwards will make their children more diligent and worldly-wise in terms of future life. They believe that early employment will give rise to their children's personal development, which will make it easier for them to plan their life ahead.

**Discrimination between boys and girls:** We have been conditioned into believing that girls are weaker and there is no equal comparison between boys and girls. Even today, in our society, we will find many examples where girls are deprived of studies. Considering girls weaker than boys deprives them of school and education. In labourer families, girls are found to be engaged in labour along with their parents.

### Consequences of Child Labour

Children are exposed to accidental and other injuries at work. They should thus be protected to prevent social, economic and physical harm, which persist to affect them during their lifetime. Such injuries include

- General child injuries and abuses like cuts, burns, and lacerations, fractures, tiredness and dizziness, excessive fears and nightmares.
- Sexual abuse, particularly sexual exploitation of girls by adults, rape, prostitution, early and unwanted pregnancy, abortion, Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS, drugs and alcoholism.
- Physical abuse that involves corporal punishment, emotional maltreatment such as blaming, belittling, verbal attacks, rejection, humiliation and bad remarks.
- Emotional neglect such as deprivation of family love and affection, resulting in loneliness, and hopelessness.
- Physical neglect like lack of adequate provision of food, clothing, shelter and medical treatment.
- Lack of schooling results in missing educational qualifications and higher skills thus perpetuating their life in poverty.
- Competition of children with adult workers leads to depressing wages and salaries.

Apart from the above, lack of opportunity for higher education for older children deprives the nation of developing higher skills and technological capabilities that are required for economic development/transformation to attain higher income and better standards of living, Lal (2019).

#### Various Laws against Child Labour:

- a) The child labour prohibition Act 1986 bans the employment of children below the age of 14 in many professions, such as domestic labour, and in the hospitality trade for example in roadside dhabas (restaurants), restaurants, hotels, motels, and spas. It does not ban child labour in agriculture.
- b) The Right to Education Act 2009 ensures all children 6-14 years have the right to free and compulsory education.
- c) The Indian Constitution ensures the right of all children 6-14 years to free and compulsory education; prohibits forced labour; prohibits the employment of children below 14 years in hazardous occupations; and promotes policies protecting children from exploitation.
- d) Whoever employs a child or permits a child to work is punishable with imprisonment from three months to one year or with fine no less than INR 10,000–20,000 rupees or with both.
- e) The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2000 defines a child as being below 18 years of age. Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), ratified by India in 1992, all children have the right to be protected from work that is dangerous, or that might harm children's health or education.

**Poor compliance of laws:** In modern society, laws stipulate that citizens have the right to receive a good education, avail good health services and take care of their health. Every citizen has the right to play the game he enjoys, and enjoy all the means of entertainment, and when he grows, to obtain employment where he can earn well and contribute to society and nation. But in the absence of proper compliance of the laws, child labour in India is continuing. It can be prohibited only by strict adherence to the related laws.

#### Limitations of the Child Labour Act

**Initiatives against child labour:** Child labour is not uniform. It takes many forms depending upon the type of work that children are made to do, the age and sex of the child and whether they work independently or with families. Due to this complex nature of child labour, there is no one strategy that can be used to eliminate it.

Combating child labour requires long term coordinated action which involves many stakeholders and the government. This includes educational institutions, mass media, NGOs and community-based organizations as well as trade unions and employers. It is important that the attitudes and mindsets of people are changed to instead employ adults and allow all children to go to school and have the chance to learn, play and socialize as they should.

Education is key to preventing child labour and has been one of the most successful methods to reduce child workers in India. This includes expanding education access to schooling, improving the quality and relevance of education, addressing violence in schools, providing relevant vocational training and using existing systems to ensure child workers return to school.

#### 8. Conclusion and Suggestion

Child labour is a serious hindrance to the social and economic development of the nation. Children employed in various sectors fail to get the necessary education, virtually forced to lead a life of hardship and poverty. It also affects the overall health of a child, as children get exhausted easily and are not physically fit to work for longer durations under difficult conditions.

Children employed in glass and firecracker industries work not only for longer hours but also under hazardous conditions, seriously compromising their health. They are continuously exposed to toxic gases and substances leading to various skin and respiratory ailments.

We suggest for a new approach that puts people and the work they do at the center of economic and social policy and business practice: a human-centered agenda for the future of work. This agenda focuses on three pillars of action. First, it means investing in people's capabilities, enabling them to acquire skills, reskill and upskill and supporting them through the various transitions they will face over their life course. Second, investing in the institutions of work to ensure a future of work with freedom, dignity, economic security, and equality. Third, investing in decent and sustainable work and shaping rules and incentives so as to align economic and social policy and business practice with this agenda. By harnessing transformative technologies, demographic opportunities, and the green economy, these investments can be powerful drivers of equity and sustainability for the present and future generations.

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