

## Child Labour in Tamil Nadu – An Economic Approach

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### Abstract

*Common sense perception of the issue is that child labour is the outcome of poverty. There are also arguments that child labour reinforces poverty. While it is true that most of the working children are drawn from the poorer segments of the population, there is also other demographic factor associated with it. Hence, this paper examines to examine child labour in Tamil Nadu and find out the general socio-economic conditions of the child labour in Tuticorin district. Mainly focused on this analyse to investigate the problem faced by child labour in their working place in study area. This study makes use of primary and secondary sources. The primary data has been collected by administering structural questionnaires. Data collected from 100 child labour, in these respondents 50 were male and 50 were female children in Tuticorin District. This study argue that Child Labour Act was implemented in India in 1986 that outlaws child labour in certain areas and set the minimum age of employment at fourteen. Eradication poverty is only the first step on the road for elimination child labour. Proper education of the children and banning child labour will help in boosting the success of the country.*

### Keywords :

Child Labour; Literacy; Health; Education; Tuticorin District

### Introduction

Children are the greatest gift to humanity and childhood is an important and impressionable stage of human development as it holds the potential to the future

development of any society. Children who are brought up in an environment, which is conducive to their intellectual, physical and social health, grow up to be responsible and productive members of society. Every nation links it is future with the present status of children. By performing work when they are too young for the task, children unduly reduce their present welfare or their future income earning capabilities, either by shrinking their future external choice sets or by reducing their own future individual productive capabilities. Under extreme economic distress, children are forced to forego educational opportunities and take up jobs which are mostly exploitative as they are usually underpaid and engaged in hazardous conditions. Parents decide to send their child for engaging in job as a desperate measure due to poor economic conditions. It is, therefore, no wonder that the poor households predominantly send their children to work in early ages of their life. One of the disconcerting aspects of child labour is that children are sent to work at the expense of education. There is strong effect of child labour on school attendance rates and the length of a child's work day is negatively associated with his or her capacity to attend school. Child labour restricts the right of children to access and benefit from education and denies the fundamental opportunity to attend school. Child labour, thus, prejudices children's adversely affects their health and safety.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Government of India, Planning Commission, Working Group for Social Inclusion of Vulnerable

## Review of Literature

Contrary to this view, Clark's study (1990) has concluded that child labour is an outcome of the individual family decisions depending on the economic status. Law can have only limited effect. Though her study is focused on textile industries in Britain, she has also drawn on the experience of other countries to strengthen the contention that individual families made decisions about the work force participation of their children on the basis of an assessment of what would be to the advantage of the family as a whole. In the view of Prof. Weiner (1991) represents a third view on the decline of child labour. He understanding of the contemporary prevalence of child labours in India not only in Indian conditions but also in those in other countries, past and present. His conclusion is that the key to eliminating child labour lies in a firmly enforced policy of compulsory schooling. He also draw to no doubt that school attendance laws were more important and more because easier to enforce than child labour laws.

In view of Dr. Vidyasagar (2001) his study focused on child labour in the home based match industries of Sivakasi in Tamil Nadu. The issue of child labour in match industry to hand-made match industry. There is availability of cheap labour, especially of children is the corner stone of hand-made match sector in this region. He concluded that working children of match industries 30 per cent were boys and 70 per cent were girls. He suggest to the need to more educational attention to this area.

## Scope of the Study

The present study attempts to examine the problems of child labour in Tamil Nadu. It examines how far the programmes have helped in rescue to child labour in various working places and analyze to impact on sarva shiksha abhiyan programme in child labour education. The study would provide a

framework for drawing suitable guidelines for improving to child labour.

## Objectives of the Study

1. To examine child labour in Tamil Nadu.
2. To find out the general socio-economic conditions of the child labour in Tuticorin District.
3. To investigate the problem faced by child labour in their working places in study area.

## Sources of Data

The data and information for the purpose of the study have been collected through primary and secondary sources. The primary data has been collected by administering structural questionnaires. Data collected from 100 child labour, in these respondents 50 were male and 50 were female children in Tuticorin District. Secondary data collected from Government records and reports.

## Status of Child Labourers in Tamil Nadu

The state of Tamil Nadu is one of the developed states in India in terms of Economic Development where it is placed 8<sup>th</sup> on the Human Development Index 2011. Tamil Nadu is the 11<sup>th</sup> largest state in India by area and the 7<sup>th</sup> most populous state. It is the second largest state economy in India as of 2012. The state ranked 6<sup>th</sup> among states in India according to the Human Development Index as of 2011. In addition, Tamil Nadu figures as one of the most advanced states in providing education to its people. The state has 4,05,24,545 literates, making the literacy rate to 73.45 per cent and the school dropout rates at primary level is one of the lowest in comparison to other states. But on the other side, child labour problem still persists in the state where children are engaged in manufacturing industries like brick kins, beedi, silk, seed, handloom and textiles; in case of service sectors like tea shops, automobile shops, rag picking, domestic labour etc. In addition according to Campaign Against Child

Labour, several thousand children from the state are continue to be sent to the northern states to work missing out on their education.

**Child Labour in Match box and Fire Crackers Industries of Sivakasi**

Sivakasi is situated in Virudhunagar district hot region. Sivakasi has a dry weather, making it suitable for dry crops like cotton, chilies and millets. Approximately 70 per cent of the firecrackers and matches produced in India are from Sivakasi. The hot and dry climate of the town is conducive for the firecracker and match making industries. In 2011, Sivakasi, Tamil Nadu was home to over 9,500 firecracker factories and produced almost 90 per cent of total fireworks and 500

match factories giving 75 per cent of matches output in India. Mostly children in the age group of 7-15 work for more than 12 hours a day and earn paltry sum as wages for their back breaking work.

There are three categories of workers in these industries one which is done in the factories second in units/contractors premises and third in the homes. Steps taken to prohibit and regulate are confined of the first two while the home based work is still rampant.

**Child Labour in Tuticorin – An Overview**

Child labour is a phenomenon associated with various supply and demand side factors. In Tuticorin region the demand for child labour is mainly from the textile shops and hotel sector.

**Table – 1 : Occupational, Educational & Community Distribution of Child Labour**

Sl. No.	Types of Work	Gender		Total
		Male	Female	
1	Hotel	22	5	27
2	Textiles	9	23	32
3	House Keeping	1	4	5
4	Brick Industry	17	18	35
5	Motor Vehicle Service Center	1	0	1
	<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Educational Status</b>				
1	Primary Education (1-5 <sup>th</sup> Standard)	28	21	49
2	Completed 6 <sup>th</sup> Standard	3	5	8
3	Completed 8 <sup>th</sup> Standard (Elementary Education)	19	24	43
	<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Community Status</b>				
1	General	1	0	1
2	Backward Community	18	21	39
3	Most Backward Community	3	2	5
4	Schedule Caste	28	27	55
<b>Age Group (in years)</b>				
1	6 years – 10 years	05	08	13
2	11 years – 14 years	45	42	70
	<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Computed from Primary Data, 2013.

Table -1 showed that the occupational pattern and educational status of the child labour in Tuticorin District. Nearly 49 per cent of the literates in the have

less than five years of schooling and it more than 8 per cent of the child labourers completed six years of schooling. Almost 43 per cent of the respondents completed

their elementary education. In view of gender disparity, 21 per cent of the females completed five years of schooling against 28 per cent of male child labourers and 24 per cent of female completed their elementary education against 19 per cent of male child labour in our study area. Elementary education schooling showed that female are higher than male, because of more number of girls elementary schools situated in our study area.

As far as the age structure of the child labour is concerned children in the age group 6-10 constitute about 13 per cent of the total respondents. But with the gender wise slightly female are higher than male. Most of the working children being in the age group of 11 – 14 contribute 70 per cent among 42 per cent are female child labour. Caste has been an important determiner of the process of social stratification in our country. Traditionally, caste and class have been associated with the occupations of the people. This study finds that almost all 99 per cent of child labour from the other than higher castes. As large as 55 per cent of child labour were of scheduled castes, 5 per cent of most backward casters and 39 per cent were

backward caste and just one per cent for higher caste. The child labour from scheduled castes and backward caste are majorly contribute in this district.

Occupational wise classification, nearly 27 per cent child labour are engaged hotel – table cleaning, vessels cleaning and helping to cook. Majority of male child labour are engaged in hotel works. 32 per cent of the respondents associated with textile shops and 23 per cent of the female child labour working in textile shops. Only 5 per cent of the child labour working in housekeeping. Majority of the child labour working in brick industry it was contributing 35 per cent among the female there are 18 per cent.

**Income Range of Working Children**

Wages paid to these children have really converted into little machines. Their concentration, speed of work and dexterity is so high. Every children has received wage through paid by cash, they don't have bank accounts. Income of children forms a significant component of the total family income. Thus it is contribution level of children to the total family income.

**Table – 2: Monthly Income of Child Labour (in Rs.)**

Age Group	Males			Females		
	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Minimum	Maximum	Average
6-10	1200	1400	1250	1000	1200	1100
11-14	1700	2500	1900	1400	2000	1500

Source: Computed from Primary Data, 2013.

Average income level of girl children seems to be lower than boys in Tuticorin district. Average monthly income of a male child is Rs. 1250 in the age group of 6-10. Similarly while it is Rs. 1900 for male children it is Rs. 1500 for female children in the age group of 11-14. Older children finish more work and the younger ones are slow till they pick up the work. Boys earn

more in the brick industry and hotel, vehicle service, housekeeping sectors.

**Major Findings**

Working children are from different age, race, income or health status groups. The children generally start to work at a very young age and usually work for long hours for little or no payment. In our

research, 95 per cent of child labour faced problems to working long hours and 85 per cent of the working children are affected to latter payment. The inappropriate structure of work schedules (long hours/late hours with frequent changes) and the lack of supervision increase the risk of work related injuries and illnesses.

Child labour contributes to the family income nearly 95 per cent of the households are in low-income range (below Rs. 5000 per month). 12 per cent of the children contribute less than 40 per cent of the total family income. Children in 80 per cent of the households contribute 50 per cent of the total income. Child labour always have lower growth and poor health status as compared to their non-working children. Child labour may start adopting the habits which are usually associated with adults like beedi smoking, use of alcohol, gambling and involvement in sexual abuse even the educated youths are inducing in this practice.

### Recommendations

Everyone should take some steps in the direction to stop child labour so that we can bring smiles to many faces and make this world a beautiful place for a child to live in. There are various organizations which are fighting against child labour by helping children and imparting education among that part of society from where majority of the child labour comes. Poor families should be given knowledge about family planning/control so that they are not burdened by children. It would be advisable not to keep small children at home for taking domestic help in daily household chores.

The future of a community is in the well being of its children. So it becomes imperative for the health of nation to protect its children from premature labour which is hazardous to their mental, physical, educational and spiritual developmental needs. It is urgently required to save

children from the murderous clutches of social injustice and educational deprivation and ensure that they are given opportunities for healthy, normal and happy growth.

### Conclusion

The Government of India has implemented the Child Labour Act in 1986 that outlaws child labour in certain areas and sets the minimum age of employment at fourteen. This Act falls short of making all child labour illegal, and fails to meet the International Labour Organisations guideline concerning the minimum age of employment set at fifteen years of age. Though policies are in place that could potentially reduce the incidence of child labour, enforcement is a problem. If child labour is to be eradicated in India, the government and those responsible for enforcement need to start doing their jobs. Policies can and will be developed concerning child labour, but without enforcement they are all useless. Eradicating poverty, however, is only the first step on the road to eliminate child labour.

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