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Socio – economic perspectives of child labour in Bihar: A study with special reference to Rohtas

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Abstract

A “Child” is defined as any person below the age of 14 years and “Adolescent” are children above 14 years. The employment of children is prohibited by ‘Child Labour and Adolescent labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986. (CLPR Act”) Bihar is the fifth poorest state in India and one of biggest employer of the child labours. In Bihar, on 13 districts accounts for 55% of child labour employment. Rohtas has also a large number child labour employed in mining, stone crushers, dhabas, domestic help etc.

Keywords: child, labour employment

Introduction

A “Child” is defined as any person below the age of 14 years. The provisions of the ‘Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 (“CLPR Act”) prohibits the employment of a child in any employment including as a domestic help ^[1]. The employment of a children between the age of 14 and 18, called “Adolescent”, is allowed except in the listed hazardous occupation and processes which including mining, inflammable substances and explosive related work and other hazardous processes as per the Factories Act, 1948. In 2006, an estimated about 1% of all the child workers, or about 120,000 children in India were in a hazardous job. The Constitution of India also prohibits the employment of children in hazardous Industry but does not prohibit employment in non-hazardous Industries under Article 24 ^[2] UNICEF estimates that with its larger population has the highest number of labourers in India. UNICEF estimates that India with its largest population, has the highest number of labourers in the world under the age of 14 years ^[3]. The International

Situation of Bihar

Bihar is the fifth poorest state and ranks lowest in school attendance of children. There are about 2.07 million workers aged between 5 and 17 and the state accounts for 10.7% of India’s underage work force and has the second highest number of child and adolescent workers. As per census of 2011, the thirteen districts together accounts for 55% of child labour in Bihar. The districts identified were Patna, Gaya, Darbhanga, Bhojpur, Araria, Muzaffarpur, East Champaran, Madhubani, Nalanda, Nawada, West Champaran, Purnia and Sitamarhi. Due to extreme poverty and discrimination, Dalit children in Bihar account for the largest section of child labours in the state, and are among the most exploited as well. The 2011 census points out that a staggering 51% of S.Cs and 56% of S.Ts. live below the line of poverty in Bihar. The feelings of untouchability and impurity prevalent in the society census discrimination in everyday life and this denies them access to basic amenities and jobs them of employment opportunities. The Dalit children who often go for studies at government school face such kind of discrimination with their schooling ^[5].

Children of the *Dom* community, who traditionally cremate the dead bodies, are not allowed to work in agriculture, As per prevalent practice, Children of Dom, Valmiki, and poor Muslim communities are forced to work only as rag pickers. Children from the *Mushar* community, now recognized as Mahadalits, are never employed in houses as domestic helpers.

If they ever manage to work in road side *dhabas* (food courts), they hide their caste. The stigma is due to the perceived belief of non-SC employers that the presence of

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the marginalized could “contaminate” their surrounds and belongings. Even in terms of wages, Dalit children are underpaid. According to them, when they accept payments in the form of grain; instead of cash, there is a clear discrimination and differential treatment. While the workers from a dalit village are given to kilograms of grain, workers of non-SC village get 15 kilograms of grain.

Situation of Rohtas

The district of Rohtas has a large number of child labour employed in various sectors. An estimated 10,000 child and adolescent labours are employed in stone mining and crushing Industries. Nearly 1200 are employed in *Dhabas* and hotels. They are also employed to carry out portable lights shaped like chandeliers and wired to a mobile generator during marriage processions. There are mostly 12 to 17 years of age. A large number of children are employed as domestic servant as well.

Conclusion

Poverty and unemployment are the main reasons for employment of children. ‘Mid-day meal ‘ scheme of government for bringing children to school has not been found much effective as such schooling deprive the children to work and earn for their families. Only the sufficient employment generation and effective literacy can solve the problem.

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