

Profile of Child Labourers in a Rural Area of West Bengal: A Cross Sectional Study

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Abstract: Background: Child labour in India is the practice where children are engaged in Economic activities. Poverty, lack of good school infrastructures and growth of informal economy are considered as the important causes of child labour in India. According to UNICEF India has the highest number of labourers in the world under 14 years of age. Objective: To describe the job pattern of Child labourers in a rural Block of West Bengal and to assess the socio-demographic characteristic of child labourers under study. Materials and Methods: A Cross sectional Observational study was conducted in Paharhati Block in the district of Burdwan, West Bengal from December 2012 to February 2013 among children aged 5 to 14 years. Assuming 6.8% of the 5-14 years population engaged in child labour, the estimated study population would be about 2080. About 5% of this estimated study population i.e. 104 would be involved in the study. With design effect of 2, the number would be 208 and was selected through 30 cluster sampling and about 7 child labourers per cluster were gathered by 'Snowball' technique was used for data collection. Data was compiled and analyzed by SPSS 16.0 and presented in tables as proportions. Results: The study done on 210 participants revealed that Mean age of participants was 12 years. Male participants 72.4% and Female 27.6%. Majority of participants belonged to Hindu community i.e 63.3% and 67.1% child labourers were from locality. 51.9% had primary education and rest were illiterate. 54.8% belonged to nuclear family and 63.3% from lower socioeconomic status. Mean duration of present working was 34 months and mean duration of each shift was 8.23 hours mainly in afternoon session (66.7%). 47.6% had addictions to different substances and 17.6% were engaged in regular Gambling. 40% participants were happy about their present situation of life and 60% were unhappy. 71% children belonged to illiterate mothers. Force by parents(47.65) was major cause of school dropout and poverty (43.85%) was main cause of working. Salary/wages were taken and spent by fathers in 58.6% cases and fathers mainly abused children(41%). Proper legislation, imposition of penalties can not only solve problems. Government, NGOs and common people should work jointly for permanent solution of the problem.

I. Background:

Child labour in India is the practice where children engaged in Economic activities, on part time or full time basis. The practice deprives children of their childhood and is harmful to their physical and mental development. Poverty, lack of good school infrastructures and growth of informal economy are considered as the important causes of child labour in India¹. UNICEF estimated that India has the highest number of labourers in the world under 14 years of age. ILO and FAO estimated that 60% to 70% of child labour is deployed in agricultural and related activities. Outside of agriculture, child labour is observed in almost all informal sectors of Indian Economy².

The study relating to the issue of child labour in rural area of West Bengal is not very prominent and the present study is planned to supplement the existing information, if present.

Objectives:

1. To describe the job pattern of Child labourers in a rural Block of West Bengal.
2. To assess the socio-demographic characteristic of child labourers under study.

II. Methodology:

This was a cross sectional observational descriptive study done in the Paharhati Block in the district of Burdwan, West Bengal in the study Period December 2012 to February 2013. Study Population consisted of all children aged 5 to 14 years of the selected block.

Sample size and sampling design: The Paharhati block of Burdwan district was chosen purposively. As per the 'Health On The March' (published by the 'State Bureau of Health Intelligence' West Bengal), the

percentage of rural population belongs to the age group 5-14 years is about 18%. It comes to about 30600 in the selected block (considering its population of about 170000). Assuming 6.8% of the 5-14 years population engaged in child labour⁹. the estimated study population would be about 2080. About 5% of this estimated study population i.e. 104 would be involved in the study. With design effect of 2, the number would be 208 and was selected through 30 cluster sampling technique i.e. 10% of the study population would be involved and about 7 child labourers per cluster were gathered by ‘Snowball’ technique for data collection.

Study variables: *Dependent*- profile of work (duration, nature of work, shift, working hours, wages, safety measures, resting time, working conditions, holiday, recreation/amusement,); *Independent*-age, gender, literacy status (self), literacy status of parents, occupation of parents, type of family, SES of the family, status of other sibling etc.

Study Tool: Predesigned and pretested schedule for interview

Technique of data collection: Interview

Data collection: Collection information was started after getting approval from Ethics committee of R.G. Kar Medical College. Block Medical Officer of Health (BMOH) of Paharhati Block Primary Health Centre (BPHC) was be informed. The child labourer was gathered by the help of Snowball technique and information pertaining to various objectives was collected using predesigned and pretested schedule after getting verbal consent from their parents / employers / owners. During interview the participants were secluded. For gathering the study subjects, the help of Panchayat Raj Institution (PRI) personnel and other community leaders like teachers, General practitioners and grass-root level health workers were sought.

Statistical analysis: The data analyzed with SPSS: 16 software .Presented in tables as proportions.

III. Results:

The study done on 210 participants revealed that Mean age of participants was 12 years. Male participants 72.4% and Female 27.6%. Majority of participants belonged to Hindu community i.e 63.3% and 67.1% child labourers were from locality . 51.9% had primary education and rest were illiterate. 54.8% belonged to nuclear family and 63.3% from lower socioeconomic status. Mean duration of present working was 34 months and Mean duration of each shift was 8.23 hours mainly in afternoon session (66.7%) . 47.6% had addictions to different substances and 17.6% were engaged in regular Gambling. 40% participants were happy about their present situation of life and 60% were unhappy.

Table No.1: Distribution of the participants according to sociodemographic background (n=210)

Parameters	Number	Percentage
Literacy status of mothers:		
Illiterate	149	71.0
Primary	30	14.3
Expired	31	14.8
Main earning member of family:		
Father	116	55.2
Mother	36	17.1
Self	58	27.6
Occupation of Fathers:		
Bidi binder	30	14.3
Coal mine worker	22	10.5
Farmer	53	25.2
Rickshaw puller	12	5.7
Unemployed	48	22.9
Van puller	21	10
Expired	24	11.4

Table No.2: Distribution of the participants according to cause of school dropout and working (n=210)

Parameters	Number	Percentage
Causes of school dropout:		
Force by parents	100	47.6
Illness of parents	21	10.0
Poverty	89	42.4
Cause of working		
Force by parents	87	41.4
Illness of parents	31	14.8

Poverty	92	43.8
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Table No.3: Distribution of the participants according to working profile (n=210)

Parameters	Number	Percentage
Working hours:		
Morning	59	28.1
Afternoon	140	66.7
Night	11	5.2
Night stay at:		
Home	111	52.9
Owner's home	36	17.1
Work place	63	30
Salary/wages taken and spent by:		
Father	123	58.6
Mother	55	26.2
Self	32	15.2

Table No.4: Distribution of the participants according to being abused (n=210)

Parameters	Number	Percentage
Abuse by:		
Father	86	41.0
Mother	54	25.7
Owner	70	33.3

IV. Discussion:

UNICEF reports on child labour suggested that poverty is the main cause of child labour in society and girls are two times more likely to be working in domestic roles and more chance of school dropout among them³. A BBC report concluded that poverty and inadequate public educational infrastructure were main causes of child labour⁴. A 2012 Wall street journal reported that though the enrollments in Indian schools had increased, the poor facilities, long distance from home and poor quality of education led to early school dropout and directed towards child labour⁵. ILO published that the number of child workers around the world is more than 13% of under 14 children. It also showed that in rural India 80% of child labourers are employed in agriculture and allied occupations⁶. In my study it was observed that . Majority of children were engaged in agricultural works. Force by parents(47.65) was major cause of school dropout and poverty (43.85%) was main cause of working. According to State plan of action 2003 report released by WB government, state incidence of child labour was higher than that of national average. In West Bengal children were employed in large numbers in agricultural activities, household works and small scale industries. Poverty was main cause⁷. Devendra Sareen et al. showed in a study done in Udaipur district that poor socioeconomic status of family (56.5%) was the principal factor behind child labour and Illiteracy of parents was also a major contributing factor⁸.

V. Conclusion:

A good number of child labourers are in the hazardous and dangerous industries. Irrespective of the area educational level of the mothers, overcrowding in the family, poverty, presence of unemployed or addicted members in the family, religion etc. were noted with the problem working child. There is a need to protect the children, reduction in family size, and promote parental education and economic empowerment in order to reduce the urge on children to perform economic roles. Proper legislation, imposition of penalties can not only solve problems. Government, NGO s and common people should work jointly for permanent solution

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