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Knowledge of adolescent girls regarding child labour

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Abstract

The present study focuses on knowledge of adolescent girls regarding child labour in Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh. A sample of 112 school going girls of age 14 to 18 years was identified from five villages from two blocks of Kangra district. A questionnaire consisting of aspects of Child labour and its prohibitions was developed and administered. All adolescent girls were given questionnaire to fill regarding their knowledge on child labour. It was observed that majority of adolescent girls were not aware of the involvement of child labourers in various occupations. Majority of the respondents did not respond to the duration of the time beyond which a child can not work in the occupation. More than one third of the respondents reported that it is an offence to make children work with machines.

Key words: Adolescent girls, child, labour, knowledge.

Introduction

Creating a safe and healthy world for our children is an important a task as any that exists. But millions of children world wide are trapped in mind numbing subsistence level labour of little economic value which saps the creativity and learning potential of the entire community of future workers. The complex issue of child labour is a developmental issue worth investigating. The notion that children are being exploited and forced into labour, while not receiving education crucial to development, concerns many people.

It is painful reality of our world that million of children are foresting their childhood to child labour and India is the largest example of nation plagued by the problem of child labour. Instead of spending their years in school with learning, laughter and love unlike other children, they are carrying the heavy burden of wage earning on their backs. Most of the children work after the age of six or seven. They help around running errands or spending time helping their parents on the family forms. Child labour in India is more of a rural than urban phenomenon. Ninety per cent of the working children in the rural areas are employed in agriculture and allied activities. Child labor can be factory work, mining or quarrying, agriculture, helping in the parents' business, having one's own small business (for example selling food), or doing odd jobs. Some children work as guides for tourists, sometimes combined with bringing in business for shops and restaurants where they may also work as waiters (BBC News, 2007). Other children are forced to do tedious and repetitive jobs such as assembling boxes or polishing shoes. However, rather than in factories and sweetshops, most child labor occurs in the informal sector, "selling on the street, at work in agriculture or hidden away in house-far from the reach of official labor inspectors and from media scrutiny" (UNICEF, 1997).

The unorganized and informal sectors, both in rural and urban areas, account for almost the entire child labour force. What are the causes of child labour in India? How do governmental policies affect it and what role does education play in regards to child labour in India? These are the questions, which can be answered through an analysis of the problem of child labour. Children working as Laborer are present in all three sectors of Indian economy, the Agrarian, Industrial and the service sectors. There are several forms of child labour-migrant labour, invisible labour, bonded labour, wage based labour/ self employed and so on. The number of child labour in India varies from 11 million to over 1000 million. Child labour is defined as that segment of the child population which participates in work either paid or unpaid. It also denotes use of children, purely motive, either by the family or society. Child labour is the phenomenon of poverty and more of social attitudes, exploitation, compulsions and sensibilities. Keeping in view the above explanation, the present study was undertaken to assess the awareness of adolescent girls regarding child labour.

Material and Methods

A total sample of 112 girls belonging to the age group of 14-18 years was selected from two blocks i.e. Panchrukhi and Bhawarna of

district Kangra of H.P. A total of five villages were selected from blocks, two villages i.e. Paruar and Bhawarna from Bhawarna block and three villages i.e. Tatehal, Banuri and Rajpur from Panchrukhi block. Senior secondary schools were contacted to obtain the list of girls belonging to 14-18 years of age. Out of that list girls were randomly selected. Hence from Bhawarna 54 girls were selected and from Panchrukhi 58 girls were selected thus making a total of 112 girls. Survey was done on 112 girls regarding their knowledge on Child labour, its prohibitions and the reasons of prohibition. The tools consisted of a self-structured questionnaire consisting of aspects of Child labour.

Result and Discussion

Majority of adolescent girls in Table 1 revealed that they do not possess knowledge about prohibitions under child labour act. While only 26.7 percent of them reported that respondents less than 14 years should not work. Only 7.1 per cent of girls reported that children less than 18 years should not work as a child labour and only 5.3 percent of the respondents observed that punishment should be given to employer those who force the children in this act.

In a study conducted by Shah and Sharma (1992) on adolescent's knowledge regarding child labour revealed that 79 % of children were not aware about child labor act and the punishments that can be enforced on employers who force children into work as child labourers. It is indicated from table 2 that 28.5 % of the respondents were aware that children work as child labours in factories. It is followed by labour work (17.8%). On the other hand 11.7 per cent respondents were aware that child labourers are also engaged in doing housework. It can be seen that these adolescent girls were not aware of the involvement of child labourers in hotels/ Dhabas, garage, making houses, working with machines or cleaning roads. The results of the study are in line with a research conducted by Devi and Geetha (2005) on 50 working children, it was found that 36 per cent of the children were working as goldsmiths and another 38 per cent were working as casual labourers doing menial jobs. Eighteen per cent of the boys were helping in workshops and 8 per cent of the boys were sales boys. Further it shows that half of the respondents were aware that the child labour act prohibits children to work due to the risks of having accidents during work. Whereas 20.5 per cent reported it to their tender age. On the other hand other significant reasons like their future is not secure, health problems or physical and mental effects are not reported by the respondents, which show that adolescents were lacking in the knowledge about child labour act and its reasons of prohibitions. The results of the present study were in consonance with findings of study by Jacob and Sekar (2005) reported that many of the jobs children do are harmful for their physical development. The manner of their employment, the nature of their work and the conditions under which they are often employed subject them to severe health and safety hazards.

Table 1. Knowledge regarding prohibitions under child labour act

Particulars	Total %age (N=112)	V1 (n=18)	V2 (n=20)	V3 (n=34)	V4 (n=20)	V5 (n=20)
Children less than 14 years should not work	30 (26.7)	-	14 (70)	8 (23.5)	4 (20)	4 (20)
Under 14 yrs children should be educated	7 (6.2)	5 (27.7)	3 (15)	2 (5.8)	-	-
Children less than 18 years should not work	8 (7.1)	1 (5.5)	-	1 (2.9)	4 (20)	2 (10)
Children under 13 years should not work	2 (1.8)	-	-	-	2 (10)	-
Punishment should be given to employer	6 (5.3)	-	2 (10)	4 (11.7)	-	-

Figures in parenthesis denote percentages

Table 2. Awareness regarding prohibited occupation under child labour act

Particulars	Total %age (N=112)	V1 (n=18)	V2 (n=20)	V3 (n=34)	V4 (n=20)	V5 (n=20)
Prohibited occupations						
Factories	32 (28.5)	8 (44.5)	8 (40)	8 (23.5)	7 (35)	1 (5)
Labour work	20 (17.8)	4 (22.2)	5 (25)	5 (14.7)	2 (10)	4 (20)
Housework	13 (11.7)	-	2 (10)	5 (14.7)	6 (30)	-
Lifting heavy loads	6 (5.3)	-	-	5 (14.7)	1 (5)	-
Mining	2 (1.8)	-	1 (5)	1 (2.9)	-	-
Alcohol shops	3 (2.6)	1 (5)	1 (5)	-	-	1 (5)
Hotels, dhabas	5 (4.4)	3 (15)	-	-	2 (10)	-
Garage	2 (1.8)	-	1 (5)	-	1 (5)	-
Making houses	5 (4.4)	-	-	3 (8.8)	1 (5)	1 (5)
Working with machines	1 (.8)	-	1 (5)	2 (5.8)	-	-
Cleaning roads	1 (.8)	-	1 (5)	-	-	-
Why does law prohibit						
No response	21 (18.7)	3 (16.7)	4 (20)	4 (11.7)	3 (15)	7 (35)
Any accident can occur	56 (50)	1 (55.6)	7 (35)	16 (47)	10 (50)	13 (65)
Because of small age	23 (20.5)	5 (27.7)	6 (30)	5 (14.7)	5 (25)	2(10)
Future is destroyed	1 (.8)	1(5.5)	-	-	-	-
Health deteriorates	9 (8)	-	3(15)	5 (14.7)	1 (5)	-
Physical and mental effect	4 (3.6)	-	-	3 (8.8)	1 (5)	-

Figures in parenthesis denote percentages

Children are particularly at risk from endemic and parasitic diseases, diseases of respiratory tract, dermatitis and fatal accidents. Child workers in industries are faced with serious risks to their health and physical development. There are claims that children's brains are detrimentally affected due to exposure to lead poisoning, the risk of occupational disease, accidents are higher among child workers because their growing bodies are not as strong as adult workers.

It is revealed from the table 3 that half of the respondents did not have knowledge about number of hours children devote at work in various occupations. Whereas 18.7 per cent of the respondents reported that children devote 1-2 hours at work. On the other hand 2.6 per cent respondents reported it as more than 6 hours. Majority of the respondents did not respond to the duration of the time beyond which a child can not work in the occupation. More than one third of the respondents reported that it is an offence to make children work with machines. A study conducted by Devi and Geetha (2005) revealed that about 54 percent of children worked for 4-8 hours and 46 per cent worked for more than 8 hours. About 64 percent of children had work experience ranging between 2 to 5 years and the remaining have less than 2 years of work experience.

Conclusion

On reviewing the knowledge level of rural adolescent girls regarding child labour the major conclusion that emerged was that girls had little knowledge about child labour act and the prohibitions which are enforced under this act. Lack of knowledge is due to various other factors like illiteracy, poverty, lack of awareness in parents and community as well. Therefore adolescents and parents have to be educated to understand the importance of schooling. This plays a vital role in determining child schooling and employment. Relying on government alone will not bring success. It should be a joint effort of the entire community. Greater awareness must be created among parents in not sending children for work but rather to school. The effects of child labour to the child him/herself and to the nation at large must be told to the people. To overcome child labour adult employment must be strengthened and a attitudinal change is needed to overcome this problem. Society should not forget that the development of India as a nation is hampered by child labour and it is the legitimate duty of the government and society to tackle this problem of child labour.

Table 3. Knowledge regarding time at which children are not permitted to work

Particulars	Total %age (N=112)	V1 (n=18)	V2 (n=20)	V3 (n=34)	V4 (n=20)	V5 (n=20)
Hours children work						
No response	57 (50.8)	8 (44.5)	4 (20)	21 (61.7)	11 (55)	13 (65)
1-2	21 (18.7)	6 (33.3)	6 (30)	3 (8.8)	2 (10)	4 (20)
3-4	19 (17)	4 (22.2)	5 (25)	6 (17.6)	2 (10)	2 (10)
5-6	11 (9.8)	1 (5.5)	4 (20)	2 (5.8)	3(15)	1 (5)
More than 6hours	3 (2.6)	-	2 (10)	1 (2.9)	-	-
Time at which children are not permitted						
No response	100 (89.2)	17(94.4)	18 (90)	30 (88.2)	17 (85)	17 (85)
After two hour	1 (.8)	1 (5.5)	-	-	-	-
2pm- 4pm	2 (1.8)	-	1 (5)	-	1 (5)	1 (5)
4pm- 9pm	4 (3.6)	-	1 (5)	-	1 (5)	2 (10)
Night hours	2 (1.8)	-	-	2 (5.8)	-	-
9pm-5am	3 (2.6)	-	-	2 (5.8)	1 (5)	-
Offence to make children work with machines	44 (39.2)	5 (27.7)	10 (50)	10 (29.4)	8 (40)	11 (55)

Figures in parenthesis denote percentages

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