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AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF WAGES AND WORKING HOURS OF THE CHILD LABOURERS IN AGRA.

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ABSTRACT:

Child labour has many repercussions for the children, for their families and for the society as a whole. The harmful effects of child labour can be seen in inadequate physical development, various illnesses and deformities, damage to their central nervous system, impoverishment of their mental faculties and indulgence in immoral acts. Family of the working child suffers the economic loss in the long run and loses social bonds and ties within family which may ultimately lead to family disorganisation. This survey focuses upon some specific dimensions of child labour like wages and hours of work of the child labourers in Agra district of the U.P. state of India. Total 500 child workers were chosen as respondents and Interview Guide and Observation Schedule were used to collect responses and primary data.

KEYWORD:

Child Labour; Wage; Hours of Work; Relationship.

INTRODUCTION:

Children are forced by circumstances to render labour for wages in the tender age when they should have been at schools and playgrounds. The mere fact that it is not the work but labour that children are coerced to do has manifold repercussions for them, for their families and for the society as a whole. For child labourers, harmful effects of child labour can be seen in the form of their improper physical development, varied kind of illnesses and physical deformities, damage to the central nervous system, impoverishment of the entire mental world, lack of capacity to adjust with other persons in society, inability to express views, indulgence in various social vices.

Involvement of children in the wage work in early age deprives them of opportunities for acquiring various abilities and skills through education and training which are necessary for getting important positions in the contemporary competitive society and thus they become unable to contribute their might to their families which they would otherwise have done. Participation of children in work outside the family dissociated them from their family members and creates a physical distance between them and thereby reduces the degree of intimacy, love and affection towards the family. The incidence of earning money from childhood generates a feeling of independence among children due to which they like to behave freely and promiscuously and do not like to be subjected to control and discipline by other family members and are seen in many cases, even before marriage indulging in sexual acts. Thus the family not only suffers the economic loss in the long run but also becomes subjected to lose social bonds and ties within the family, and at times, even family disorganisation occurs. This survey study empirically investigates into dimensions of wage and working hours of child workers in Agra, U.P., India.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Khandekar and Naik (1972) observed that since the early years are meant to equip oneself with knowledge, techniques and skills for one's different adult roles in the society, having to take up a job at a young age to earn a living, is bound to affect the very process of growing up.

Chakraborty (1991) found that wage rate of child labourers was nearly 69.43 percent and 64.48 percent of adult male wage rate in 1984-85 and 1986-87 respectively. But the man days of employment for adult males in agriculture and all other occupations were 242 and 257 and for children there were 307 and 315 respectively in 1984 and 1987. He has advanced the argument that child agricultural labourers although they constitute a very small percentage of total agricultural labourers (6.17 percentage in 1984) are being used very intensively mainly due to their low wage rates and their ability to do same amount of work as it is done by adult labourers. He further noted that if child labourers are eliminated from work force, there might be an increase in adult mandays of employment and their wage rates.

Cain (1991) observed that households with lower standard of living would be expected to have greater need for children's contribution to generate extra income. Standard of living can be treated as a rough measure of a family's requirement of income supplementation by children. This observation is in contradiction with the Vlassoff's claim that village households whose standard of living is low actually have more idle children and among the richer families, children are more active.

Vlassoff (1991) was of the opinion that poorer families did not get as much economic help from their children as expected. The poor families do not possess sufficient resources to take advantage of the potential family labour.

Khuda (1992) noticed that the average number of the hours worked daily was longest among children belonging to households with small cultivable land holding and landless households. The hours of work of children were lower among the households having relatively larger land holdings. These children spend longer hours in household maintenance activities and they start this work in rather earlier ages than the children of the better off households. The poor have a greater need for young children to do the comparatively unproductive or less productive responsibilities in order to enable parents to engage in more productive work.

Jodha and Singh (1992) noticed that among the rural poor, child labour accounted for 39 to 71 percent of the labour engaged in the economic activities.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

This survey study was conducted with the following objectives:-

1. Study the level of monthly and daily wages of the child labourers according to their different age-groups;
2. To find out the number of working hours for which the working children have to work for wages;
3. To study the relationship between the working children's wages and hours of work; and
4. To understand the pattern of wage collection among the working children.

METHODOLOGY

This is a survey research study which was conducted in the Agra District of Uttar Pradesh state of India. For the purposes of this study, a sample size of 500 child labourers was selected through stratified Random sampling technique from different trades and occupations of the informal sector such as hotels/restaurants/dhabas/tea stalls; cycle/bike and motor repairing shops; shoe industry; carpet industry; petha manufacturing units; and marble industry. An Interview Guide and Observation Schedule were used to collect responses and facts.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

TABLE-1 Level Of Monthly And Per Day Earnings According To Different Wage-Groups

WAGE GROUP (Rs)	NO. OF CHILDREN	TOTAL MONTHLY INCOME (ABSOLUTE) (Rs)	AVERAGE MONTHLY INCOME (30 DAYS) (Rs)	AVERAGE WAGE PER DAY PER CHILD (Rs)
0-75 (5.80)	29	1910	65.86	2.20
75-150 (30.00)	150	18160	121.07	4.04
150-200 (10.00)	50	9940	198.80	6.63
200-300 (13.00)	65	18850	290.00	9.67
300-400 (10.40)	52	20910	402.12	13.40
400-500 (8.80)	44	21610	491.14	16.37
500-600 (13.00)	65	38670	594.92	19.83
600-700 (3.60)	18	12180	676.67	22.56
700-800 (2.80)	14	10800	71.43	25.71
800+ (2.60)	13	12590	968.46	32.28
Total (100.00)	500	165620	331.24	11.04

Note : Figures within parentheses refer to percentage.

Data on the wages and levels of earning among the working children in the sample indicate that per worker monthly earning (income) recorded is at Rs. 331 (Table 1) which is too little considering the hazardous nature of work and the back-breaking strain of work done by the children in unorganized sector of Agra. In classification according to different wage-groups, it is found that 30 percent of the working children get wages of Rs. 4 per day while 69.2 percent get below Rs 23.40 per day. Only 9 percent of the working children get wages above Rs.20/- per day. The working children constituting about 2.6 percent get a little more than Rs.32 per day. These child workers are engaged in shoe and carpet work. Level of wages among the children depends on the hours at work, level of skill, nature of work, age of the child and the establishment where the child gets employment.

TABLE NO. 2: Classification Of Working Children According To Hours Devoted (Per Day) To Work

HOURS WORKED PERDAY (NUMBER)	NO. OF CHILDREN	PERCENTAGE
0-2	13	2.60
2-4	79	15.80
4-6	82	16.40
6-8	127	25.40
8-10	108	21.60
10 and above	91	18.20
	500	100.00

Table 2 shows direct relationship between duration of work and the number of child workers; longer the duration of working hours, larger the number of child workers. These children can compete with adults in putting in as many hours of hard work but costs paid by these children are incurred in terms of ill health, loss of childhood, education and leisure and such costs minimize or negate the benefits (paltry wages) that accrue to them. For an alarming 39.80 percent of the total children, working hours stretch beyond 8 hours a day. Exploitation is evident as an adult working day is defined as constituting 8 hours. It is an outrage to make children work relentlessly for such long duration in the environment not conducive to the physical mental and social development of children, A little more than a quarter of the working children work for 6-8 hours a day. This time duration too is pathetically long for a child barely in his/her teens. Further, this table reveals another unfavorable fact concerning child labour, the number of working children

falls as the hours of work shorten. A little more than 16 percent of the children work for 4-6 hours, 15.8 percent for 2-4 hours and only 2.6 percent of the fortunate few work for a reasonable 2 hours. The grimness of the situation is magnified by the fact that exploitation begins at home for more than half (57.40 percent) of these over burdened children.

A glance at Table 3 is enough to notice the plight of the working children working in various units of different trades of unorganized sector. The total picture reveals that as the hours of work increase from 0 to 8 hours per day, the number of working children also increases. The increase in the number of children with 0-2 hours to 2-4 hours is drastic but steadies as hours increase from 2-4 to 4-6 day.

TABLE No. 3: Classification Of Working Children According To Different Levels Of Monthly Income And Its Relationship With Work Per Day

MONTHLY INCOME OF THE WORKING CHILD (Rs)											
NO. OF HOURS WORKED PER DAY	0-75	75-150	150-200	200-300	300-400	400-500	500-600	600-700	700-800	800 & above	Total hours
0-2	2	8	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	13
	(15.39)	(16.53)	(15.39)	(7.69)							100.00
2-4	10	50	5	10	1	2	1	-	-	-	79
	(12.66)	(63.29)	(12.66)	(1.27)	(1.27)	(2.53)	(1.27)				(100.00)
4-6	4	22	7	10	7	13	15	3	1	-	82
	(4.88)	(26.83)	(8.54)	(12.19)	(8.54)	(15.86)	(18.29)	(3.66)	(1.21)		(100.00)
6-8	5	38	13	10	11	13	23	9	1	4	127
	(3.94)	(29.93)	(10.24)	(7.87)	(8.66)	(10.24)	(18.11)	(7.08)	(7.08)	(3.15)	(100.00)
8-10	6	20	12	14	17	10	16	4	4	5	108
	(5.55)	(18.52)	(11.11)	(12.97)	(15.75)	(9.26)	(14.82)	(3.70)	(3.70)	(4.62)	(100.00)
10 & ABOVE	2	12	11	20	16	6	10	2	8	4	91
	(2.19)	(13.91)	(12.09)	(21.99)	(17.59)	(6.59)	(10.99)	(2.19)	(8.79)	(4.39)	(100.00)
TOTAL	29	150	50	65	52	44	65	18	14	13	500
	(5.8)	(30.00)	(10.00)	(13.00)	(10.40)	(8.88)	(13.00)	(3.6)	(2.8)	(2.6)	(100.00)

As working time expands to 6 hours a day, the increase in working hours is quite noticeable. But the increase in income is not necessarily consistent with longer hours of work. Beyond 8 hours the number of children working starts to fall but at decreasing rate. Therefore we may say that the rate of increase of working children with the increase in working hours ranging from 0-8 is greater than the rate of decrease in working children with a corresponding increase in working time beyond 8 hours. The above discussion is necessary to establish a clear relationship between working hours and income earned. A little over 50 percent of the children working up to 8 hours per day earn up to Rs. 300 /per month. For those putting in more than 8 hours a day, the figure ranges between Rs. 300-400. The increase is not consistent with the added hours of work put in (Table 3) of those working 0-2 hours per day maximum (67.53%) earn Rs. 75-150. A majority of the children earn the same amount i.e. Rs.75-100 irrespective of the fact that they work for 2-4 hours 8-10 hours a day. This trend shows a deviation only when working time exceeds 10 hours. For this duration most of the children receive between Rs.200.300 per month. Only if a child works for 4-6 hours or more per day makes the employer consider giving him Rs. 600 or more. This pattern reflects the working children's lack of bargaining power as they are operating in a 'sellers' market. Moreover, the supply of labour exceeds the demand tilting the scales in favour of the employers and leading to exploitation of the child labour.

Table 4 exposes the attitude of neglect by the employers towards child labour. Their 'take it or leave it' attitude is evident from the fact that they make work available at a certain wage irrespective of the hours put in by the child worker. The very first income group of Rs. 0-75 when considered reveals that most of the 29 children (34.49 percent) work for 2-4 hours per day but for the same income, 17.25 percent work for 6-8 hours a day and 27.58 percent for more than 8 hours a day. As income rises to Rs.75-100 per month, the number of children increases too.

TABLE No. 4: Classification Of Working Children According To Hours Worked Per Day And Its Relationship With Income Levels

NO. OF HOURS WORKED PER DAY	MONTHLY INCOME OF THE WORKING CHILD (Rs)										
	0-75	75-150	150-200	200-300	300-400	400-500	500-600	600-700	700-800	800 & above	Total hours
0-1	2	8	2	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	13
	(6.89)	(5.34)	(4.00)	(1.54)							(2.60)
2-4	10	50	5	10	1	2	1	-	-	-	79
	(34.49)	(33.33)	(10.00)	(15.39)	(1.92)	(4.55)	(1.54)				(15.80)
4-6	4	22	7	10	7	13	15	3	1	-	82
	(13.79)	(14.66)	(14.00)	(15.39)	(13.46)	(29.55)	(23.08)	(16.67)	(7.14)		(16.40)
6-8	5	38	13	10	11	13	23	9	1	4	127
	(17.25)	(25.34)	(26.00)	(15.39)	(21.15)	(29.55)	(35.37)	(50.00)	(7.14)	(30.77)	(25.40)
8-10	6	20	12	14	17	10	16	4	4	5	108
	(20.69)	(13.33)	(24.00)	(21.53)	(32.69)	(22.72)	(24.62)	(22.22)	(28.58)	(38.46)	(21.60)
10 & ABOVE	2	12	11	20	16	6	10	2	8	4	91
	(6.89)	(8.00)	(22.00)	(30.76)	(30.78)	(13.63)	(15.39)	(11.11)	(57.14)	(30.77)	(18.20)
TOTAL	29	150	50	65	52	44	65	18	14	13	500
	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)	(100.00)

Of these 150,33.33 percent work for 2-4 hours but again the percentage of those who work for 6 hours and more exceed by a fair margin of 13 percent (Table 4). Another noteworthy point is that as income increases further the number of children drops to 50. This is due to the fact that average hours of work also increases ranging from 6 to beyond 10 hours per day. More children are lured by the wages in the Rs.200-300 income group; maximum (30.76 percent) children work for more than 10 hours per day. This is discriminatory as for the same income many children are devoting lesser hours. This further reflects on the individual and discriminatory payment policy of the employers and a lack of awareness/information among the child labourers regarding the prevailing wage rate. This further weakens their position and makes them easy targets for exploitation. Even as wages rise to Rs. 600 per month and above, number of children choosing to work for this amount drops sharply. It can be attributed to the corresponding rise in the duration of work which most often stretches to 8 hours and beyond. The average wage rate is seen to be towards the lower end of the scale; 59 percent wages ranging between Rs. 0-300. Most of them receive between Rs.75-100 (Table 4). On the other hand, as many as 65 percent of the children work for more than 6 hours per day. It is therefore appropriate to conclude that employer is the stronger party. Such exploitation is disgraceful and further deplorable as in many cases the exploiter seems to be one of the family members as 57.40 percent of the children work in family run firms. But the fact is that the child labour is employed at the household due to socio-economic compulsions.

The status of working children is reflected by the pattern of wage collection among the working children to some extent. Similarly, it gives some clue about the exploitation and attitude of parents towards their children. It is an irony that the working children do not have the right on the income earned by them on the one hand and the keen concern of parents to corner the earnings of their children as well as the economic condition of the households on the other. Data regarding the pattern of wage collection of children indicates that more than half of the working children do not enjoy the prerogative of collecting their wages from their employers. Parents of 48.80 percent working children and relatives of 2.80 percent children collect the wages of their children (Table 5). The working children constituting 48.40 percent collect their wages directly from their employers.

TABLE NO. 5: Pattern Of Wage Collection Among The Working Children

COLLECTION OF WAGES BY	CHILD WORKERS	
	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
Self	244	48.80
Parents	242	48.40
Local Guardians	14	2.80
Total	500	100.00

Data were also collected from the working children about the main items on which they generally spend the pocket money. Snacks, entertainment, smoking and gambling are the main items, on which the working children spend their pocket money. Expenditure on snacks is the major item on which about 90 percent of the pocket money is spent. Money in hand also leads some children to evils of smoking or

chewing tobacco.

Due to lack of incentives, motivation, awareness and small amount of money available with the working children, the saving habit was not seen among the working children. Out of 500 child workers in the sample, only few child workers have reported that they have saved money from their pocket money. About the mode of saving among the working children, the data revealed that they have deposited their savings either with the employers or friends.

CONCLUSIONS

1. All the selected 500 children were working to earn wage income and about 23 percent of them are still under training period. A little more than 57 percent of the working children work at homes of the employers while the rest work in the units.
2. More than 65 percent of the total working children work for 6 to 10 hours per day.
3. The pattern and distribution of wage income of the working children shows that 69 percent of them earn up to Rs. 400 per month. Only 9 percent of the working children earn wage income between Rs. 600 and 800 per month.
4. The relationship between wage income and duration of work hours indicated that the income the working children receive and the labour time they put in work are not consistent. It exposes the exploitation of the child labourers in these trades and occupations.
5. About 49 percent of the working children collect wages by themselves and wages of the rest of the working children are collected by their parents and guardians.

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