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Research Papers



A SOCIO-ECONOMIC STUDY OF THE INDEBTEDNESS, CONSUMPTION, INCOME, EDUCATION AND SIZE OF THE FAMILIES SUPPLYING CHILD LABOUR.

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Abstract

Child labour is mentally, physically, socially and morally harmful, hazardous and exploitative as it deprives the working children of their childhood and education. The prime reasons for child labour in India are poverty and poor schooling opportunities for children. The Industrial Revolution has brought with it the increased rate of employment as well as exploitation of child labour. This is a survey study carried out with the objectives of understanding the socio-economic dimensions of the families and households that supply child labour to the unorganised sector of Agra district of U.P. India. It studies the indebtedness, consumption, education, size of the families that supply child labour and also the reasons for child labour. 500 households and families of child workers were selected through stratified random sampling technique. Data were collected from respondents through Observation Schedule and Interview Guide.

Key Words: Child Labour; Indebtedness; Consumption; Income; Education; Family Size.

INTRODUCTION

*Papa, papa I want to go to school,
Papa said shut up your mouth you little fool,
Now go to work with your lunch and tool,
Before the sun melts the dawns cool.*

These words of an anonymous poet bring out the silent screams of the working children as the Child Labour deprives them of their childhood and education. It is mentally, physically, socially and morally harmful, hazardous and exploitative. High incidence of crippling poverty and poor schooling opportunities are the root causes of child labour in India. Child labour was intrinsic in

pre-industrial societies also, as the children as young as 10 actively participated in activities like child rearing, hunting, food gathering and farming because it was needed for their survival and that of their family and social group. With the advent of industrial revolution, there was a rapid increase in the employment as well as exploitation of child labour. The present survey study focuses upon the socio-economic dimension of the indebtedness, consumption, income, education and size of the families that supply child labour to market.

Jung, (1978) in his study revealed that the work children do does not meet hygienic standards. There are often no running water or toilet facilities. Many of these situations carry very considerable health risks of silicosis, asbestosis, infections transmitted from rats and mice; and

adverse psycho-social effects.

Jain (1971) pointed out that the I.L.O conventions have provisions for India which lay down the stringent requirements. India fulfils these requirements in respect to employment in industry, but not completely in respect to employment in non-industrial occupations. Long hours of work may result in excessive fatigue which stunts growth and leads not only to malnutrition and anemia but also to associated diseases and changes in the endocrine and nervous systems.

Bouhdiba (1981) in his study of child labour, revealed that the range of activities in which children are involved is enormous and the occupational hazards and risks in what are often completely unregulated activities with minimal inspections are grave. These children sometimes as young as 3 are often maltreated and often in poor health.

Verma (1979) stressed the need for societal efforts to curb the menace of child labour. He talks of creating awareness in the society and sensitizing it about the problems faced by child workers. It is only with the combined and integrated efforts of the society, state and family, a solution to this problem can be reached.

Morice (1980) pointed out that home visits by social workers to motivate parents to send their children to school, remind a mother that registrations have started in the school, try and help a child get adequate medical help if sick, if he has been absent and help provide financial assistance, are some of the roles which a social worker can perform.

Singh et.al. (1987) in a study on 'Child Labour in Agriculture' observed that the guardians of child labourers are generally below the poverty line and poor economic condition was forwarded as a reason by the guardians for putting them into work.

Institute of Industrial Relations (1988) concluded that child labour is closely associated with the problem of unemployment; and low wages force people to send their children to work to get help in the families' struggle for survival. Incidence of child labour among families in which the father/guardian has regular employment is much lower than among those in which male

adult is either in sporadic employment or is unemployed.

Salazar (1988) noticed that about half of the households surveyed contained at least one employed adult. Very few adult workers had stable wage employment. This irregular employment and low wages among the household heads was reflected in the incidence of child labour.

Mendeliveich (1989) noted that in earlier times, children used to work within their family circle. Little by little, through almost unconscious observation, association and initiation, children learnt the work of guilds and family occupations. During the process of socialisation of children, training formed a part and children grew physically and intellectually without facing hazardous difficult tasks and ill-treatment and were simultaneously prepared for adult life. The question of exploitation was not there because the work place was the extension of home and work relationships were informal.

Singh (1990) concluded that children who are forced to work since their childhood are literally deprived of any emotional recognition and play. Many a times they are engaged in such works which are monotonous, strenuous, harmful and unduly prolonged. Working children are susceptible to certain deformations and diseases.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

- 1.To comprehend the supply aspect of child labour i.e. households or families which supply child labour to labour market of the unorganized sector of Agra.
- 2.To study the socio-economic background of the sample households supplying child labour.
- 3.To study the indebtedness and educational status of the heads of the families of working children.
- 4.To investigate the consumption pattern, jobs of child workers and family size of the households supplying child labour.
- 5.To understand reasons due to which the sample households supply their children for paid work in the labour market.

METHODOLOGY

For achieving the objectives of this survey,

500 households or families of the child labourers were selected through stratified random sampling technique. These sample strata included various trades and occupations such as hotels/restaurants/dhaba/tea stalls; cycle/bike and motor repairing shops; shoe industry; carpet industry; petha manufacturing units; and marble industry of Agra District of U.P. state of India. Interview Guide and Observation Schedule were used as tools for data collection.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Regarding indebtedness among the sample households, Table 1 indicates that 26.8 percent of the sample households are indebted. The amount of loan per indebted households is Rs.6972. Out of 134 indebted households, 47.01 percent people borrowed from the landlords. Of the total credit, the share of landlords is 45.44 percent. The next largest source of credit is the banks/credit societies which cater to 31.32 percent of the total indebted households. Traders and employers are not the popular options for obtaining credit. A little more than 14 per cent of the sample households borrowed from friends and relatives whose share into total credit is 20 percent.

Thus, the landlord, money lender, trader and friends and relatives are the major sources of credit for the households. About 64 percent of the 134 households are indebted to them and the total share stands to be 68 percent of the total amount of loans taken from all sources by all 134 households.

TABLE No. 1: Level Of Indebtedness And Source-Wise Distribution Of Loans Among Sample Households

| SOURCE OF LOAN | INDEBTED HOUSEHOLD AMOUNT OF LOAN (Rs) | | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------------|------------|--------|---------------|
| | NO. | PERCENTAGE | TOTAL | PER HOUSEHOLD |
| Employer | 4 | 2.99 | 5000 | 1250 |
| Landlord (Land owner) | 63 | 47.01 | 424600 | 6740 |
| Money lender | 2 | 1.49 | 23500 | 11750 |
| Traders | 1 | 0.75 | 1000 | 1000 |
| Bank/Credit Society | 45 | 33.58 | 293100 | 6 513 |
| Friends & Relatives | 19 | 14 .18 | 187100 | 9847 |
| Others | - | - | - | - |
| Total | 134 | 100.00 | 934300 | 6972 |

The classification of indebted households according to size of loan indicates that among the 134 indebted households 82 have taken loans exceeding Rs.5000 each. Next to follow is the

group of 49 households which took loans ranging between Rs.1000 - 4999 each. Only 2.24 percent of the indebted households borrowed less than Rs.1000. The percentage of households which took credit is just 26.80 percent of the total sample (Table 2).

Table No. 2: Classification Of Households According To Size Of Loan

| Amount of Loan Rs. | No. of households which have taken loan | % Distribution of Households according to size of loan |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Less than 1000 | 3 | 2.24 |
| 1000-4999 | 49 | 36.57 |
| 5000 and above | 82 | 61.19 |
| TOTAL | 134 | 100.00% |

Main items of food were listed in the consumption pattern of sample households. In the consumption of cereals, wheat forms the main item of the diet of sample households (Table 3). The average monthly consumption of wheat has been 72.31 Kg per household i.e., 12.54 kg per capita. Intake of dal, rice and other cereals is found to be comparatively lower in quantity. The utilization of edible oil is recorded at about 3 Kg per month per household.

TABLE No. 3: Consumption Pattern In The Sample Households

| ITEM OF CONSUMPTION | MONTHLY CONSUMPTION (KG) | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------|---------------|------------|
| | TOTAL | PER HOUSEHOLD | PER CAPITA |
| Rice | 2091.5 | 4.18 | 0.75 |
| Wheat | 36153.0 | 72.31 | 12.54 |
| Other cereals | 1877.0 | 3.75 | 0.65 |
| Pulses | 2426.00 | 4 .93 | 0.86 |
| Oil | 1407.5 | 2.82 | 0.49 |

When we examine the composition of child population and child labour in the sample households we find that more than half of the household population is composed of children. Male children outnumber females being 54.07 percent and 47.21 percent of the total child population respectively (Table 4).

As already mentioned the supply of child labour perpetuated from one generation to the next, Each and every family in the poor section of society has engaged its children as child labour. In the total sample of 500 households, the number of working children is found to be 639, registering 1.28 child labour in each household. In other words, 43.20 percent of the child population (below 14 years) is working in one section of the economy or other. Among the male children below 14 years, the ratio of child labour is worked out to be 53.45 percent. However, the

corresponding figure for female children is 25.95 percent (Table 4).

TABLE No. 4: Composition Of Child Population And Child Labour In The Sample Households

| DESCRIPTION | COMPOSITION OF CHILD POPULATION AND CHILD LABOUR | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------|-------|
| | Male | Female | Total |
| Total Child Population in the 500 sample households (below 14 years) | 928 | 551 | 1479 |
| Percentage of child population in the total household population | 54.07 | 47.21 | 51.30 |
| No. of child workers in the 500 sample households | 496 | 143 | 639 |
| Percentage of child workers in the total child population | 53.45 | 25.95 | 43.20 |

Why the households or families supply their children for work in the labour market is the most significant question: relevant data were collected from the sample households in order to comprehend the reasons for the same. Different reasons are reported by the households for engaging their children in child labour. Most of the households are found not to be in a position to meet the basic requirements of their subsistence. The only alternative with such households is to send their children to earn. Need for supplementary income has been the main cause for involving 89.33 percent of the working children in income generating activities (Table 5). Acquisition of skill in young age for better prospects in future motivated 5.01 percent to work as working children. Further, it is ironical that some of the households in the sample do not have other adult earning members in their families. Among the working children, 1.09 percent reported that they have no other adult earning member in their families and they are compelled to earn money for their livelihood. Other problems such as handicapped parents and alcoholism among parents have forced some of the children to seek wage employment.

Table No. 5 Reasons For Working As Child Labour

| Reasons for working as Child Labour | Number of Working Children | Percentage of Working Children |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. No other earning member | 7 | 1.09 |
| 2. Need for Supplementary income | 574 | 89.83 |
| 3. Father/Mother alcoholic | 4 | 0.63 |
| 4. Parents handicapped | 7 | 1.09 |
| 5. Acquisition of skill | 32 | 5.01 |
| 6. Other | 15 | 2.35 |
| Total | 639 | 100.00 |

There were 1.28 working children (below 14 years) per household in the study area. A little more than 48 percent of the total working children never attended school. Those currently

attending school are 30.98 percent. Out of 639 working children in the sample households 20.81 percent discontinued their studies in the early stages.

The working children in the sample households are found engaged in different types of activities. For the purpose of analysis, the activities are broadly classified in two categories; skilled and unskilled. Village and small scale industries employ 487 children (7.82 percent of the total working children in skilled work (Table 6). Out of these 79.20 percent are recorded males and 20.60 percent females. So far as the employment of children in unskilled work is concerned 75 percent of 152 children are males and the rest are females. An overall picture shows that male children are employed proportionately more in skilled work than the female children. The corresponding figure among the female working children is recorded at 72.66 percent. Less than one-fourth (23.79 percent) of the working children in the households are found earning income from unskilled work. None of the working children are employed in unpaid work.

Poverty seems to be the major factor for children to seek employment in the study area. Due to poverty the children could not get education and were compelled to earn money. As it has been already mentioned that among the working children below 14 years of age, 20.81 percent dropped out of school at an early stage. Out of the working children those who discontinued schooling due to poverty are recorded at 73.68 percent. About 4.52 percent of the drop-outs are compelled by their parents to earn money. Due to death of the parents 3.76 percent children had no alternative but to discontinue studies and struggle with the fulfillment of responsibilities of households.

However, a few of the working children who dropped out, were not interested in studies as reported in 18.04 percent cases. Overall, in more than 80 percent of the cases, poverty was mainly responsible for forcing the children to work in order to earn wages.

TABLE No. 6: Activities In Which All The Working Children Of The Sample Households Are Engaged

| TYPE OF WORK | NO. OF WORKING CHILDREN | | | PERCENTAGE OF WORKING CHILDREN | | |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|--------|-------|--------------------------------|---------|----------|
| | Male | Female | Total | Male | Female | Total |
| On paid households Work | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Skill training outside the family | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Work for wages in villages and small scale industry | 386 | 101 | 487 | 79.20 | 72.66 | 76.21 |
| | | | | (79.20) | (20.80) | (100.0) |
| Work for wages in unskilled Work | 114 | 38 | 152 | 22.86 | 27.34 | 23.79 |
| | | | | (75.00) | (25.00) | (100.00) |
| Total | 500 | 139 | 639 | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

Data pertaining to household income and proportion of working children in the total number of children reveals that lower the household income, higher was the percentage of child workers in the total number of children. Of the total number of children below 14 years, 43.20 percent were recorded as working children (Table 7). The percentage of child workers in total number of children was found at 56.00 percent in the households which have monthly income of less than Rs.500. This percentage falls to 42.62 when the income increases to between Rs. 1001 - 2000. There was no child labour in the households which have monthly income more than Rs5000 (Table 7). The reason behind this could be that the higher income group households were economically able to meet their basic needs and are not in need of earnings from their children. The analysis of data regarding household income and child workers highlights that poverty is the main cause of child labour in the study area.

It is evident by the fact that in the population of children, the proportion of child workers is recorded at 44.64 percent in the sample households headed by illiterate persons, whereas this figure is 42.25 percent in the households in the case of heads educated beyond secondary level and 38.78 percent in the case of heads having schooling level up to primary level (Table 8). Illiteracy has deep roots among the heads of households and working children. In the sample of the total, about 64 percent heads and 65 percent of the working children are found illiterate.

TABLE No. 7: Level Of Family Income And Working Children

| MONTHLY INCOME OF HOUSEHOLD | NO. OF HOUSE HOLD | NO. OF CHILDREN BELOW 14 YRS | NO. OF WORKING CHILDREN BELOW 14 YEARS | PERCENTAGE OF CHILD WORKERS IN THE TOTAL NO. OF CHILDREN BELOW 14 yrs |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Less than 500 | 11 | 25 | 14 | 56.00 |
| 501-1000 | 194 | 567 | 253 | 44.62 |
| 1001 -2000 | 231 | 696 | 299 | 42.62 |
| 2001 -3000 | 46 | 147 | 57 | 38.77 |
| 3001 -5000 | 12 | 43 | 16 | 37.21 |
| Above 5000 | 2 | 1 | - | - |
| Total | 500 | 1479 | 639 | 43.20 |

TABLE No. 8: Educational Level Of Head Of Household And Working Children

| EDUCATIONAL LEVEL OF HEAD OF THE HOUSEHOLD | NO. OF HEADS | NO. OF CHILDREN BELOW 14 YRS | NO. OF WORKING CHILDREN BELOW 14 YRS | PERCENTAGE OF CHILD LABOURERS IN TOTAL NO. OF CHILDREN |
|--------------------------------------------|--------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| Illiterate | 319 | 932 | 412 | 44.64 |
| Primary level and below | 98 | 312 | 121 | 38.78 |
| More than Primary and upto Secondary | 59 | 173 | 76 | 43.93 |
| Beyond Secondary | 24 | 71 | 30 | 42.25 |
| Total | 500 | 1479 | 639 | 43.20 |

We also tried to examine the data on working children according to different size-groups of families in the sample households to find out whether the family size is also one of the factors responsible for child labour. The analysis of data regarding the family size and rate of working children indicates an inverse relationship between the family size and the work participation rate among the children. Of the total number of children belonging to families which have less than three members, 94.00 percent children are found working. The corresponding figure has come down to 48.52 percent in family size-group of 3-6 members. As the number of members in the family increases, this proportion starts to fall. The proportion of working children is 30 percent in the total number of children in those sample households having family size of 9 to 12 members (Table 9). This trend is against the trends projected by other studies. It seems that it is because of the changed attitudes of the parents about the employment of the young children in the family.

The analysis reveals that as the members in the family increase, fewer numbers of households send their children to work as compared to households of large family size. In the households of smaller family size, factors like, small proportion of adult members in the family composition, absence of adult earning members, due to death, old age, sickness, and alcoholism

and insufficient earnings of the adults are the main reasons for the higher percentage of working children in the total number of children.

TABLE No. 9: Family Size And Working Children

| FAMILY SIZE GROUP | NO. OF HOUSE HOLDS | NO. OF CHILDREN BELOW 14 YRS | NO. OF WORKING CHILDREN BELOW 14 YRS | PERCENTAGE OF WORKING CHILDREN IN TOTAL NO. OF CHILDREN BELOW 14 YRS |
|-------------------|--------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Up to 3 | 44 | 50 | 47 | 94.00 |
| 3-6 | 302 | 779 | 378 | 48.52 |
| 6-9 | 138 | 573 | 190 | 33.16 |
| 9-12 | 15 | 70 | 21 | 30.00 |
| 12-15 | 1 | 7 | 3 | 42.86 |
| Total | 500 | 1479 | 639 | 43.20 |

CONCLUSIONS

1. About 27 percent of the sample households of working children are indebted and majority of them are found to have taken loans from the landlord, friends and relatives.

2. The household income level shows that the sample households are not economically sound but weak and poor. The monthly consumption pattern of the households also supports this fact.

3. Most of the households supply child labour in the labour market because of poverty. About 90 percent of the child labour is reported to have been employed due to poverty. The other causes for the supply of child labour are the absence of any other earning member in the family; the alcoholic habit of father etc. All other causes are also related to the poor and weak socio-economic background of the sample households.

4. There are 639 child workers who constitute about 39 percent of the total number of workers and 43.20 percent of the total child population of 1479 belonging to the sample households. Most of the child workers are found to be skilled work and only about 24 percent of 639 child workers are engaged in unskilled work.

5. A little more than 67 percent of the total population of the sample households is illiterate and about 20 percent are educated up to primary level. About 64 percent of the heads of the sample households are illiterate and 20 percent of them are just literate.

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