

## RE-EXAMINATION OF CHILD LABOUR FROM FEW UNNOTICED PERSPECTIVES

**Dr. Steven Wind**  
Independent Researcher,  
Arizona,  
USA

**Dr. Devajana C Nanjunda**  
National School for Advanced Study,  
Kushalnager, Kodagu District,  
INDIA  
ajdmeditor@yahoo.co.in

### ABSTRACT

*Child labour implies that who are in the age group below 14 yrs and who work for themselves or for their family for an income and who contribute a significant share to the labour force of India. Child labour is more a rural phenomenon than an urban phenomenon in India. It is found that acute poverty and other reasons poor families send their children to urban areas for bread and butter. In urban areas, to survive in a cutthroat competition, manufacturers have lowered the real wages for adult workers in order to employ child workers on low wages. The problem is very much vast in its dimension. Children are forced to work in the most hazardous, unhygienic conditions, where they are vulnerable to many severe health problems. Child labour is an international evil. It requires cumulative efforts to wipe it out. Toiling long hours for a pittance, these little breadwinners accept exploitation as a way of life. This article gives a solid platform for debate with few unnoticed issues regarding child labour problem*

**Keywords:** Child labour, labour force, efforts

### INTRODUCTION

The issue of child labour has drawn international attention and condemnation since the 1970s. Criticism has focused on inhumane working conditions, impact on mental, physical and moral health, and lost educational opportunities. Over the last decade ILO has, while not abandoning its long-term goal of the complete elimination of child labour, increasingly emphasized the more immediate need of ending children's involvement in the most hazardous forms of work (Boyden 1997:201). Researchers have cautioned that effective solutions to child labour must situate the problem within the larger context of the economic decision making processes and survival strategies of poor households and have lamented the dearth of micro-level data in such areas.

However Only few studies have examined child labour in India from the perspective of household health maintenance with particular attention to household economic decision-making involving children's work, allocation of food and medical care within households having child laborers, and the perceptions of parents and children concerning the impact of work on children's health. The health and working conditions of children involved in varied types of work will be compared; working children and their siblings will be similarly contrasted along a number of health –related variables. Few study have further attempt to situate attitude towards child labor and health within a context of local cultural norms surrounding children and human rights.

The history of public concern about child labour significantly predates the industrial revolution, with some restrictions prohibiting the employment of children in selective dangerous areas of work having been enacted in Venice as early as 14<sup>th</sup> century. Historians give some evidence for the existence of child labour during medieval period of Indian History in India. However, the process of changing limited concerns regarding child labour in to broad social consensus was a slow one, involving much public debate during which the perception of the child gradually moved from one of a vial wage earner to that of a vulnerable individual to e loved and protected.(Weiner,1991). Protection of child laborers gained momentum with the establishing of ILO in 1919 and has continued strengthen with the adoption of a many international conventions, most important the UNO convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 (Guptha, 1993). When calls for more intensive efforts to abolish child labour increased, the ILO and Other NGO's have increasingly acknowledged that regardless of Many conventions or laws of individual countries at least for the short-term the socio-economic realities of many developing countries, will continue to act as a push factor for the child involvement in the labour force and that economic enforcement of any child labour regulations (Boyden, 1988).

Hence this has led to programmes framed to improve working conditions and minimize the health risks faced by the working children while offering them additional opportunities for non-formal education and recreation (Narayana, 1988). While recent international efforts have focused both on ending exploitation of most vulnerable of children and all children's involvement in the most hazardous forms of work, conventions ending child labour have been criticized as leaving major part of definition of what constitutes hazardous work for children to cultural consensus in individual countries without recognizing that the definition may very by social group (White,1991).

Even as practical consideration have been the central force behind the modified emphasis of international child about remediation efforts, those efforts have also been pushed in new directions by growing social science critique of the philosophies underlying abolition oriented polices and programmes and the innovative approaches of some child welfare NGO's Social science critics contend that an universal conception of child development inform much of the international legislation, ignoring varied cultural meanings of age and developmental stage appropriate work as well as important socializing role of work(Khan,1991).They also asserted that concept of children's work must be geographically, temporally, and ethically deconstructed and historically situated giving attention to place ,era, generation and social class. Mohanty further asserted that given the socio economic realities of most developing countries, even if children were prohibited from working they would be unable to experience the kind of child hood envisioned appropriate in developed countries (Mohanty, 1999).

Number National child welfare NGO's have proposed a child-centered approach to research and interventions that explicitly acknowledge children's agency as a major element of the child labor conundrum. Utilizing innovative participatory and action research methodologies they have attempted to under stand child labour from the perspective of child conditions, and move forward a broad social agenda on issue affecting them (Guptha and Boyden, 1997) Concerned for Working Children (CWC) Bangalore based child worker advocacy NGO has trained working children in *participatory action research* methodology, with the trainees proceeding to gather data in their comminutes concerning child labour that they used to develop a children's policy agenda. Many Indian NGO's have expressed concerns about

additional strengthening of national and international restrictions on child labour. Also many NGO's have challenged the stereotype of child workers as helpless victims and the right of adults to speak for them while affirming their desire and need to be financially contributing members of their families (CWC, 2001).

Despite the recent proliferation of more realistic approach to child labour and the increased inclusion of children voice in the debate the dominant paradigms explaining child labour fail to adequately consider either the complexity of the phenomenon's causes or the health implications of its proposed abolition. Neoclassical economics driven poverty reduction approaches using the house hold as few unit of analysis fail to go beyond a conception of the house hold as a economically rational entity they situate child labour decisions within a more complex web of inter house hold decision making and power relations, socio cultural norms, and political economic factors. So they view the health of child workers as a segregated unit of analysis separates from there households in which they reside.

Although a political economic analysis of child labour provide a more realistic picture of the landscape within which child labour occurs, it fails to adequately examine the complex survival calculus of house hold economic and labour decisions, does not include consideration of house hold allocation of resources, and in general does not give proper attention to the relationship between child labour and family health outcomes. "A medical anthropological conceptual frame work that has been proposed to overcome the limitations of individual level analysis of health outcomes is known as house hold production of health (HHPH). HHPH proposes that household harness its resources in combination with a range of available medical service to produce good health for house hold members. The HHPH frame work realistically situates the choice made within the constraints of a large political economic environment"(Mosely, 1994- Internet Article) In addition to the need to consider gender as an important variable influencing access to health-producing resources within households, research has demonstrated that the relationship between productive ability and resource entitlement also has special implications for the study of child labour.

The information presented above illustrates why child labour may be plausibly viewed as a resource used in household health production as well as potentially one of a number of independent variables influencing inter household resource allocation. However, it is equally vital to look beyond the household level of social organization to identify community norms and practices concerning both work and children. To succeed in the short-term in removing children from the most hazardous forms of work will require culturally and geographically specific data concerning how communities classify particular types of work as being appropriate for different age groups, how they judge the degree of risk associated with each type of work, and how community social and economic resources can be mobilized for remediation campaigns and an examination of community norms influencing child labour practices must additionally consider community perceptions of human rights, specially the rights of children (Khan,1999)

Also social scientist asserted that the implementation of human rights should have more easily operationalizable norms and there should be flexibility of mechanism in implementation. More over the implementing mechanism should be culturally and geographically specific. Anthropologist Wilson say "local interoperation of human rights doctrine draw on personnel biographies, community histories, and on expression of power relations between interest groups their relation ship to formal, legal versions has to be discovered not assumed"(Wilson, 1997).

As a global solution to eliminate child labor, development experts are now proposing a standard based on the sanctity of the nuclear family on the one hand and the school on the other as the only legitimate spaces for growing up. If this becomes a universal standard, there is a danger of negating the worth of often precious mechanisms for survival, and penalizing or even criminalizing the ways the poor bring up their children. This criminalization is made more malevolent as modern economies increasingly display their unwillingness to protect poor children from the adverse effects of neoliberal trade policies'.(Thomas Offit, website article)

### **POLICY SUGGESTION**

Any new proposed research study should examine the health status of children, working in hazardous sectors within the broad context of house hold livelihood strategies. The major objectives of any such research study may be to explore whether working children's contributions to house hold income differentially affect their access to health related resources and to find out and compare how a spectrum of work related dependent and independent variables are determined as impacting health of children working in hazardous industries. Also it must focus to reveal the perception and traditional practice of concerned households within a broader framework of community norms regarding childhood as inseparable part of a life phase, the human rights and rights of children. More over research should also adds to the general knowledge base of how community evaluates the risks associated with the children occupation, enlightenment crucial to promote global effort to immediately remove children from the most hazardous forms of work. Also any research needs to document ways in which universalistic conceptions of children rights can be operationalized within culturally divers setting.

### **Conclusion**

While the study of child labour covers wide range of theoretical and geographic territory, India's standing as the country with the world's largest child workers population has made it the focus of a substantial proportion of the social science literature examining the issue's economic, socio-cultural, and health aspects. Only little work, however, has entailed in-depth consideration of the comparative emic perspective of child workers, the parents of such workers, and members of the communities in which they reside. Any proposed research should contribute to filling that gap in our anthropological understanding of child labour in urban India.

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