

## REVISITING CHILD LABOUR IN INDIA {A CASE OF SRINAGAR DISTRICT OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR}

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### ABSTRACT

This study revisits the issue of child labour in the north Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. Despite legislations against this practice, child labour keeps flourishing. The study examines the factors responsible for the widespread prevalence of child labour in the automobile and handicraft sectors in Srinagar district of Jammu and Kashmir. The study makes some interesting revelations. It emerges that the socio–economical condition is one of the major factors responsible for child labour in Srinagar. The study shows that the children working in handicraft sector and their families are economically more downtrodden as compared to those of automobile sector. With their parents unable to afford their schooling, the child labourers were found working in extreme and unhygienic informal conditions. A discussion of these findings, policy implication and suggestions to rid the society of child labour are provided.

**KEYWORDS:** Automobile Sector, Child Labour, Handicraft Sector, India, Kashmir, Srinagar

### INTRODUCTION

Child labour is prohibited in virtually all countries, yet it continues to flourish. With economic recession and its after-effects in the industrialized countries and persistent poverty in developing countries, the phenomenon is indeed growing. The problem has existed around the world since the very dawn of human civilization. However, majority of the world's child labourers are found in Asia with 153 million children working (ILO, 1999). One such Asian country, India has the largest number of world's working children between 60 million to 115 million (Tucker & Ganesan, 1997; Kovacevic, 2009). Within India, in the northern state of Jammu & Kashmir, child labour has of late assumed new proportions due to several reasons, the main one being of political turmoil in the state in the last two decades. In Srinagar, the summer capital<sup>2</sup> of Jammu & Kashmir, the phenomenon of child labour remains widespread at automobile workshops and petrol pumps. Similarly, many children also work as, domestic hands, bus conductors, carpet weavers, salesmen, agriculture helpers and so on.. Given the sheer magnitude of child labour in the state as revealed by official statistics Census (2001) as well as non-governmental agencies, studying child labour becomes an important exercise. This study hence aims to put in proper perspective the situation of child labour in India by reviewing the relevant literature and focusing on the issue of child labour in the northern Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. The aim is to understand whether the socio-economic status of the children's families is the only reason for child labour in Srinagar, and find out if the working children's income is indispensable in running their households. We also examine the health and well-being of the children caught in child labour. Quantitative approach using the survey method is used to meet the objectives of the study.

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<sup>2</sup> The state of Jammu and Kashmir has two capitals – Srinagar for the summer and Jammu for the winter.

## Objectives

- To understand if socio – economic status of families is the only reason for the child labour in Srinagar.
- To find out if the child labourer’s income is indispensable in running the household.
- To find out the effect of working conditions on child labourers, particularly on their health.

## Child Labour and India

Any work, whether manual or mental, which is undertaken by a child below 14 years of age, for monetary consideration, is called child labour. Industrialized economies especially of Europe, North America, and Australia have largely reduced child labour. However, the problem of child labour as faced by the developing economies today has serious dimensions. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2007) estimates that the number of economically active children aged 5-14 years in the year 2000 was 211 million, while the number classified as child labourers was 186.3 million. Of these 120 million are estimated to be in full-time work. India, being the second most populated country in the world, is home to a huge number of such working children.

The table below shows in percentage terms the phenomenon of child labour across five continents.

**Table 1: Phenomenon of Child Labour across Five Continents**

%Region	Year 1980	Year 1985	Year 1990
Africa	17.0	18.0	21.3
America	4.7	5.6	N/A
Asia	77.8	75.9	72.3
Europe	0.3	0.2	0.1
Oceania	0.2	0.2	0.2
N/A = Not available			

*Source:* Siddiqi & Patrinos (1995)

According to Tucker & Ganesan (1997), India has the largest number of world’s working children between 60 to 115 million. Siddiqi & Patrinos (1995) mention that India leads Asia in child labour with 44 million children working while Bhat (2009) states that 55 million children in India at present are in labour force. According to the International Labor Office (ILO, 2007), there are 25 million children employed in the agricultural sector, 20 million in service jobs (hotels, shops and as servants in home) and 5 million in the handloom, carpet making, gem cutting and match making industries. 91% of child labour in India occurs in rural areas, and 9% in urban areas Bhat & Rather (2009). In India, every third child is a working child and every fourth child in the age group 5-15 is employed. The informal sector contributes more to the child labour as it remains unchecked and unnoticed.

Jammu and Kashmir State in India is one such state where child labour is widespread. The state is divided into three Regions: Kashmir, Jammu and Ladakh. The state has 22 districts with a total population of 10.14 million. The population of the Kashmir Region is 5.48 million (53.9%), that of the Jammu Region is 4.43 million (43.7%) while Ladakh Region has a population of 236,539 (2.3%). The main district of the Kashmir Division, Srinagar has a total population of 1,202,447 out of which 369,634 are children. 78,478 of these children fall in the age group of 0-4 years while 291,156 belong to age group 5-14 years (Census, 2001).

The phenomenon of child labour in Jammu and Kashmir is not different from the rest of the country. According to census of 2001, 175,630 child labourers were found in Jammu and Kashmir State. Given the political disturbances in the

state from the past more than two decades, particularly in the Kashmir valley, child labour has increased exponentially in Jammu and Kashmir in general and in the Kashmir Province in particular. The conflict has children's education in a shambles. While child labour remains a serious concern throughout the country, in Jammu and Kashmir this issue becomes more alarming as the government and the civil society at large give priority to issues related to the conflict.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies document the phenomenon of child labour in different parts of India. Shandilya & Khan (2003) used mix methods to look at child labour in Patna, the largest city in Bihar (one of the poorest states in India). Under-fed and under-paid, child labourers were found to work for as long as 14 hours a day with 90% of them working under pressure from their families. This study also revealed that majority of the children (62%) reported multiple health problems.

Another study by Devi & Roy (2008) focused mainly on the prevalence of child labour among school children in the rural and urban areas of Pondicherry. They found that the overall prevalence of child labour among students was 32.5% (42.8% in rural and 24.9% in urban areas). Irrespective of the area, educational level of the mother, crowding in the family, families being in debt, presence of a handicapped or alcoholic member in the family, gender and religion were significantly associated with the working child.

Many studies report that poverty is the main reason for child labour (Harper & Karen, 2003; Oyaide, 2000). Sarkar (2007) reported that extreme poverty led to the entry of children into the labour market and their exploitation became common. The author suggests that the employment of child workers in urban India is growing much faster than in rural India and that the four sectors that need to be targeted for the elimination of child labour are manufacturing, transport, storage and communication while wage-based agriculture in rural and urban India must not be ignored. Concurring with Sarkar (2007), Molankal (2008) reported that the core reason for child labour is poverty. Poverty coupled with rapidly growing population, ignorance and increasing dependency load are behind the grim incidence of children employment in the villages and towns of developing countries. The author adds that in India, child labour is not a new phenomenon. It has been in existence since time immemorial in one form or the other and has been changing from time to time. In the context of Jammu and Kashmir, Shah (1992, pp. 97-101) looked at the informal sector using a mixture of quantitative and qualitative approaches. As is the case in rest of India, the author found children working for long hours ranging from 9-20 hours a day depending on the industry in which they worked. In addition the children were found to be typically under-paid.

In contrast to these studies however, Boyden, Ling, & Myers (1998) suggest that it is too simplistic to attribute child labour to poverty alone. Other factors that have been found to generate child labour include the inadequacy of the school system, geographical location of the family (Kelly, 1998); large family size (Kamocho, Munalula, & Miti, 1997) and family dysfunction due to HIV/AIDS or divorce (Lungwangwa & Macwan'gi, 2004).

There are numerous studies on working children from around the world. However a review of these studies reveals that the children tend to work prolonged and irregular hours, without rest, play, or recreation, suffer from abuse and often live in hazardous conditions (Oyaide, 2000a). The next section presents the methodology used in this study to look at child labour in the northern state of Jammu and Kashmir in India.

## Methodology

The step wise methodology adopted for the present study can be discussed as:

## Research Design

Pursuant to an extensive review of the related literature to understand child labour in India, a quantitative approach using the survey method was used to answer the objectives of this study. The survey, carried out by using interview schedule, targeted child labourers operating in Srinagar city who were working in Automobile workshops and as Hook embroidery workers (Handicraft industry). Local languages namely Kashmiri and Urdu were used for communication. Aware of the problems translating the languages may cause, we followed the back-translation procedure recommended by Brislin (1970) to ensure validity of the interview schedule.

## RESEARCH SITE

Several areas of Srinagar namely Batamaloo, Barzulla, Rambagh and Hyderpora Bye-pass were surveyed to collect data from children working in automobile workshops. These places were chosen as most of the automobile workshops in the Srinagar city are located in these areas. To collect data from child labourers working as embroidery workers (Handicraft industry), the areas of Palpora and Parampora were chosen. These two areas were chosen particularly because the National Child Labour Project (NCLP, 1988) sponsored by the Government of India works in these areas on child labour issues. Sampling constraints were applied and the data were collected only from qualified respondents; those who were 14 or below years of age. In three weeks, 130 interview schedules were conducted out of which 100 responses were found to be usable and taken for further data analysis.

## Method

Divided into three sections, the interview schedule used in this study was designed to be quantitative in order to obtain valid and reliable measures of the variables. For this, previously validated scales were used to measure the variables of interest the details of which are provided at the end under Appendix A.

## Data Analysis Techniques

The collected interview schedules were screened for completeness and the unqualified responses were eliminated. In total, out of 130 responses, 30 were found to be unusable as they were incomplete and did not provide complete information regarding the variables of interest. Thus 100 responses were included in the final data analysis. SPSS® v.16 was used for data analysis. We checked normality of the data and found it to be normally distributed. Descriptive statistics including frequency tests were conducted to answer the objectives of this study. The results of these statistical tests are discussed in the next section.

## RESULTS

### Respondent Profile

Sixty % male and 40 % female respondents participated in this study. Eighty eight % of the respondents were in the age group of 12–14 years, whereas 12 % in age group of 9–11 years. Fifty two % of the respondents were engaged in automobile work while 48 % worked as embroidery workers. The table below indicates that 96 % and 4 % of the respondents lived in nuclear and joint families respectively. Sixty eight % of the children had 4–7 family members in their family while 32 % had 8–11 family members. Sixty four % of the child labourers had 1–4 siblings and 36 % had 5–8 siblings. The monthly income of 94 % of the respondents was Rupees 500–1500 while only 4 % of these children were earning more than 1500 rupees per month. The monthly family income of 62 % of the respondents was below 4000 rupees,

for 24 % it was below 6000 rupees whereas for 12 % it was below 8000 rupees and only for 2 % of the respondents the monthly family income was above 8000 rupees.

**Table 2: Demographic Information of the Respondents**

Item	%	
<b>Gender</b>	Male	60.0
	Female	40.0
<b>Age</b>	9 – 11	12.0
	12 – 14	88.0
<b>Child Occupation</b>	Automobile worker	52.0
	Embroidery worker	48.0
<b>Family Type</b>	Nuclear Family	96.0
	Joint Family	04.0
<b>No. of family members</b>	4 – 7	68.0
	8 – 11	32.0
<b>No. of Siblings</b>	1 – 4	64.0
	5 – 8	36.0
<b>Child Monthly Income (in Indian Rupees)</b>	500 - 1500	94.0
	1500- 2500	06.0
<b>Family Monthly income (in Indian Rupees)</b>	2000 – 4000	62.0
	4100 – 6000	24.0
	6100 – 8000	12.0
	Above 8000	02.0

### **Work, Education & Socio – Economic Status of Working Children**

To answer the objectives of this study, we analyzed the data using descriptive statistics. It was found that sixty % of children started working at the age of 9 – 12 years whereas 40 % of children started working between the age of 5 – 8 years. It was revealed that 64 % of children had attended the school whereas 36 % had not attended the school at any level. Results indicate that 64 % of children were unable to afford schooling, 22 % of children were not interested in schooling, 10 % of children mentioned that their family did not allow them to go to school and 4 % of children mentioned that they did not attend the school because they needed to work for money. Looking at the legal aspect of child labour, a huge 78 % of children did not know that it was prohibited under law while 22 % of children knew that it was prohibited.

The result also shows that 70 % of the working children give their earnings to their parents, 20 % of children spend it on family needs by themselves and just 10 % of children spend their earnings on their personal needs. Sixty % of children were found to get no other work related benefits besides their wages, 26 % however said that they got food/meals from the employer and 14 % mentioned that they got clothes from their employer. This study also tried to find out if the children were happy working and found that 64 % of children were not happy to work at younger age, 14 % were unable to answer this question and 22 % were happy working at younger age. Regarding working hours, the result indicates that 52 % of children work for 8–9 hours, 42 % work for 10 – 12 hours whereas 6 % of children worked for more than 12 hours. After analyzing the data, it emerged that 56 % of children worked for 6 days in a week, 42 % worked for entire week i.e. 7 days where as only 2 % of children mentioned that they worked 5 days a week. This reflects a very hard work schedule for these children. Complicating the issue further, 52 % of children said that they even worked at home after working for entire day at work place. Forty eight % of children said that they don't work at home after working for entire day at work place. An assessment of work safety indicated that 92 % of children did not use safety equipments during work while only 8 % used the safety equipments during work. This study also tried to find out if the working children faced abuse at the work place and found that 62 % of children abused by the employer, while 38 % of children said their employer did not abuse

them. That paints a grim picture of the situation. The results also reveal that 60 % of children lived in semi-concrete houses, 30 % in concrete houses and 10 % of children lived in sheds. An attempt was also made in this study to find out how important the working children's wages are to the family. It was revealed that 54 % of children's income was indispensable for their family, whereas 44 % of children mention it was not. It was also found that 74 % of children did not want to send their siblings to work at younger age because of many negative effects of child labour; however 14 % of children were willing to send their siblings to work at younger age and 12 % of children were indecisive on this. A brief overview of this is given in the table below.

**Table 3: Work, Education & Socio – Economic Status of Respondents**

Items	%Age	
At what age did you started working?	5 – 8	40.0
	9 – 12	60.0
Have you ever been to school?	Yes	64.0
	No	36.0
Reason for not attending school?	Can't afford schooling	64.0
	Not interested in schooling	22.0
	Family does not allow schooling	10.0
	To work for money	4.0
What is you highest level of education?	None	32.0
	Primary	52.0
	Middle	16.0
Do you know Child labour is prohibited under law?	Yes	22.0
	No	78.0
What do you do with your earnings?	Spend on personal needs	10.0
	Spend on family needs	20.0
	Give to father / mother	70.0
What other benefits do you get?	Food/meals	26.0
	Clothing	14.0
	None	60.0
Do you feel it is good to work at younger age?	Yes	22.0
	No	64.0
	Can't say	14.0
What is the nature of work?	Skilled	52.0
	Semi-skilled	40.0
	Un-skilled	8.0
How many hours a day do you work?	8 – 9	52.0
	10 – 12	42.0
	13 – 16	6.0
How many days a week do you work?	5 days	2.0
	6 days	56.0
	7 days	42.0
If given a chance, would you go to school?	Yes	52.0
	No	48.0
Do you perform any other work at home?	Yes	14.0
	No	40.0
	Sometimes	46.0
Do you use safety equipments during work?	Yes	8.0
	No	92.0
Does your employer scold or beat you?	Yes	8.0
	No	38.0
	Sometimes	54.0
What type of house do you have?	Concrete	30.0
	Semi-concrete	60.0
	Shed	10.0

Is your income indispensable for your family?	Yes	54.0
	No	44.0
	Can't say	2.0
Did you parents send you to learn skills only?	Yes	34.0
	No	74.0
	Not sure	18.0
Would you prefer to send you sibling to work at young age?	Yes	14.0
	No	74.0
	Can't say	12.0

### Health and Hygiene

Another objective of this study was to examine the health and hygiene of the working children. The result shows that 56 % of children did not wash their hands before eating, 42 % washed with water and only 2 % of children washed their hands with soap and water before eating food. This points to unhygienic conditions which led to 90 % of children falling ill sometimes, 8 % falling ill every month and 2 % of them falling ill often. All the children interviewed mentioned that they get medical check-up only when they fall ill, otherwise they never see a doctor. Eighty four % of children suffered from one or more disease while only 16 % were free from disease. Of these working children, 36 % suffered from headache/ eye problem usually, 32 % suffered from cold and cough usually, 16 % suffered from stomach ache and 16 % had skin problems. Replying to another indicator of hygiene, 72 % of respondents mentioned that they changed their clothes once a week, 20 % mentioned that they changed clothes every day and 8 % mentioned that they changed their clothes after a fortnight. These statistics are briefly mentioned in the table below.

**Table 4: Health & Hygiene of Respondents**

Items	%Age	
How many times a day you eat food?	Twice a day	98.0
	Thrice a day	2.0
How do you wash hands before eating?	Only with water	42.0
	With soap	2.0
	Without washing	56.0
Is anyone from your family seriously ill?	Yes	22.0
	No	78.0
How often do you fall ill?	Sometimes	90.0
	Every month	8.0
	Often	2.0
When do you get medical checkup?	When ever get ill	100.0
Did you suffer from any disease recently?	Yes	84.0
	No	16.0
What usually is the nature of disease?	Cold & cough	32.0
	Stomach ache	16.0
	Skin problem	16.0
	Head ache/eye problem	36.0
How often do you change your clothes?	Every day	20.0
	After a week	72.0
	Fortnightly	8.0

### DISCUSSIONS

The current study shows that poverty is one of the major reasons of child labour in Kashmir: 64% of the interviewed children cited un-affordability as the reason for dropping out of the school. This finding is consistent with many past studies. For instance, Chaudhri and Wilson (1997) mention that poverty is one of the reasons of child labour in

India. Shandilya (2003) in his study conducted at Patna in India reveals that poor economic condition of child labourers' families is the reason for child labour. Equally Sarkar (2007) highlights extreme poverty as a reason for the entry of children into the labour market. Another study conducted by Molankal (2008) mentions poverty as the core reason for child labour. This study also suggests that poverty coupled with rapidly growing population, ignorance and increasing dependency are behind children's employment in villages and towns in developing countries. In the present study, 68% of children mentioned that they had 4-7 family members whereas 32% mentioned that they had 8 - 11 family members. Moreover, 96% of the working children lived in nuclear families. Kamocha, Munalula and Miti's (1997) made similar findings in their study conducted on child labour in Zambia, wherein they found large family size as a cause of child labour. Their findings indicate that child labour predominates in large households and that 28% of all working children come from households with 6-7 persons.

The current study also indicates that the children worked longer days and hours in comparison to adults. Ninety four % of children interviewed for this study worked for 8- 12 hours while 98% worked 6-7 days a week. This finding concurs with Shandilya (2003) who found children working for 14 hours a day in Patna in India. In addition, Shah (1992) found children working for 9-15 hours daily in Kashmir. The current study further shows that working children are usually prone to diseases as 84% of children had suffered from disease recently and almost 100% of them had suffered from cold and cough, stomach ache, skin problem and head ache/ eye problems. Similar findings were reported by Shandilya (2003); 62% of the working children examined in his study were found suffering from multiple health problems.

## CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Based on the review of literature and field experience, we conclude that child labour cannot be straight away banned in developing countries; it can however be controlled. This is primarily due to the embeddedness of child labor in the socio-economic structures and set up of the society. Basu & Van (1998), Dessy (2000) and Soares (2010) too realized this and suggested that banning child labour alone is not likely to be effective in practice. A ban on child labour would be difficult to enforce, especially in the rural areas of the country (Brown, 2001). In India, a sizable 5% of the economy is supported by child labour (Basu, 1999). Therefore a ban on this practice, besides being difficult to enforce, will not even serve the purpose of ensuring improvement in children's welfare as 54% of the child labourers studied in this paper indicated child labourers' income as indispensable to their families. The authorities can, nevertheless, sensitize public on the nature of crime committed by employing a child either as domestic help or otherwise. The authorities can also improve condition of the child labourers by introducing attractive and free pre-primary and primary education to woo children. Imparting skill-based education at the school can reduce worries of unemployment among parents and discourage child labour. Authorities can also regulate children working as child labourers for last 4-5 years and ensure that the employers pay them fixed wages, provide them with benefits like medical facilities, provident fund facilities, and other benefits enjoyed by regular adult workers.

Community based school extension programmes, brought in as a result of effective policy-making, can raise awareness about the benefits and necessity of education and encourage children to go to schools. Torres (2003) suggests that mandatory school attendance coupled with policies aimed at improving access to and the quality of schools, are important interventions that would primarily affect children who are not facing subsistence poverty. In line with the suggestion of Edmonds & Pavcnik (2005), the government of Jammu and Kashmir can make policies targeted at improving school infrastructure and reducing the cost of schooling. In addition, the stated government can strictly implement the



federally legislated Right to Education Act 2009 to bring prospective child labourers back into school. Lastly, policy makers can thwart the practice of child labour by developing a mechanism to monitor the informal sector for child labour so as to make it accountable.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Summary of interview schedule

S. No.	Section	Sources
1.	Interview Schedule for working Children <b>Section 'A'</b> (Respondents Profile)	<i>Nazir Ahmad Shah (1992); Bhat et al (2009); Oyaide (2000); Kutay &amp; Sabhia (2002)</i>
2.	Interview Schedule for working Children <b>Section 'B'</b> (Work, Education & Socio- economic status)	<i>Oyaide (2000); Shah (1992); Kutay &amp; Sabhi (2002).</i>
3.	Interview Schedule for working Children <b>Section 'C'</b> (Health & Hygiene)	<i>Shah (1992); Bhat et al (2009); Oyaide (2000)</i>