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## Child Labor

*Ananya Gupta<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Reshma Umair<sup>2</sup>*

Amity Law School,  
Amity University, Lucknow

### ABSTRACT :

Despite decades of growth and legislation, child labor is still a major socioeconomic problem in India. With an emphasis on India's particular difficulties as a populous, developing country, this essay explores the extent, causes, effects, and current remedies to child labor. It emphasizes the relationship between poverty, educational disparities, and enforcement shortcomings while offering workable solutions to achieve global goals, like the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8.7 to end child labor by 2025. It does this by drawing on recent statistics and policy analysis. It remains a persistent problem and is among the oldest in our culture. As a direct result of the industrial revolution, it evolved throughout this time from laboring in tiny handicraft workshops or in agriculture to working hard in urban factories.

**Keywords** - Child labor Causes Consequences Challenges Poverty Education

### Introduction

Child labor is defined as an activity that is extremely detrimental to a child's physical and mental development and deprives them of their childhood, potential, strength, peace, and dignity. A long-standing evil throughout human history is child labor. Throughout history, children were subjected to many forms of exploitation. This issue is prevalent in underdeveloped and impoverished nations. As a direct outcome of the industrial revolution, child labor evolved from working in tiny handicraft workshops or in agriculture to being forced to work in urban factories. Due to their extremely low pay, low strike rate, and ease of manipulation, children become extremely profitable assets.

Child labor is caused by a number of circumstances, including socioeconomic inequality and limited educational opportunities. When it comes to defining the boundaries of child labor, religious and cultural views can be misleading and covert. Child work hinders children's intellectual, emotional, and physical development.

(organization, 2021)

### Review

Child labor is an activity that harms children's physical and mental development and robs them of their youth, potential, leisure, serenity, and dignity. An evil that has existed throughout human history is child labor. At different ages, children have been exploited to varied degrees. The poorest of the poor and developing countries are particularly affected by this problem. Due in major part to the Industrial Revolution, child labor swiftly moved from laboring in tiny handicraft businesses or in agricultural settings to urban factories. Since they may be paid very little, are less likely to go on strike, and are simpler to control, children are desirable assets for employment. Among the variables contributing to child labor are socioeconomic inequalities and unequal access to education. The boundaries of child work can be obscured and distorted to some degree by cultural and religious beliefs. Child labor is caused by a variety of factors, such as poverty, parental financial strain, inadequate education, increased conflict, mass migration, gender inequality, and many more. Health risks, deprivation of education, development, or human rights, as well as the potential for group fragmentation and national repercussions, are all consequences of child labor. The threat can be controlled and addressed in a variety of ways, including by enforcing strict laws, educating children, giving them financial support, and rehabilitating children who have been harmed by child abuse. CSR offering children free education, offering children legal assistance, and a host of other measures were able to rationalize the problem of child labor. Children are also protected by the constitution's provisions, which include the right against exploitation (Article 23), the prohibition of employment in hazardous work (Article 24), the requirement that children attend school from the age of six to fourteen, and the prohibition that children be placed in environments that are not appropriate for their age or strength (Article 39). Some ILO, UNESCO, and other journal studies addressed the statistics and facts about the amount of children working as child laborers.

## Methodology

This paper is a mixed-methods study designed to thoroughly discuss the problem of child labor with specific reference to the Indian situation. It brings together qualitative and quantitative methods in an attempt to gain a whole picture of the extent, cause, effects, and possible resolutions to child labor.

### 1. Data Collection

**Document Analysis:** There will be a comprehensive examination of the literature that includes academic publications, international organization reports (like those of the ILO and UNICEF), government reports, and legal texts (like the Child Labor (Prohibition and Regulation) Act). This will determine the historical context, the current figures, and the legal situation of child labor.

**Statistical Data Analysis:** Quantitative data on child labor prevalence, demographics of child laborers, and related socio-economic indicators will be gathered and analyzed. Data sources will include:

Census of India

Employment and Unemployment Survey (EUS)

Periodic Labor Force Survey (PLFS)

India Human Development Survey

India Time Use Survey

Reports from the International Labor Organization (ILO) and UNICEF

**Policy Analysis:** A review of current policies and programs in place to combat child labor in India. This will include the assessment of the effectiveness of such policies, the gaps, and recommendations for strengthening them.

### 2. Data Analysis

**Qualitative Analysis:** The qualitative data collected from the literature review will be analyzed thematically to determine the key drivers of child labor, the different forms it exists, and its effect on children and society.

**Quantitative Analysis:** Statistical information will be analyzed by applying descriptive statistics to portray the existing situation of child labor in India. Comparative analysis will be employed to spot trends and patterns.

**Integrated Analysis:** The quantitative and qualitative findings will be cross-cutting to help provide a detailed and richer understanding of the problem. This will entail determination of how the statistical patterns overlap with the lived experiences and wider socio-economic environment of child labor in India.

### 3. Scope and Limitations

The scope of the paper shall chiefly concern child labor in India. The international statistics and global approaches will be taken into account, but the emphasis will lie with the particular challenges and reactions in the Indian setting.

Limitations of the study might include the availability of data and its reliability, and the difficulty in measuring the extent of child labor because of the informal nature and the likelihood that it exists in hidden form.

### 4. Ethical Considerations

The study will be carried out ethically, with the utmost care that all information is utilized responsibly and the privacy of individuals is not compromised.

The analysis will be unbiased and objective, seeking to present a true and balanced picture of the problem of child labor.

## Meaning of Child Labor

The term "child labor" describes the exploitation of children in the workplace, which robs them of their youth, potential, and dignity.

Child labor encompasses any type of work that poses a risk to a child's physical, mental, social, or moral development.

Work that requires them to leave school early or prohibits them from attending is also considered child labor.

Whether a particular sort of job is considered child labor relies on a number of elements, such as the age of the child, the nature of the activity, the hours worked, the working environment, and national regulations.

varying countries may have varying definitions of child labor, and different businesses within a same nation may employ it differently. (fund, 2020)

### Historical Context

1. *Pre-Independence Era:* Children traditionally worked in agriculture and crafts, often seen as part of family survival rather than exploitation.
2. *Post-Independence:* Industrialization and urbanization increased demand for cheap labor, shifting child labor into hazardous sectors like mining, fireworks, and textiles.
3. *Legislative Evolution:* Introduction of laws like the Child Labor (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986, and its 2016 amendment banned employment of children under 14 years of age except in family enterprises.

### Causes of Child Labor in India

In this in-depth article, we will explore the ten primary causes of child labor in India.

#### 1. Poverty

In India, the main factor causing child labor is poverty. Child labor is frequently used by impoverished families as a means of subsistence. Child work is seen as a means of providing financial support for families by parents who are unable to afford clothing, food, and shelter. The government must realize that measures to reduce poverty are necessary to address the underlying causes of child labor. The main goal of government initiatives should be to raise awareness of the value of education and how it may help parents find better jobs for their kids in the future.

## **2. Economic Pressures on Families**

Child labor may be used by families to augment their little income when they are experiencing financial strains from underemployment, unemployment, or growing debt. This is frequently a devastating decision taken in a moment of extreme need.

By providing parents with access to MNREGA employment possibilities and other social welfare programs, the Indian government must work to end this cycle. In order to lessen their reliance on child labor, they must also enable parents to increase their financial security.

## **3. Lack of Quality Education**

One of the biggest obstacles to breaking the cycle of child labor is a lack of high-quality education. In India, many kids lack access to good or even respectable schools. Children are more likely to work when they lack access to high-quality education.

The best way to transform lives is via education. In addition to working hard to guarantee that every child has access to high-quality education, the government should help them see beyond their current circumstances by facilitating their access to government advantages like educational materials and scholarships.

## **4. Lack of Child Labor Awareness**

One factor contributing to the problem is a lack of knowledge about the terrible effects of child labor. Some families are completely unaware of the emotional, psychological, and physical harm that child labor causes to their kids.

Campaigns to raise awareness of the dangers of child labor are essential. To end this horrible problem, it is essential to hold workshops, seminars, and awareness campaigns to educate families, communities, and legislators on the importance of ending child labor.

## **5. Conflicts & Mass Migration**

Mass migrations and conflict situations, which can be brought on by natural disasters, internal strife, or unstable economies, can upend families and expose kids to the most hazardous types of work, frequently with no assistance.

Governments have a crucial role to play in helping children in places devastated by violence and mass migration. For instance, they can help raise the standard of living for children affected by conflict by offering them services, counseling, and educational opportunities to help them reconstruct their lives.

## **6. Gender Disparities**

Gender disparities contribute significantly to child labor since, in particular, girls face discrimination, are more likely to perform unpaid household work, and are often prevented from attending school to learn and simply be children.

## **7. Natural Disasters & Climate Change**

For vulnerable and marginalized groups, natural disasters—such as floods, droughts, other climate disasters, and climate-related situations—often occur at the worst possible time. Children frequently view this as their sole chance to work and provide for their families when families and children lose their means of subsistence due to environmental effects.

## **8. Demand for Cheap Labor**

Child labor is a result of the need for inexpensive labor in the home, agricultural, and production sectors. Some businesses can readily take advantage of children who are typically oblivious to their rights and unable to defend themselves since they are motivated by cost.

## **9. Lack of Stringent Legislation**

Child labor persists because of lax rules that are occasionally not enforced. Although India has made progress in enacting legislation to combat child labor, there are still gaps and inconsistent implementation.

In order to guarantee that the legislative and policy framework is robust, all-encompassing, and free from potential exploitation, we have a duty to actively participate in debates at all levels, including the policy level.

## 10. Lure of Cheap Labor

In certain cases, young children are enticed to enter the workforce by the prospect of independence and the belief that it offers them the chance to achieve financial success.

Through children's collectives, the government must empower children to make decisions about their own destiny. The government must give kids the knowledge and skills they need to be employable, have a respectable and safe future, and avoid being forced into exploitative work.

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## Current Statistics of Child Labor in the World

According to the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2002), there are 211 million child laborers worldwide, of whom 73 million are under the age of ten, 126 million engage in the most severe types of child labor, and over 8 million are held as slaves for prostitution, pornography, armed conflict, domestic work, and trafficking. Every year, work-related accidents claim the lives of around 20,000 children. Africa employs around one-third of the world's youngsters.<sup>i</sup>

According to the UNICEF Report of 2020 on the Estimates of Child Labor, 160 million children worldwide—97 million boys and 63 million girls—were engaged in child labor at the start of 2020. Child labor is defined as work that jeopardizes a child's health and development and impedes their ability to receive an education. Child labor has steadily decreased in a variety of places; for instance, across Asia and the Pacific, the number of children engaged in child labor fell from 62.1 million in 2016 to 48.7 million in the beginning of 2020. However, unless the region attains an average rate of child labor cessation by 2025, it is anticipated to fall short of the 8.7 Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target, which calls for a yearly decrease of 35%.

The region is predicted to have 22.7 million children working in child labor in 2030 and 33.4 million children working in child labor in 2025 if immediate action is not taken.

(Child Labor and Schooling in India: A Reappraisal, 2024)

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## Current Scenario of Child Labor in India

**Total child population (5-14 years) in India:** 259.6 million (Census 2011).

For the years 2011–12 and 2018–19, estimates of child labor and child work in India are available. A summary of earlier estimates is provided below, along with estimates derived from data analysis done for this paper. According to the 2011 Census of India, 11.8 million children between the ages of 5 and 17 were employed as primary laborers (those working more than six months). (See Kim, Jihye, Wendy Olsen, 2020)<sup>ii</sup>

12.9 million children between the ages of 5 and 17 were involved in economic activity in the year prior to the survey, according to analysis done for this research using data from the Employment and Unemployment Survey (EUS) 2011/12. According to an analysis of the 2018–19 Periodic Labor Force Survey (PLFS 2018/19), about 5 million children between the ages of 5 and 17—or 2% of all children—were involved in economic activity in India.

Approximately 13.2 million children were engaged in child labor, which is equivalent to 4% of all children in the 5–17 age group, according to estimates derived by combining the EUS 2011/12 and the India Human Development Survey 2011/12. These estimates included children working in hazardous industries as well as those who worked long hours in economic activities or household chores.<sup>iii</sup>

The ILO calculated that 5.8 million children between the ages of 5 and 17—or 1.9% of all children in this age group—were employed in specified hazardous sectors and occupations using EUS 2011/12. (ILO, 2015)<sup>iv</sup>

Another study indicated that roughly 7% of children aged 6 to 17 were engaged in child labor in 2019. This finding was based on the 2019 India Time Use Survey, which permits a detailed description of activities performed by children, including home duties. (A Time-use Perspective on Dangerous Types of Child Labor in India, 2023). [Kim, Jihye, and Wendy Olsen, "Development in Practice, vol. 33 no. 2, 2023, pp. 190–204; Harmful Forms of Child Labor in India from a Time-use Perspective] The estimated number of children engaged in child labor in India ranged from 1.8 million (0.7 percent of all children aged 5–17 years), according to analyses of data from PLFS 2018/19 done for this study. The estimated number of children in child labor in India varied from 1.8 million (0.7 percent of all children aged 5–17 years) using the national definition to 3.3 million (1.3 percent of children) using the most comprehensive international definition, according to analyses of data from PLFS 2018/19 carried out for this report. As part of this paper, analyses of PLFS 2018/19 and EUS 2011/12 show comparable socioeconomic trends in child labor and child work. Nearly half of youngsters who work do so within their family.

Almost half of them work in the agricultural sector, while a third are in the industrial sector, which includes manufacturing and construction. Between 14 and 17 percent of youngsters who worked were employed in the service industry. Given that children's domestic work is often underreported, particularly for girls who perform a greater proportion of household duties, the gender aspects of child labor require further attention.

Work participation among children aged 5–17 years tends to be:

- higher among older children;

- higher among boys than girls;
- higher among children residing in rural rather than urban areas;
- higher among Scheduled Tribe children than those belonging to other castes;
- higher among Muslim children than those belonging to other religions; and
- higher among children belonging to the poorest households.

Patterns of child labor were similar as well; the primary distinction was that, in 2018–19, industry accounted for the biggest share of child labor. After services and other sectors, agriculture was the second-largest sector.

India and other nations have worked very hard to combat the most severe type of child labor. Nonetheless, 33.1% and 56.4% of children between the ages of 5 and 14 are employed in the agricultural sector. Children in India are compelled to work in order to pay off family debt. In addition to working in the most dangerous and potentially fatal conditions, they are coerced into engaging in commercial sexual exploitation, human trafficking, or are abducted or coerced into joining terrorist organizations. (Child Labor and Forced Labor Reports in India, 2014) <sup>v</sup>

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## Consequences of Child Labor

The consequences faced have a far-reaching impact on the child, society, and the nation as a whole:

### 1) *Child Consequences:*

**Health Risks:** It exposes kids to harmful work-related risks, physical and psychological maltreatment, and extended workdays that can harm their physical and mental development.

**Education Deprivation:** Child workers are often denied access to education, which results in low literacy rates, limited possibilities, and poverty-stricken children and families.

**Stunted Development:** Because child labor keeps kids from engaging in healthy play, socializing, and maintaining their mental health, it hinders their ability to grow physically, cognitively, and emotionally.

### 2) *Societal Consequences:*

**Undermining Human Rights:** It violates children's fundamental rights by depriving them of their right to education, their right to safety, and their right to live in a healthy and safe environment.

**Poverty and inequality:** Children contribute very little to the family's income and obstruct any long-term prospects for their financial future, which leaves families trapped in a never-ending cycle of poverty.

**Social Disintegration:** When children are lured into the workforce at the expense of care and education, it upends family and community systems. Intergenerational poverty and the disintegration of social institutions might result from this compromised system.

### 3) *National Consequences:*

**Economic Repercussions:** It prevents children from receiving an education, which results in a workforce with low skill levels, less productivity, and fewer prospects for employment in the future.

**Lost Human Capital:** As a result of children's education and talents being withheld, future human capital is lost. The competitiveness of the country and its chances for sustainable development are affected by this loss.

**Social welfare expenses:** The nation bears the social and health costs of the physical and mental effects. In order to meet the demands of health care and social welfare costs, the federal, state, and local governments must spend funding in ways that may compromise other essential needs.

There are moral and ethical reasons why child labor is inappropriate. In 1989, a historic event that recognized children as human beings with rights rather than as someone else's property, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) became the first organization to ratify the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Work that puts a kid's health at risk and prevents them from receiving an education is known as child labor. Children who work for their parents are not excluded under the existing law.

## Remedies for Child Labor in India

Child labor is a major issue in India, but several steps can be taken to reduce and eliminate it. Here are some effective remedies:

### **I. Strengthening Laws and Enforcement**

Strict Law Enforcement: Strengthen the Juvenile Justice Act of 2015 and the Child Labor (Prohibition and Regulation) Act of 1986.

Enhanced Penalties: Employers of minors will face harsher penalties.

Frequent Inspections: Perform unexpected inspections of farms, industries, and other establishments.

### **II. Education and Awareness**

Free & Compulsory Education – It has been more than 10 years since the implementation of the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009. Make sure the Act is fully implemented.

Vocational Training: Offer older kids a skill-based education as an option.

Awareness campaigns: Inform employers and parents about the negative effects of child work.

### **III. Economic Support for Families**

Financial Aid: To lessen reliance on kid income, give impoverished families financial assistance.

Adult Employment: Increase parental employment options to help them avoid using child labor.

Self-help groups and microfinance can help families start small companies.

### **IV. Rehabilitation of Child Laborers**

Rescue & Rehabilitation Centers: Create shelters run by NGOs and the government.

Counseling & Support: Provide rescued youngsters with psychological support.

Reintegration into Schools: Children can return to school with the aid of special bridge courses.

### **V. Role of NGOs & Civil Society**

Rescue Operations: Child laborers are rescued by NGOs like CRY and Bachpan Bachao Andolan.

NGOs provide advocacy and legal assistance in matters pertaining to child labor.

Community Involvement: Motivate residents to report instances of child labor.

### **VI. Corporate Responsibility & Consumer Action**

Ethical Sourcing: Businesses should make sure that their supplier chains don't employ child labor.

Customer Awareness: Motivate consumers to purchase goods from companies that don't use child labor.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): Companies ought to fund initiatives that support children.

### **VII. Government Initiatives**

The Mid-Day Meal Scheme offers free meals to promote school attendance.

Special schools for child laborers are run by the National Child Labor Project (NCLP).

Preventing child labor through skill-based education is the goal of Skill India & Digital India.

India's Constitution, national legislation, and ratified international accords all guarantee certain rights to children impacted by child labor. These rights are intended to shield people from exploitation, guarantee their welfare, and offer chances for growth and rehabilitation.

### **VIII. Constitutional Rights**

Right to Education (Article 21-A): All children between the ages of 6 and 14 must receive free, obligatory education from the State. This entitlement is frequently denied to children who work, and attempts are undertaken to save them and reintegrate them into the educational system.

Article 23's Right Against Exploitation forbids forced labor, human trafficking, and other like acts. This clause protects children who are subjected to exploitative employment circumstances or bonded labor.

Article 24: Prohibition of Employment in dangerous Work: Children under the age of 14 are not permitted to work in mines, factories, or other dangerous enterprises. This fundamental right safeguards one's health and well-being.

Directive Principles of State Policy (Article 39): The State must make sure that children are raised in an environment of freedom and dignity and are not compelled by financial need to work in jobs that are not appropriate for their age or strength.

### ***IX. Legal Protections Under National Laws***

#### **Child and Adolescent Labor (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 (Amended 2016)**

- Prohibition: Children under the age of 14 are not allowed to work in jobs or as apprentices, with the exception of helping out in family businesses or as child artists (as long as the work is done after school hours and with the necessary safeguards).
- Adolescents (ages 14 to 18) are not allowed to work in several of the Act's identified hazardous jobs and processes.
- Right to Rescue and Rehabilitation: The law mandates that children be rescued from unlawful labor and that they be rehabilitated, which includes providing their families with financial support and education.
- Penalties: To establish responsibility, employers who violate the Act may face jail time and fines.

#### **Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 (RTE)**

- Provides for children aged 6 to 14 to attend school for free, breaking the cycle of poverty and work. 25% of seats in schools should be set aside for underprivileged student populations, such as children who have been rescued from child labor.

#### **Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015**

- provides a structure for the protection, care, and rehabilitation of underprivileged children, especially those who have been saved from forced labor. It forbids the use of children in bonded labor or dangerous jobs and imposes fines, including jail time.

- In order to guarantee that rescued children receive assistance, such as housing, schooling, and counseling, it is necessary to establish Child Welfare Committees (CWCs).

#### **Bonded Labor System (Abolition) Act, 1976**

- outlaws bonded labor, a common practice of child exploitation, and mandates the relief and rehabilitation of children impacted by it, along with financial aid and debt forgiveness.

### ***X. International Commitments***

India has ratified a number of international agreements that uphold the rights of children impacted by child labor, including:

- The 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) guarantees children's rights to participation, protection, development, and survival. It requires the state to shield youngsters from dangerous jobs and financial exploitation (Article 32).

- The rights to health, education, and protection against abuse are emphasized.

- In order to prevent minors from working in jobs that are detrimental to their development, ILO Convention No. 138 (Minimum Age Convention) sets the minimum age for employment at 15 (or 14 in some circumstances).

- The worst forms of child labor, including slavery, trafficking, prostitution, and hazardous work, must be eradicated immediately in accordance with ILO Convention No. 182 (Worst Forms of Child Labor), which also ensures the protection and rehabilitation of impacted children.

### ***XI. Practical Rights and Entitlements***

Right to Rescue: State governments and non-governmental organizations have the right to identify and rescue children engaged in exploitative work through raids and inspections.

**Right to Rehabilitation:** Through programs like the National Child Labor Project (NCLP), which offers stipends and bridge education, rescued children are entitled to financial assistance, education, and vocational training.

**Right to Health and Safety:** Children who work, particularly in dangerous jobs, are entitled to medical attention and protection from additional harm.

**Right to Legal Recourse:** Affected children or their legal representatives may file a lawsuit against their employers, and in certain situations, the law may provide fines and damages.

In conclusion, children who are impacted by child labor in India are entitled to a number of rights that are meant to safeguard their development and shield them from exploitation. Even while the legal framework is strong, putting these rights into practice still depends on how well it is implemented.

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## Findings

Child labor in India reflects deep structural challenges—poverty, education deficits, and weak governance—that defy quick fixes. While progress is evident, with a 65% reduction in child laborers from 2001 to 2011, the 2025 SDG target looms large. A multi-pronged approach, blending robust policy, economic support, and societal change, is essential to free India's children from exploitation and secure their futures.

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## Conclusion

Child labor is a persistent global challenge rooted in poverty and systemic inequalities, with devastating effects on children's health, education, and future prospects. While significant progress has been made—evidenced by declining numbers over recent decades—the rise in child labor in regions like Asia, specifically speaking in India, signals that more work is needed. Ending child labor by 2025, as targeted by the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, requires sustained investment in education, economic support, and enforcement of protective laws. Only through collective action can societies ensure that every child enjoys a childhood free from exploitation. Eliminating child labor in India requires a combined effort from the government, society, businesses, and individuals. Education, strong enforcement, economic support, and social awareness are key to solving this issue.

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