

Socio-Economic status of child labourers at brick kiln sites

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Abstract

A number of Socio-economic and demographic factors determine/influence the incidence of child labour in general as well as in the brick Kiln industry which is a significant employer of Child labour in the country. The extensiveness of supply and demand side factors makes eradication of child labour a very difficult task. Poor people tend to send their children to work to augment their income. Therefore, the poverty variable is one of the important determinants of the supply of child labour. It is not, however, clear, which is the cause and which is effect between poverty and child labour. It is possible that child labour can perpetuate poverty. In case of brick kilns, it's especially true where working in the brick kilns has become inter- generational occupation. The deprivation of education and negligent accumulation of social and economic capital even after working in the brick kilns over long period of time has resulted in to the perpetuation of the child labour in the family. It was observed from the field that majority of labourers started as child labourer along with their parents some 20- 25 years ago and now their children are working with them.

Keywords: Child, Labourer, Brick, Kiln, Industry, Education

Introduction

Socio-economic factors like female literacy, fertility rates, family size, adult wage rates, diversification of the rural economy and female work participation rates, etc, are also important determinants of child labour. Economic development is another variable which is supposed to reduce child labour with better opportunities for adult labour and increasing education for children. It is possible that economic development may, in fact, also increase child labour for the same reason of better opportunities. In other words, demand for labour may increase with economic development.

Demand for schooling may increase depending on the infrastructure and quality of education in schools. On opposite side, the lack of schooling facility exacerbates the problem of child labour, brick kilns are one of the best example of this phenomenon. Generally, The brick kilns are located in the outskirts of cities in the agricultural land away from residential areas (city or villages) therefore schools are far away for the young children. There are several key issues - economic, social and environmental - linked with brick production. Workers in the brick kilns constitute one of the poorest and weakest sections of the society.

The brick kilns are significant employer of women and children as well. Of the total of 51 brick kiln workers interviewed in Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, 60.8 per cent were landless although they depended on the agricultural sector for six months a year and 37.3 per cent did own land but would fall in the category of small farmers who combine self-cultivation with income from wage labour. Both the categories are net buyers of food and dependent on wage labour for the major share of their yearly income.

Poverty: cause and consequence

Poverty is cited frequently as a primary reason for child work. It is true that poor families have a greater need for survival or supplementary income from their children's work, although this

contribution may be over-estimated in light of what is now known about the. Role of the range of factors, including poor or inaccessible education, that contribute to making work a more attractive option than school for children.

Poverty that keeps children working also serves to keep them out of school, the most obvious plane; a child cannot be working and in school at the same time; "survival", it is argued, must take precedence over "development," and the best interests of the child are weighed by the contribution she makes to the family and therefore her/his own survival, illustrated by the direct and indirect costs of school. It has been calculated that "free" compulsory education covers only 20 per cent of the total cost of schooling.

Other costs for books, uniforms, writing materials, transportation to school, need to be borne by families. There is also the indirect "opportunity cost" of schooling, the loss of income incurred by a family whose child is in school rather than working. The higher the opportunity cost of school attendance in relation to a household's income, the greater the perceived need for the child to work. Understanding poverty as a cause of child labour must include understanding that it is also a consequence and that it is the exploitation of poverty that perpetuates child labour and prevents children from attending or learning in school.

Children are desired as workers for their malleability and compliance; their young age is justification for low or no wages. While children's work may increase family income, it also helps to keep adult wages low and increase unemployment as millions of poor children maintain the labour force at barely-survival wages, their families are kept under- and unemployed; another generation of unskilled, illiterate, powerless adults is in the making, and the structure of poverty and power disparities remains in place. Like poverty itself, the prohibitive cost of education that keeps children out of school and increases the likelihood of their remaining in hazardous work, must also be

seen not as natural or even unavoidable, but as a consequence of faulty policies and priorities.

Societal value and the perception of children

The complex role of culture and tradition plays an equally important role in the interplay between child labour and education. This includes the struggle and confusion between new and old values and beliefs -- the view of children, the value of work, and the role of money and material goods as symbols of social status. The unconvincing explanation of poverty as a sole cause of child work and its link to other underlying issues are illustrated by the millions of families who, in spite of poverty, manage to find the resources to send their children to school.

In India most of the poor parents believe that children should work to support the family instead of going to school. Present schools fail to teach skills that make children suitable in acquiring jobs; Job market is also limited and confined to the limited urban areas. Now it is widely believed that child labour and education is intimately correlated. In fact education is key to child labour eradication. A serious lack of educational opportunities is becoming well understood as a major contributor to children's involvement in harmful work.

Conversely, educators and others concerned with access to education have noted that work and a number of related factors contribute significantly to the difficulty of millions of children exercising their right to education or benefiting from it fully when they gain access. These include quality and relevance of the education system itself, cost, inflexible schedules, long work hours and other hazardous working conditions. Childhood is a critical stage of life that must be respected and honoured for itself as well as a transition to productive and fulfilling adulthood.

Children deserve, need, and have the right to a nurturing and stimulating environment that fosters growth and development in all areas of their lives. Key among these is education, which includes not only access to school, but quality basic learning that is fundamental to developing critical life and learning skills. Education is also an enabling right that contributes to opening the space for the fulfillment of all other rights - to health, nutrition, leisure, participation in society, and assists children in becoming self-sufficient, contributing members of society.

Because deficiencies in education systems can in themselves also facilitate the perpetuation of child labour, these need to be addressed and schools made a more viable, valuable, and interesting option for children. Although this paper focuses on mostly children of primary school age, it attributes equal importance to adolescents who may be of legal working age but have been denied or did not finish primary school because of work. Any work activity, which interferes with a child's right to education, is intolerable and must be eliminated. All best efforts must focus on preventing children from entering work that will impede or prevent their education as well as removing those who are currently working under harmful conditions and ensuring that they are provided with an enabling educational environment.

The linkage between child labour and education must also be understood in the larger context of powerful social, economic, political, and cultural forces which play a major role in determining the level of child participation in both activities. In this chapter the analysis of working children and the proportion

of attending and not attending school and also the proportion of those children who were neither working nor attending school has been attempted. This chapter deals with education influencing the incidence of child labour. A number of studies have classified the causes of child work in different categories.

Migration Trends

The seasonal migration of labourers to brick kilns is from villages, small towns within and across districts and also from other states. The brick kiln industry is the second largest sector after the construction sector, which absorbs such a floating labour population and a reserve surplus of the land. A primary concept in migration studies is 'pull' versus 'push' factors. The primary driving force in the case of pull factors is the drive to improve economic status. In contrast, extreme deprivation in native areas along with a lack of employment opportunities locally, causes push migration. The brick kilns in the Kanpur district offers clear instances of both. The migrant labourers come from both areas.

The labourers from poor areas like East UP, Bihar and Orissa migrate mainly due to "push" factors where as labourers migrating from within district or from nearby districts are motivated by pull factors. These seasonal migrants spend between 6 to 8 months (depending upon Monsoon condition as brick kilns get closed during rainy season) in the brick kilns. Both categories (i.e. depending upon motives/reasons for push or pull factors) of migrant families have different profiles, not only in terms of their ways of living, spending habits etc but significantly in terms of children also.

The later category is more likely to send their children to school and often leave their grown up children behind so that they can study. It was observed that those households which are relatively well off or have some Hmd or any other source of income such as animal rearing etc leave some of their children (generally of school going age) back home with their grandparents or uncles.

The majority of migrant labourers in the study area come from within the district (mostly from within 15 km radius). This category of workers constituted 58 percent of the total labourers followed by the inter-district migrants constituting another 34 percent of total labourers. The majority of workers in later category come from adjacent districts i.e. Hamirpur, Kanpur Dehat, Fatehpur and Banda districts. The rest are from Gorakhpur, Allahabad, Pratapgarh and Basti. The inter-state migration is much less prevalent mainly because of the availability of local labourers. Eight percent of labourers come from the other states mainly from Bihar and Jarkhand. The all migration is seasonal in nature except few staff member i.e. accountant (Munshi) and gaurds who may remain in the kilns even after the kilns get closed. They, along with brick kilns owners sell the bricks stock rest of the year. The migrants are predominately (97%) from rural areas. The rest 3 percent come from mostly small towns.

Essentially agricultural labourers, or marginal and small farmers, combining agricultural wage workers, migrate from one place to another in search of employment in brick kilns during the lean period in agriculture between October and the middle of June. This is the lean period for single paddy-cropped areas and perhaps explains the presence of large number of workers from the rice growing areas of eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Jarkhand.

The major urban centers may also offer pull factors which acts directly or indirectly as in case of brick kilns which come up in the vicinity of urban centers to meet the increasing demands from the construction sector of the city. They attract the improvised and unemployed or underemployed rural population especially belonging to low economic and social status who are also pushed by adverse conditions at the native places. For instance a study found out that Thane and Nashik districts of Maharashtra are close to urban Mumbai which generates the demand for bricks in turn providing seasonal employment to tribal families in the brick kiln season.

These being hilly regions with moderate rainfall and humid climate, the crop grown here is paddy which is cultivated in the monsoons. Thus, in the summer and winter months, when there is dearth of water, families migrate to other nearby areas in search of employment. The main motive of such migration is obviously employment but it entails the loss of rights and basic facilities like access to education, health, food distribution system, etc.

Socio-Economic and Demographic factors influencing Child Labour in Brick Kilns

Child labourers in the brick kilns are predominately from migrants and low caste family background. The poverty of household in which children need to earn to sustain the family, large family size, low literacy level of parents, lack of schooling facility near work and residence site and adverse social and community environment are the major factors which lead to incidence of child labour.

The other indirect contributing factors are: high fertility, mortality, child women ratio etc. As stated before in the chapter the high growth rate of population; high birth rate and declining morality rate can lead to unemployment, low wages and low per capita income. This in turn can result in more and more children being engaged in work for the sustenance of a family. In this section, the socio-economic and demographic factors which are specifically significant to the incidence of child labour have been stated.

Conclusion

The major socio-economic factors like female literacy, fertility rates, family size, adult wage rates, diversification of the rural economy and female work participation rates, etc, are important determinants of child labour. The poverty is one of the important determinants of the supply of child labour. From last one decade the high economic growth rate, rapid urbanization and increased domestic and foreign investment has led to high growth of the construction sector, thus increasing the demand for Bricks and cheap labour (in form of child labour). And, to meet the demand many new brick kilns have been established which generated more employment of child labour.

On the other side, the lack of schooling facility also exacerbates the problem of child labour, brick kilns can be considered as best example of this phenomenon. While, Countries like Japan, Taiwan, Korea, and China have made primary education compulsory after Second World War in spite of low per capita income and acute poverty. But, within twenty years they improved a lot and secured a good position. Unfortunately India failed to provide major thrust to education especially primary education in past. But very recently the Government of India is also giving more emphasis on primary education.

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