

STATISTICS OF CHILD LABOUR IN INDIA DUE TO COVID -19 AND ROLE OF NGO'S TO CURB IT: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

"There is no greater violence than to deny the dreams of our children."

**- Kailash Satyarthi
(Nobel Peace Prize 2014)**

A report by ILO & UNICEF warns that 9 million additional children are at risk of being pushed into child labour by the end of 2022 globally, as a result of the pandemic. India contributes 7.3 percentage of total number of child labour worldwide. In India the risk of more child labour increase in last decades is just because of huge number of vulnerable families, facing economic crisis and closure of schools during pandemic. Thus such triggered families are likely pushing children into poverty and which causes child labour and unsafe migration of such child labour.

The most alarming fact is the number of such children who are still remained unidentified and can be the subject of human trafficking. Our Govt. both central and state level had taken some effective steps to control this but vital role of NGO's can't be denied or ignored as they are working at grass root level.

Keywords: *Child Labour, Pandemic, Unsafe Migration, Vulnerable Alarming.*

Introduction

Everyone is born free by birth as a child but some of social and economical factors of society leads and more correctly we can say decides one's fate to be a child labour. Child labour is actually refers to the employment of children in any work that deprives them of their childhood, hampers their ability to attend regular school and in large aspects which results into their mentally, physically, socially or morally disturbed life for rest of their life span. In families specially in villages which don't have adequate means of earning can be seen to made their children working in fields or elsewhere to contribute to the family income. Such children are obviously having lack opportunities of education and are also prone to health risks.

Child labour is an open form of exploitation and one of the worst kind of exploitations as people indulge in such bad practices deprives children from their basic rights i.e. fundamental rights given by our constitution i.e. right to education under article 21-A and pushes them into hazardous situations which same times can be risky enough for their life and tender mental health. Some of the side - effects of working at a young age can be; risk of contracting occupational diseases like skin disease, diseases of lungs, decay in eyesight, TB etc; vulnerability of sexual exploitation at the work place; deprived of education. The worst part of child labour is that such children grow up unable to avail & explore development opportunities and end up as unskilled workers for the rest of their lives.

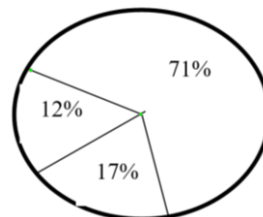
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It has been observed that in India Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra are the main states in India where child labour is present. This is where over half of the country's total child labour population works. In these states it has been observed that in villages especially and in some remote areas representatives of various industries like brick making industry, glass bangle industry, carpet industry etc. lure children with promises of job and wealth and in some adverse cases purchase such children from their parents those are already fighting with hunger and poverty and bring them to the city where they are employed as bonded labour in factories. Some other children are also forced to work as domestic help or as a bonded labour.

Child Labour in India

According to the ILO, there are around 12.9 million Indian children engaged in child labour. They are between the age group of 7 to 17 years old. The children are such employed in child labour or doing unpaid household work, their chances to attend the school on regular basis are less or can attend only intermittently. This all leads into cycle of poverty. The reality is that they start child labour because of poverty and this poverty become their destiny as they never get basic education or any formal training to earn more what they are receiving. It's next to impossible to expect from them any kind of demand for minimum wages or better working conditions even after they attend maturity. A majority of children between 12 to 17 years Indian girls and boys work daily for factories and small scale industries or selling cigarettes on the streets are forced to work upto 16 hours a day to help their families. Some other reports indicate that in India child labour is started at early age of 5 and 14 years group of children who are almost 10.1 million in numbers. Less paid workers are one of reasons which made these tender age group children a child labour or some times bonded labour. The future of these early employed children of age group 5 to 14 years leads to their involvement in hazardous industries job when turn in age group 15 to 17 years old. Measuring the exact scale of child labour in India is next to impossible due to two reasons 1. It is often hidden 2. Under reported. The most alarming data is of almost 18 million children between the ages of 7 to 17 years old who are considered "in active" in India, neither in employment nor in school. These missing girls and boys in India are potentially subject to some of the worst forms of child labour.

• Forms of Child Labour in India



71%	:	Agriculture sector
17%	:	Employed as service staff and domestic helpers
12%	:	Industry sector and mines

The majority of World's Child Labour and their place of employment by ILO

As per a study of ILO which is picturised in above diagram which shows clearly that 12% of world's child labour are involved in hazardous and risky work in mining sector or in industries. Where as large number of child labour is involved in agriculture sector, including cotton plantation and rice fields. Remaining 17% are employed in service staff, domestic workers and others.

The picture of child labour in India is also same, less payment make them first choice as a labour and more working hours can be determined as second reason to promote child labour in industries, child labour in India are working for starvation wages in textile factories, helping with the processing of carpets, or doing back breaking work in brick making factories and quarries. Other child labour are involved in making and selling tobacco products like 'Bidi' or cigarette, on the street for tobacco industry which made them vulnerable to join drugs industry and an endless sector of crime and heinous offences. Children are also used for cheap labour in industries such as steel extraction, gun polishing and carpet manufacturing. A staggering number of girls and victims of child trafficking in India, whether through traditional bondage or through organized crime. In 2014, 76% of all people trafficked in India were women and girls. The number of girl child trafficking is approximate because according to a report by the National Human Rights Commission of India 40,000 children are abducted each year,

leaving 11,000 untraced. One more alarming fact is that only 10% of human trafficking in India is international, while 90% is interstate. Above data is sufficient to clear the vague picture of child labour i.e. girl child labour and it's reality that the commercial sexual exploitation of children is among the worst forms of child labour and in India there are around 1.2 million children involved in prostitution.

- **Causes of Child Labour in India**

India is a developing country and despite the recent economic boom in between 20th century to 21st century before COVID-19, more than a third of all Indians still live below the poverty line. The technical innovations and developments in the IT sector have not created jobs in poverty - stricken areas. Pupil from rural areas with little education often see no alternative but to take their children out of school and put them to work to help feed their families. Thus due to poverty, high illiteracy rates, lack of education and schools, unemployment and overpopulation are some of major factors behind this act of child labour. In some of recent studies the fact is that child labour has relocated from rural areas to urbanized areas where the big cities are located. As larger cities provide more opportunities for work compared to smaller, rural areas. As reported by UNICEF, there has been a 54% increase in child labour in urbanized areas for children between the ages of 5-14 years. In addition, according to a campaign against child labour study, India has approximately 1,26,66,377 child labourers total. Uttar Pradesh has 19,27,997 child labourers. Delhi the capital of India has over 1 million child labourers. Other leading states with similar figure include Bihar, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

According to 2005 Government of India NSSO (National Sample Survey Org.) child labour incidence rates in India is highest among muslim Indians, about 40% higher than Hindu Indians. Child labour was found in other minority religions of India but at lower number. Even in tribal areas they having higher child labour rate at 3.8% of their population. As per the Save The Children's Stolen Childhoods Report 31 million of children are part of India's work force the highest in the world.

Child Labour Cases Increase due to COVID-19

In a recent research activist working on ground level like Bachpan Bachao Andolan or Help Age India says that despite the COVID-19 restriction in places, cases of child trafficking continue to rise unabated which is one of the basic reason of child labour and child bonded labour. As it is very much clear that most of child labour are migrated by some groups working for this. Thus child labour can't be seen as a mere offence or incidence or accidental appointment of any child as a labour to help that child. On the other hand if the cases of child labour were studied it is easy to find that it is a well organised crime at every level of crime. There are some specific areas which can be clearly marked as a source of child labour. If we talk about most of the child labour cases in Rajasthan most of the children are bought here from some parts of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar repeatedly which indicates that poor families and some local persons of that area are willingly supporting repetition of this heinous crime against childhood.

In a case a girl child Pooja (name changed) on June 4 was rescued from her employer's house in Patana. At 10, Pooja had been working as a domestic help for about a year. She was taken by child traffickers in June 2020, when the country was exiting from a nation wide corona virus lock down. Pooja told her rescuers that she was maltreated by her employers, who used to beat her thrice a day as a matter of routine on one pretext or the other. She had bruises on her body when she was rescued on June 4, the NGO said (India today). As a matter of fact according to Patana's centre DIRECT, 362 children were rescued in 2020 and another 136 have been rescued so far in 2021 - all working in factories of Jaipur. The average age of these children was 10 years. This fact indicates that the second wave of COVID-19 pandemic that swept the country in April-May brought not only a health crisis but an economic misery to scores of people. One more fact is clear that the basis of child labour is like that of any product which is ready to sale in market at good cost. As there is a demand only than there is a supply. This fact is very much clear that cases of trafficking in country are more internal and less international. The actual data of child trafficking is higher than what we have as the reason behind unidentified children. However, in year 2019 after all COVID-19 guide lines were enforced still there were around 2200 cases of trafficking were as per National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) and most alarming is that around 95% of cases were of internal trafficking. There are some other sources which are sufficient to prove that there is a demand for children in the labour and commercial sex market and hence, there is a supply.

Save the children a global child rights charity that works in most of the states in India where the problem of child labour is deep rooted has also affirmly mentioned that the cases of child labour increased during this COVID-19 pandemic, as labour migrate to their home towns from metro or urban cities and in second phase of COVID-19 a huge number of child labourers were trafficked from remote areas of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

Thus increasing number in cases of human trafficking and child labour rescued by NGO's and Activists clearly shows that this COVID-19 pandemic had an adverse effect on the efforts of Govt. machinery and NGO's who were working together to curb child labour and a big hike in number of child labourers was recorded after two decades which is totally alarming. In a worldwide down fall in economy and business it is most likely that number of such child labourers will increase in upcoming years. Although govt along with NGO's and activists is trying to rescue such child labourers and have a scheme for their rehabilitation but still demand and supply factor is working behind this crime against childhood.

Role of NGO's to Curb Child Labour

COVID-19 had large and deep impact on our social as well as economic set up. Health is the primary area which was affected but over all impact on society is more heart breaking then what it seems from surface. More than 30000 children have been orphaned, lost a parent or abandoned due to COVID-19 as per a report by National Commission for protection of child rights. The surge is resulting in dire consequences and reducing access to basic health, education and social protection. Such abandoned children are at greater risk of abuse and trafficking. Govt. made policies, Human Right Commission and other department are working to control internal trafficking cases after COVID-19. In case of child labour and child bonded labour our Non-Government Organizations are playing important role. Reason behind is our Govt. machinery has it's limits in many aspects but these NGO's has more effective work style and strong network as they are working at root level along with this they are focused and dedicated to such social problems and have more chances to understand the problem and their possible solutions. Whereas our Government had power but some ethical limitations which sometimes became hurdle while dealing such sensitive and time taking matters. This can be clear when we study objects and work done by some of these NGO's.

- **Save the Children**

India's leading independent child rights NGO, save the children works across 19 states and has changed the lives of over 10 million Indian children. It is determined to provide quality education and health care, protection from abuse and risk of life and also providing lifesaving aid during emergencies to children. The NGO also marks to improve the situation of children in more than 80 countries.

- **Salaam Baalak Trust**

After being established in 1989, the salaam baalak trust has helped thousands of children came off the streets and into a safe and nurturing environment. Their object is the holistic development of the children to become responsible, contributing members of society. The trust began its work with an aim to give street children choices and a chance to experience the joys of childhood.

- **World Vision India**

This NGO is dedicated to providing an environment where all children are educated, healthy, protected and valued. It is the largest grass rooted child- focused organisation with more than 2000 dedicated staff working in over 6,252 communities and touching the lives of a little over 26,00,000 children and their families.

- **SOS Children's Village**

Working towards the holistic development of children from vulnerable families, orphan children and women it's committed to provide a name like environment and long-term support to every child up to the age of 24. They have reached out to over 25000 children across 22 states and 32 locations in India.

- **Delhi Council for Child Welfare**

Established in 1952, DCCW originally started to care for children who were displaced, lost or abandoned in the riots surrounding the partition of India. Over the decades, their programmes have diversified and now these days their services reach about 2500 children daily and providing virtually free of cost.

Conclusion

As far as effects of COVID-19 are concerned we have discussed one of the deepest impact on our social structure as a Nation. Although this is true that the economy of over country has adversely affected due to this pandemic and socio-economic in balance leads and somewhere is responsible for child labour cases in India. Union and state government has done a lot regarding this still there are more areas which has to be covered. NGO's and civil society organizations also have a huge role to play here. Now our level of efforts should be such that we can even reach to the last child of our society who is

facing this unhuman behaviour just to get minimum of his basic requirement as a living being. Only poverty can't be blamed as a sole reason behind this we have to pledge not to justify this cruelty because of poverty. The day we change our fixed mind set we will certainly get positive result as we can clearly see the level of efforts made by Govt. or Non-Govt. machineries are never the less. There is some lack of responsibility and in our thought process. Although we noticed a huge increase in number of child labour after two decades it can be taken as the worst condition but it could be the best chance to curb this social evil from roots. If we put the efforts together at every level at right time there is no reason that we can't help the future of our nation from the web of child labour.

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