

Determents of child labour in carpet industry of Kashmir – A case study of District Kulgam

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Abstract

Like most problems in India, child labour in spite of rampant adult unemployment, is a by-product emerging out of socio-economic structure of society. After thorough investigation of the sample study of child labour in district Kulgam, various determents of child labour has been analysed in the present study. Also measures have been suggested for the reduction in the incidence of child labour and for their betterment. We hope that these measures would bring some good results.

Keywords: Child labour, demand, supply, income, wages, illiteracy.

1. Introduction

Childhood should be a period of joy. Innocence trust and spirited spontaneous activity. It should be a period of health, to be member of the society in all its forms viz. the family, the neighborhood, the school etc. and ultimately the nation itself. But alas it is not so far millions and millions of our less fortunate and deprived children. It is these unlucky and uncared for children who provide cheap labour for the profiteers. A child not at the school or in the protective care of the family should be matter of national disgrace. But we are so insured to so many forms of inequalities and exploitation that child labour too is taken very philosophically as one more regrettable form of more “backwardness”.

Child labour is an unforgivable waste of precious talents and assets for the future growth. It stands in the way of the democratic mode of life since children at drudgery cannot grow up to enlightened citizens. Child labour has been a problem with us for many countries. It was hoped that with the advent of freedom in 1947 this evil would be eradicated. On the contrary the problem has assumed more monstrous dimensions. As in the case of many other evils such as dowry, bonded labour, there has been a ceaseless experience of exhortation sermonisation, expressions of pious platitudes but no real action. Also as in other cases there is plenty of legislation but no real action to implement even the wildest previous of the various acts governing child labour.

In the present paper an attempt has been made to examine the major parameters of the child labour market. Both the market forces of demand and supply factors have been analysed. A small survey area in district Kulgam of Jammu and Kashmir has been selected in order to have an in-depth knowledge and direct interaction with the employed children.

2. Methodology

In the present study, multistage sampling has been used. In the first stage Qoimoh block was selected because of concentration of more carpet weaving units, employment of large number of children in the caret weaving industry and easy accessibility. In the second stage it was decided to take the sample of 100 households from five villages (20% from each) which have higher concentration of child labour and where there is evidence of large scale carpet weaving at the village level. Hence with the help of key persons (village elders) a sample of five villages via Brazloo, Bachroo, Hum-Shale- Bug, Tangan and Badroo were selected in the present study. In the third stage a list of carpet weaving units/households from selected villages was prepared with the help of village leaders and others having knowledge about carpet weaving units in the village. Only those households were interviewed where there was at least one child in the age group of 6-14 years employed in the carpet weaving. Thus a sample of 162 child labours was taken for the present study. As per objectives of the study parents and employers were interviewed.

Personal interviews and observation methods were resorted to in order to collect relevant data. Interviews of child labours and employers were conducted with the pre-tested questionnaires and schedules. Personal observation schedule was also found up by the researcher at the work place of child labour. The data thus collected was analysed and has been presented in tabular form.

3. Demand of child labour

The child labour is demanded for a variety of reasons. On the bases of sample survey, the table 1 shows why employers prefer child labours in their looms.

Table 1 Reasons governing employers for preferring child labour

S.No.	Reasons	Percentage
1	Child labour is cheaper	22.00
2	They work hard	25.00
3	They create less trouble	5.00
4	They work for longer hours	12.00
5	No trade union	8.00
6	They can be put to any job	17.00
7	Any other	11.00
	Total	100.00

Note: Maximum two responses from each respondent have been taken from analysis.

Source: Field survey

The table 1 shows that 1/4th employers were preferring children in their looms because they are hardworking, more than 1/5th expressed that they are cheaper than adult workers, 17 percent found that it was easy to put them in any job, 12 percent preferred them because of their capacity to work for longer hours. The analysis of the table shows that employers demand child labourers mainly because they are cheaper, easily disciplinable and can be put to work beyond the prescribed working hours. This further confirms the presumption that poor are exploited more by the rich.

As far the views of children regarding their own demand in the carpet industry are concerned they gave the reasons which are presented in table 1

Table 2 Views of the children regarding their demand

S No	Reasons	Percentage
1	Low wages	58.4
2	Hard work and discipline	36.5
3	Difficulty in obtaining adult labour	23.2
4	More suitable	18.3
5	Cannot say	27.2

Source: Field survey

The table 1.2 shows majority of the child labours were of the view that they were demanded because of low wages. Children as well as employers have the same opinion in this regard. Secondly, they believe that they work harder and remain disciplined. But many of the children remain uncertain regarding the reasons for which they are employed.

4. Supply of child labour

Child labour is employed as there is ever growing demand for it. But it is not only that employers demand child labour, but there is a constant flow of child labour into the labour market also. It means that like demand the supply of child labour into the labour market is also constant and ever rising. It is often seen that so many times employers are hard pressed to employ the child labour. Many times parents or relatives, even children press the employers hard to employ them. There are a variety of reasons behind employing child labour. Insufficient family income is one of the leading reasons. It was found in the study area that there is a negative relationship between family income and incidence of child labour i.e. lower the family income, higher is incidence of child labour.

Table 3 shows the distribution of causes behind the uninterrupted supply of child labour in the labour market. The table reveals that maximum child labour comes in the labour market due to abject poverty. In sufficient family income and poverty compel them to drop out from school and work for livelihood. This can be verified also from the fact that most of them came from downtrodden communities where incidence of poverty is undoubtedly highest, when these children go for work, they bring income to the family. Half of child labourers were working to support family income. As these families were living below the poverty line and hence they were forced to send their children to work in order to earn additional income so as to fulfill their basic needs of its members.

Besides poverty and need for additional income, other factors are of lesser importance. None of them occupies important place as only half of the respondents revealed any other cause being significant. In 17.2 per cent of cases children were found willing to work themselves, as they could not get along with the burden of studies. Illiteracy of parents, family tradition, uncertainty for future and bad habits was some of the other reasons responsible for high supply of child labour in the labour market.

Table 3 Factors constituting supply of child labour

S.No.	Factors	Percentage
1	To support family income	49.2
2	Bad habits	5.5
3	No interest in study	17.2
4	Natural calamity	3.2
6	Uncertainty of future	6.3
7	Family tradition	8.4
8	Illiterate parents	10.2
	Total	100.00

Source: Field Study

5. Conclusion

The facts and figures that came to forefront from the survey conducted in the carpet industry of district Kulgam reveals the various economic and social factors that make the problem of child labour very deep rooted. An analysis of the high demand of child labour shows that the prominent factor is low wages. Since the child labour market is unorganised and the children do not have enough bargaining power, they are forced to work at wages lower than their adult counterparts. There is hardly any control on this factor and all the government efforts fail to protect the children from getting lower wages. It was observed that bulk of the employers employ children as they are flexible, easy to adjust and obey employer's orders with honesty and sincerity. Other factors that play an important role are the inability of the children to join any trade union, the minimum liabilities of children and their tender age, which makes them quick learners.

On the supply side, the analysis of factors responsible for a large and continuous flow of children in the unorganised labour market reveals that high growth rate of population resulting in large families, abject poverty, low family income, low wages of adults, natural calamity in the area, extravaganza in superstitious customs, absence of culture of sending children to school, unfaithful implementation of laws regarding child labour and lack of compulsory education are some of the major factors constituting supply of child labour.

Looking at the factors affecting child labour in carpet weaving industry in the sampled area, it can be concluded that most of the results of the survey were not localized in nature and represent the factors contributing to child labour in general in the country. Given the complexity of the problem, the socio economic scenario and the availability of resources a sequential, progressive and integrated approach towards the elimination of child labour is required in India.

6. Recommendations

On the basis of the study the following recommendations are placed for consideration by the government the economic planners and the administration:-

1. The problem of child labour is directly connected with poverty and illiteracy of Indian masses. There should be every possible effort on the part of government and NGO's.
2. Poverty elimination programmes such as NREP, IRDP, DPAP, TRYSEM, GRY etc. should be effectively worked out in rural areas. Self-employment scheme should be intensified. Beneficiaries of these programmes must be those poor families who are child labourers.
3. Unemployment allowance, old age pension and red card scheme for supplying the grains at half price among the poor all should be properly and fairly implemented.
4. Government should implement such action plans in the areas where child labour concentration is much higher. These areas should get priority.
5. Wage earning schemes are like pain killers and give temporary relief. None of the programmes under the anti-poverty umbrella is executed in a way as may provide a lasting solution. Enough local initiative and discretion is needed to mould and share the programmes as per local needs.

6. Minimum wage act should be strictly followed and the act concerning it should be amended and reformulated to avoid loopholes in them.
7. The state of education should be improved. The policy of free and compulsory education of children up to age of 14 should be faithfully implemented.
8. Vocational training should be provided to child workers to make them educationally independent.
9. Public should be made aware about the evils of child labour. Media, social organisation's and workers and individuals can do a lot in this direction.
10. The child labour laws should be made more stringent and strict and should be implemented in the right earnest.

We hope that these measures would bring some results. Child labour could not be weeded out despite several legislations enacted by government from time to time. It needs a change in our social attitude. Social awareness is also needed to discourage the evil practice of child labour. Besides this, the tightening of laws and activating enforcement machinery is needed badly to weed out the child labour in its true perspective. Besides the government, NGO's will have to play very effective role in implementing the government schemes for children's welfare.

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