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AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF THE AGE, SEX, EDUCATION, WORK, STATUS, PAST EXPERIENCE, AND HOUSING ACCOMMODATION OF THE CHILD WORKERS IN AGRA.

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ABSTRACT:

Child Labour is a pan-India social evil which has shocked the conscience of the people across the globe. India of our vision would not be a reality if her children are not properly nurtured and educated. Their exploitation and abuse by profit makers for their personal gain need to be checked. Because of utter poverty, lack of educational opportunities and precarious socio-economic circumstances, parents are forced to send their kids for wage work. Parents miserably fail to arrange educational avenues, health care and even bare necessities of life. When children should have been at school, they are forced to search for work instead. This exploratory survey research deals with the working children and their use in the unorganized sector of Agra and as a source of income generation to their families. 500 working children were selected for this study. Observation Schedule and Interview Guide were used to collect information and data from the respondent children working in Agra district of U.P. state of India.

KEYWORD:

Child Worker; Education; Work Status; Past Experience; Housing Accommodation.

INTRODUCTION:

Child labour is an all India evil, though its acuteness differs from area to area. The child labour is not a recent phenomenon and that too not confined to any particular state. It has existed in one form or the other in almost all the countries of the world which has shocked the conscience of the people. Our constitution-makers, wise and sagacious as they were, had known that India of their vision would not be a reality if the children of the country are not properly nurtured and educated. For this, their exploitation by different profit-makers for their personal gain had to be indicted. It is this need, which has found manifestation in several provisions of the constitution and social legislations. This is a harsh reality that parents miserably fail to arrange educational avenues, health care and even bare necessities of life because of utter poverty, lack of education and bad socio-economic conditions.

Under the above compelling circumstances, when the children should have been at schools, are forced to live on streets and search for work in order to survive and thus really forced to work in factories, shops, hotels or anywhere they get job, and parents painfully allow them to work even in industries involving hazardous processes. In this way, these children form the category of child labour. This survey research deals with exploration of the working children and their use in unorganized sector of Agra and as a source of income to their families and households. It examines the main characteristics of working children such as age, sex, educational level, work status, and housing accommodation.

Ayalew (1982) found that working children are less sick than others because employers favour the

healthy ones. However, many children often only work for a relatively short time before being unemployed, often for health reasons. There is evidence that children especially in times of life such as puberty, are susceptible to illness.

National Sample Survey Organisation (1988) on employment and unemployment found that child workers belong to the age group of 5-14 years only. It further analysed that child work is the participation in any economically productive activity. Such participation may be physical or mental in nature.

Gangrade et.al. (1989) observed that it is not a present day feature only that children are taking part in economic activities. To a greater or lesser extent, children in every type of human society have always taken part in economic activities. But the problem of child labour is recent one. Actually, when the business of wage earning and participation at work or family support conflict directly or indirectly with the business of growth and education of the children, the result is the child labour.

Sharma (1990) commented that those children who work outside the home, spend the greater part of the day away from their homes and often come back late in the night. It interrupts the process of socialization, contributing to the disorganization of normal family life.

Vlasoff (1991) concluded that the sensitivity to children's maintenance costs was more than perception of their utility. For this reason, he cast doubt upon the supposed connection between the utility of children and large family size.

Goswami (1994) viewed the main thrust of the ILO conventions on minimum age for employment of children, medical examination of children and prohibition of night work for children.

METHODOLOGY

This is a survey study based upon the data collected from 500 working children selected through stratified random sampling technique. The strata of population included the children working in different trades and occupations such as hotels/restaurants/dhabas/tea stalls; cycle/bike and motor repairing shops; shoe industry; carpet industry; petha manufacturing units; and marble industry. The researcher collected primary data through Observation Schedule and Interview Guide from 500 working children of unorganised sector of Agra district of U.P. state of India.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

All the working children in our sample under study were under 14 years of age. Among the working children in the sample, the female children constituted 19 percent. Age-wise, classification of working children indicated that bulk of the child workers (68 percent) were in the age-group of 11-14 years (Table 1) while the proportion of working children was 28.4 percent in the age-group of 7-11 years. It is more surprising that the children even at the age of 4-7 years were found working in these units. However, the percentage of working children in the age-group of 4 to 7 years was 3.6 percent of the total sample.

TABLE No. 1 Age And Sex – Wise Distribution Of Child Labour In The Sample

AGE GROUP	NO. OF WORKING CHILDREN		
	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
4-7	14	4	18 (3.60)
7-11	91	51	142 (28.40)
11-14	300	40	340 (68.00)
Total	4 05 (81.00)	95 (19.00)	500 (100.00)

Note : Figures in brackets represent percentages.

Most of the children (57.80- per cent) both male and female took up the present job between 7-11 years of age. The emerging pattern from Table 2 reflects that before completing the age of seven the children were considered too young to work and after the age of 11 years thought to be suitable for starting learning the skill of the present trade. The proportion of the working children of that age group in the sample constituted 7.6 percent who started working in the present job before completing 7 years of age (Table 2). More than one-third of the working children entered in the present job between the age group of 11 to 14

years.

Data pertaining to the educational status of working children in the sample reveals that as much as 45.5 percent of the working children were illiterate. This fact highlights that the benefits of educational development programmes could not percolate to the grass-root levels of our society whether it is rural or urban. Sex-wise educational level of working children shows that 55.30 percent among males and 51.57 percent among females are counted as literate (Table 3). The discriminatory attitude of society towards the education of females is reflected from the figures in Table 3. The proportion of working children whose education is primary and below is recorded, by and large, equal among the males and females. However, the percentage of working children who have education of more than primary and up to the secondary level is 7.91 percent among the male working children as compared to 2.11 percent among the female working children.

TABLE No. 2: Distribution Of Working Children According To Age Of Entry Into The Present Job

AGE OF ENTRY (YRS)	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
<7	30	9	39
			(7.80)
7-11	215	74	289
			(57.80)
11-14	161	11	172
			(34.40)
All Group	405	95	500
			(100.0)

TABLE No. 3: Educational Status Of Working Children According To Age And Sex

AGE & SEX	ILL-ITERATE	PRIMARY AND BELOW	UPTO SECONDARY	BELOW SECONDARY	TOTAL
Up to 6 years					
Male	9	5	-	-	14
Female	3	1	-	-	4
7-11 Years					
Male	45	45	1	-	91
Female	23	28	'	-	51
Total	68	73	1	-	142
11 -14 Years					
Male	127	146	27	-	300
Female	20	18	2	-	40
Total	147	164	29	-	340
All Group					
Male	181	196	28	-	405
Female	46	47	2	-	95
Total	227	243	30	-	500

When we analyze the schooling status of the working children, we find that there were 54.60 percent illiterate children as against 45.40 percent of the children who never attended any school. Out of the total literate working children, only 36.63 percent were still attending schools. In the total number of working children 20 percent are still getting education. The drop-outs constituted 63.34 percent among the literate children and 34.60 percent in the total number of working children (Table 4). It reveals that due to various reasons a significant proportion of enrolled children discontinued the schooling.

TABLE No. 4: Schooling Status Of The Working Children

SCHOOLING STATUS	CHILD WORKERS	
	Number	Percentage
Still attending school	100	20.00
Never Attended school	227	45.40
Attended but Dropped out	173	34.60

Data were also collected regarding whether the working children had also worked before joining the present job (at the time of interview). The information reveals that only 13.40 percent of the total working children in the sample have past work experience. However, among the female working children no one had previous work experience. Though among the male working children 16.54 percent had past experience. The age-wise classification of working children, those in the age-group of 4-7 years do not have any past work experience. In the age-group of 11-14, about 18.53 percent had past work experience. Among the female working children (who constituted 19 percent in the total sample) none worked earlier and had no past experience.

TABLE No. 5: Details Of The Past Work Of The Working Child

AGE GROUP (YEARS)	WORKED			NOT WORKED			TOTAL		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
4-7	-	-	-	14	4	18	14	4	18
7-11	4	-	4	87	51	138	91	51	142
11-14	63	-	63	237	40	277	300	40	340
All Groups	67	-	67	338	95	433	405	95	500

A small percentage (13.4 percent) working children had worked prior to joining their present job and all of them were males. When the data about the duration of employment in the past job were analyzed, it was found that among the child workers who have worked earlier, 63 working children (94 percent) were in the age-group of 11-14 years. As much as 40.30 percent worked up to 6 months, 28.3 percent between 12-24 months, 19.40 percent worked for more than 24 months and 11.94 percent for 12 months. The working children, who were less than 7 years old, did not work in the past. Among the total working children, those having past experience constituted about 6 percent in the age-group of 7-11 years.

Information about the reasons for leaving the past job was also collected from the working children. Among the reasons closure of the industry was the major factor for leaving the past job as reported by 28.36 percent of the working children who had worked earlier (Table 6). As there was no job security in the past job, hence 16.42 percent left the job. Due to lower wage rate in the earlier job, 16.42 percent were forced to leave the past job, (Table 6). Similarly, 17.91 percent of the working children were thrown out of job, as a result they joined the present establishments. There have been other reasons such as, heavy work load, irregular wage payment and distant location of work place which forced about 18 percent of the working children to look for other openings and they left their earlier jobs (Table 6).

TABLE No. 6: Reasons For Leaving The Previous Job

REASONS FOR LEAVING THE PREVIOUS JOB	WORKING CHILDREN	
	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Insecurity	11	17.42
Closure of Industry	19	28.36
Low Wages	11	14.2
Heavy work load	4	5.97
Irregular wage payment	6	8.96
Distant Location of work place	2	2.98
Thrown out of job	12	17.91
Started Attending School	2	2.98
Total	67	100.00

When we look at the work status of the working children in the sample, we find that of the total 500 child workers interviewed, all were paid wages, but just 22.60 percent were receiving training while on the job.

TABLE No.7: Status Of Child Workers In The Job

Total number of child workers in the sample	500
Number of child workers under training	113
Percentage of workers under training	22.60
Number of child workers who are paid	500
Percentage of child workers paid	100

Most of the (98.00 percent) children live in the secure environment of their own houses with their parents. Relatives housed 1.60 percent of the sample working children. Just 2 unfortunate ones were found living on their own.

TABLE No. 8: Housing Accommodation Facilities For The Working Children

RESIDENTIAL STATUS OF THE WORKING CHILDREN	WORKING CHILD	
	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Living with parents	90	98.00
Living with relatives	8	1.60
Living in shelter/children's home	-	-
Living at the work place	-	-
Living alone	2	0.40
Total	500	100.00

CONCLUSIONS

- 1.The analysis of age-sex distribution of the working children shows that 81 percent of them are males and most of them (96.40 percent) belong to the age group of 7 years and above.
- 2.More than 92 percent of the working children entered the present job in the age-group of 7 years and above. But the entry of about 8 percent of them into the job at less than 7 years of age is also noteworthy.
- 3.The number of illiterate children is 45.20 percent whereas those studying up to primary education constituted 94 percent of the total 500 working children.
- 4.Many of the working children (i.e. 45.40 percent) could never attend the school and about 35 percent of them dropped out due to their compelling economic circumstances. However, 20 percent of the working children were still attending the school while being in the job.
- 5.A little more than 13 percent of the working children had been working in the past before joining the present job. They had to leave their past job due to a number of reasons such as insecurity, closure of industrial unit, low wages, heavy work load, irregular wage payment, distant location of work place, removal from job, and the child workers started attending school.
- 6.Most of the children, (98 percent) live in the secure environment of their own houses with their parents. Relatives housed 1.6 percent of the sampled working children. Just 2 unfortunate ones were found living on their own.

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