



Child Labour In India

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This article is based on “**Breaking the cycle of child labour is in India’s hands**” which was published in The Hindu on 02/06/2021. It talks about the menace of child labour in India.

With increased economic insecurity, lack of social protection and reduced household income, the Covid-19 pandemic is pushing the children from poor households to contribute to the family income with the risk of exposure to exploitative work.

Subsequent lockdowns have worsened the situation, posing a real risk of backtracking the gains made in **eliminating child labour**.

The true extent of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on child labour is yet to be measured but all indications show that it would be significant as children are unable to attend school and parents are unable to find work.

However, not all the factors that contribute to child labour were created by the pandemic; most of them were pre-existing and have been exposed or amplified by it. Though the pandemic has amplified its contributing factors, policy and programmatic interventions can save children.

Status of Child Labour in India

- Child labour refers to the employment of children in any work that deprives them of their childhood, interferes with their ability to attend regular school, and that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful.
- The Census of India 2011 reports 10.1 million working children in the age group of 5-14 years, out of whom 8.1 million are in rural areas mainly engaged as cultivators (26%) and agricultural labourers (32.9%).

- The side-effects of working at a young age are:
 - Risks of contracting occupational diseases like skin diseases, diseases of the lungs, weak eyesight, TB etc.;
 - Vulnerability to sexual exploitation at the workplace;
 - Deprived of education.
 - They grow up unable to avail development opportunities and end up as unskilled workers for the rest of their lives.

Child Labour: Constitutional And Legal Provisions

- According to Article 23 of the Indian Constitution any type of forced labour is prohibited.
- Article 24 states that a child under 14 years cannot be employed to perform any hazardous work.
- Article 39 states that “the health and strength of workers, men and women, and the tender age of children are not abused”.
- In the same manner, **Child Labour Act (Prohibition and Regulation) 1986** prohibits children under the age of 14 years to be working in hazardous industries and processes.
- Policy interventions such as **MGNREGA 2005**, the **Right to Education Act 2009** and the Mid Day Meal Scheme have paved the way for children to be in schools along with guaranteed wage employment (unskilled) for rural families.
- Further, with the ratification International Labour Organization Conventions Nos. 138 and 182 in 2017, the Indian government have demonstrated its commitment to the elimination of child labour including those engaged in hazardous occupations.

Associated Issues With the Child Labour

- **Cause & Effect Relationship:** Child labour and exploitation are the result of many factors, including poverty, social norms condoning them, lack of decent work opportunities for adults and adolescents, migration and emergencies.
 These factors are not only the cause but also a consequence of social inequities reinforced by discrimination.
- **Threat to National Economy:** The continuing persistence of child labour and exploitation poses a threat to national economies and has severe negative short and long-term consequences for children such as denial of education and undermining physical and mental health.
- **Child Labour in Informal Sector:** Though child labour is banned the law, across India child labourers can be found in a variety of informal industries like in brick kilns, carpet weaving, garment making, agriculture, fisheries, etc.

- **Disguised Child Labour:** Despite rates of child labour declining over the last few years, children are still being used in disguised form of child labour like domestic help.
 - Work performed may not appear to be immediately dangerous, but it may produce long-term and devastating consequences for their education, their skills acquisition.
 - Hence their future possibilities to overcome the vicious circle of poverty, incomplete education and poor quality jobs.
- **Linkage With Child Trafficking:** Child trafficking is also linked to child labour and it always results in child abuse.

Trafficked children are subjected to prostitution, forced into marriage or illegally adopted; they provide cheap or unpaid labour, are forced to work as house servants or beggars and may be recruited into armed groups.

Way Forward

- **Role of Panchayat:** As nearly 80% of child labour in India emanates from rural areas, the Panchayat can play a dominant role in mitigating child labour. In this context, panchayat should:
 - Generate awareness about the ill-effects of child labour,
 - Encourage parents to send their children to school,
 - Create an environment where children stop working and get enrolled in schools instead,
 - Ensure that children have sufficient facilities available in schools,
 - Inform industry owners about the laws prohibiting child labour and the penalties for violating these laws,
 - Activate Balwadis and Aanganwadis in the village so that working mothers do not leave the responsibility of younger children on their older siblings.
 - Motivate Village Education Committees (VECs) to improve the conditions of schools.
- **Integrated Approach:** Child labour and other forms of exploitation are preventable through integrated approaches that strengthen child protection systems as well as simultaneously addressing poverty and inequity, improve access to and quality of education and mobilize public support for respecting children's rights.
- **Treating Children as Active Stakeholder:** Children have the power to play a significant role in preventing and responding to child labour.

They are key actors in child protection and can give valuable insights into how they perceive their involvement and what they expect from the government and other stakeholders.

Conclusion

Children belong in schools not workplaces. Child labour deprives children of their right to go to school and reinforces intergenerational cycles of poverty. Child labour acts as a major barrier to education, affecting both attendance and performance in school.

Drishti Mains Question

Child labour deprives children of their right to go to school and reinforces intergenerational cycles of poverty. Comment.