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A Sociological Study on Various Conditions of Child Labour at Workplace

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ABSTRACT

The sociological study on the many forms that child labor takes and how it impacts the attitude of an employer explores the complex interplay between the exploitation of children in the workforce and the perspectives of employers who hire them. Child labor, defined as the employment of children in work that deprives them of their childhood, education, and potential, is a pervasive issue in many parts of the world. This study examines the different conditions under which children are employed, including the industries they work in, the nature of the tasks they perform, and the working hours they endure. In many developing countries, children are often found working in hazardous environments such as factories, agriculture, and domestic labor, where they face physical and emotional abuse, lack of access to education, and poor health conditions. These circumstances not only hinder their personal development but also perpetuate a cycle of poverty and social inequality.

KEYWORDS- Child Labour, Workplace, employer explores, health conditions, social inequality.

INTRODUCTION

Child labour continues to be a serious issue across many parts of the world, especially in developing countries where poverty, illiteracy, and lack of enforcement of laws allow this problem to persist. Children involved in labour are often subjected to extremely harsh and inhumane conditions that not only hinder their development but also rob them of their basic rights to education, health, and a dignified childhood. The workplace conditions under which these children are forced to work are varied and depend on the type of work, the location, and the socio-economic context, but most share common characteristics of exploitation, abuse, and neglect. Many of these children are employed in agricultural sectors, factories, domestic help, construction sites, roadside shops, hotels, brick kilns, carpet weaving centers, and even in illegal activities such as begging or trafficking. A significant number of child labourers are forced to work in these places due to economic constraints in their families, while others are victims of bonded labour, trafficking, or displacement due to disasters or conflict. These children are often made to work long hours, sometimes more than 10-12 hours a day, without proper rest or breaks, and are paid far less than the legal minimum wage—if they are paid at all. They are usually denied access to clean drinking water, hygienic sanitation facilities, proper shelter, or adequate nutrition, which severely affects their physical and mental well-being. In most cases, child labourers do not receive any kind of healthcare, and

they often work in environments that are hazardous and dangerous to their health. For instance, children working in mines or chemical factories are regularly exposed to toxic substances, loud noise, and heavy machinery without any safety gear. They are often prone to respiratory illnesses, skin infections, physical injuries, and chronic ailments that can affect them for the rest of their lives. Moreover, children working in construction or roadside businesses are constantly exposed to environmental pollution, extreme weather conditions, and physical exertion that is unsuitable for their age. These workplaces lack even the basic infrastructure for safety, and the children's vulnerability to accidents is extremely high. In addition to physical dangers, many of these children also face psychological trauma. They are often subjected to verbal abuse, physical punishment, and even sexual exploitation. Their employers tend to see them as cheap, obedient, and disposable labour, which encourages a culture of cruelty and neglect. Domestic child workers, especially girls, face an added layer of exploitation in the form of emotional and sexual abuse by their employers, and because they work behind closed doors, their abuse goes unnoticed and unreported. One of the most heart-breaking conditions of child labour at the workplace is the complete absence of education. Most child labourers have either never gone to school or have dropped out prematurely due to financial constraints or lack of access. Their daily routine leaves them with no time, energy, or resources to study, and this traps them in a cycle of poverty and illiteracy. Without education, their prospects for a better life are greatly diminished, and they grow up with limited opportunities for personal and professional development. Many employers prefer hiring children because they are easier to control, can be made to work longer hours without complaint, and can be paid less. This further discourages the hiring of adults and perpetuates the exploitation of vulnerable children. In rural areas, child labour is particularly rampant in agricultural work where children are involved in sowing, weeding, harvesting, and pesticide spraying. These jobs are physically exhausting and expose them to sharp tools, poisonous chemicals, and long hours in the sun. In urban settings, children are commonly employed in small industries like zari work, embroidery, glass blowing, and firecracker manufacturing—often working in cramped, dark rooms without ventilation. The health hazards in such occupations are severe and sometimes fatal. Another serious issue is bonded child labour, where children are pledged as workers against a loan taken by their parents. These children are forced to work indefinitely under exploitative conditions until the debt is repaid—a repayment that may never be completed due to the manipulation of accounts by employers. These bonded labourers often work in complete isolation, away from public view, and have little chance of escaping their situation. Child labourers in street-based occupations such as rag-picking, vending, or begging are exposed to unsanitary conditions, violence, and police harassment. These children lack the basic protection of shelter and security, and their lives are in constant danger from illness, accidents, and abuse. In such conditions, they often fall prey to addiction, criminal activity, and mental health issues. Moreover, migrant children or those displaced by conflict and natural disasters are at greater risk of falling into exploitative labour as they are disconnected from any form of legal or social protection. Gender also plays a significant role in shaping the workplace conditions of child labourers. Girls are more likely to be involved in domestic work, where their labour is undervalued and their vulnerability to abuse is higher. Boys, on the other hand, are more likely to be employed in physically demanding and hazardous jobs such as construction or mining. Both genders, however, suffer equally from the loss of childhood, educational deprivation, and the psychological toll of premature labour. The invisibility of child labour in many workplaces makes it harder to address. Employers often hide child workers from inspectors or bribe officials to turn a blind eye. Many of the workplaces are informal, unregistered, or mobile, making

enforcement of labour laws difficult. Although various laws and international conventions prohibit child labour—such as the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act in India, and conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO)—implementation remains weak due to corruption, lack of political will, inadequate inspections, and poor legal literacy among the poor. Non-governmental organizations, social activists, and international bodies have been working tirelessly to identify, rescue, and rehabilitate child labourers. However, sustainable change requires more than rescue operations. It requires a multidimensional approach that addresses the root causes such as poverty, lack of access to education, gender inequality, and inadequate enforcement of laws. Governments need to strengthen the education system, provide financial incentives for families to keep children in school, and ensure that employers face strict penalties for hiring underage workers. Community awareness programs must be conducted to inform people about the dangers of child labour and the rights of children. Employers and consumers also have a moral responsibility to ensure that their businesses and supply chains are free of child labour. In conclusion, the various conditions of child labour at the workplace are grim and multifaceted. These children are forced to work under exploitative, unsafe, and degrading conditions that not only rob them of their childhood but also damage their future. Unless strong and sustained efforts are made by governments, civil society, and the global community, child labour will continue to flourish in the shadows, destroying the lives of millions of innocent children who deserve care, education, and the freedom to dream.

COMMON SECTORS EMPLOYING CHILD LABOUR

Child labour is a deep-rooted social and economic issue that continues to affect millions of children worldwide, especially in developing countries. One of the main reasons child labour persists is due to the high demand for cheap, easily controlled, and low-skilled labour in various industries. These children, often from poor and marginalized communities, are forced into work that is inappropriate for their age and harmful to their physical and mental development. The sectors that most commonly employ child labour are agriculture, manufacturing, domestic work, construction, mining, and street-based activities. Among these, agriculture is the largest sector employing child labour globally. Children are made to work in fields harvesting crops such as cotton, sugarcane, coffee, tea, and tobacco. This type of work is often seasonal, physically demanding, and carried out in harsh environmental conditions like extreme heat or rain. Children in agriculture are exposed to dangerous tools, heavy lifting, harmful pesticides, and long hours without rest, which puts them at serious risk of injury and illness. Another sector heavily reliant on child labour is manufacturing. Small-scale and unregulated factories and workshops in countries like India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and several African nations employ children in industries such as textiles, garments, carpet weaving, leather goods, and fireworks production. Children are often engaged in tasks that require fine motor skills, such as embroidery, stitching, or assembling small parts. These jobs are done in dimly lit, poorly ventilated spaces with minimal safety precautions, increasing the risk of accidents, eye problems, and respiratory diseases. Domestic work is another widespread sector that employs child labour, particularly girls. These children are hired to work in private homes as maids, cooks, babysitters, or cleaners. They often live with the employer and are expected to be available around the clock, with little to no rest or personal time. Because they work behind closed doors, domestic child workers are highly vulnerable to verbal, physical, and even sexual abuse. They are also deprived of education and social interaction, which is crucial for their emotional development. Construction sites also commonly use child labour, especially in urban areas where cheap labour is needed for physically

intensive tasks. Children are used for carrying bricks, mixing cement, and cleaning construction debris. These jobs are extremely hazardous, with high risks of falling, injury from heavy materials, or exposure to dust and chemicals. Street-based work includes activities like rag-picking, vending, shoe polishing, washing vehicles, and begging. These children are often unsupervised, face constant exposure to exploitation and abuse, and are at risk of addiction and criminal involvement. Mining is one of the most dangerous sectors employing children, where they work in gold, coal, or gemstone mines, often crawling through narrow tunnels, carrying heavy loads, and being exposed to toxic chemicals. These harsh and exploitative conditions severely endanger their lives and leave long-term physical and psychological damage. In conclusion, child labour is widespread in sectors that benefit from unregulated, cheap, and vulnerable labour. The persistence of this practice highlights the need for strong legal action, education, poverty alleviation, and social awareness to protect children and secure their right to a safe and healthy childhood.

WORKING HOURS AND WAGE EXPLOITATION

One of the most disturbing aspects of child labour is the exploitation of children through excessive working hours and unfair wages. Children engaged in labour are often forced to work far beyond legal limits, with little to no regard for their age, physical capacity, or well-being. In many countries, labour laws restrict the number of hours a child can work, particularly in hazardous occupations. However, these laws are frequently ignored or weakly enforced, especially in the informal sector where most child labour is concentrated. As a result, children often find themselves working 10 to 16 hours a day, seven days a week, with minimal rest, inadequate nutrition, and no access to education or recreation. The long hours of physically exhausting labour take a heavy toll on their bodies, leading to fatigue, malnutrition, stunted growth, and chronic health issues. These working hours are not only physically damaging but also emotionally and mentally draining. Child labourers are denied the opportunity to learn, play, or interact with peers, which is essential for their cognitive and social development.

In addition to being overworked, these children are also severely underpaid. Employers often exploit the vulnerability and helplessness of poor families by offering extremely low wages for the same or even more work than adult labourers. In some cases, children are paid as little as 20 to 50 per day, or receive payment in the form of food, shelter, or small gifts instead of actual money. Many are not paid at all, particularly those who are part of bonded labour systems or trafficked for work. In bonded labour, children are made to work to pay off a family debt that often never gets settled due to manipulated accounting by employers. Wage exploitation is further compounded by the fact that most child labourers lack any knowledge of their legal rights or the means to demand fair treatment. They are at the mercy of employers who threaten, abuse, or intimidate them into silence and compliance.

Girls involved in domestic work face even more severe exploitation, often receiving no wages at all for long hours of physically demanding work. In addition, they are frequently subject to emotional and sexual abuse, making their situation even more precarious. Wage disparities also exist among children based on caste, gender, and region, revealing a deep-rooted system of discrimination and injustice. Children who work in factories, brick kilns, workshops, and roadside stalls are often made to work in return for a small weekly sum that barely contributes to their survival, let alone secures a future.

The combination of long working hours and wage exploitation creates a cycle of poverty that is extremely difficult to break. Without adequate rest, education, or income, these children remain trapped in a life of hardship and dependency. Ending such

exploitation requires strong enforcement of child labour laws, the creation of alternative livelihood options for families, universal access to quality education, and widespread social awareness. Only through a collective effort can we hope to break the chains of exploitation and give every child the childhood they rightfully deserve.

PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH IMPACTS ON CHILD WORKERS

Child labour leaves a lasting imprint on the physical and mental health of children, often with irreversible consequences. When children are forced into labour at a young age, they are exposed to environments that are physically dangerous, emotionally stressful, and developmentally inappropriate. Due to their growing bodies and immature immune systems, they are especially vulnerable to injuries, illnesses, and developmental delays. Most child workers are engaged in manual labour in sectors like agriculture, construction, mining, domestic work, and manufacturing—fields that demand physical strength, precision, and long working hours. This leads to a variety of physical health issues such as back pain, joint problems, respiratory disorders, skin infections, and injuries from tools and machinery. Children in agricultural work are exposed to harmful pesticides and chemicals without protective gear, which can lead to poisoning, chronic lung conditions, and even cancer. Those working in mines or brick kilns often inhale dust and toxic fumes, leading to chronic coughs, asthma, and silicosis. Long hours of carrying heavy loads or standing for extended periods also result in bone deformities, fatigue, and stunted growth.

Nutrition is another major concern. Many child labourers come from poor families and work in conditions where they do not receive proper meals, rest, or hydration. This leads to undernutrition, weakened immunity, and a higher susceptibility to infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, skin diseases, and diarrhea. These children often lack access to basic healthcare, so even minor injuries or illnesses can become serious or life-threatening. Poor sanitation and exposure to unhygienic surroundings further worsen their health conditions.

The mental and emotional impact of child labour is equally concerning. Children who work instead of attending school are deprived of the joy of learning, playing, and forming healthy relationships. The pressure of adult responsibilities, fear of punishment, physical abuse, and constant fatigue lead to mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and emotional numbness. Many child workers are subjected to verbal and physical abuse by an employer, which leaves emotional scars that last a lifetime. Domestic child workers, especially girls, face isolation and abuse in private homes, leading to extreme loneliness, fear, and trauma.

Moreover, the continuous exposure to harsh conditions and adult work culture robs them of their innocence and childhood. They often develop feelings of hopelessness, anger, and mistrust. In severe cases, some children may resort to substance abuse or self-harm as a coping mechanism. The long-term psychological effects can affect their ability to form healthy relationships, trust others, or engage in society as confident adults.

ABUSE, EXPLOITATION, AND HARASSMENT AT WORKPLACES

Child labour is not just about children being made to work at a young age—it often comes hand in hand with abuse, exploitation, and harassment in the workplace. These young, vulnerable individuals are exposed to environments where their rights are constantly violated, and they are treated as tools of cheap labour rather than as human beings with dignity and rights. Because of their age, poverty, lack of education, and powerlessness, child workers are frequent victims of verbal, physical, emotional, and even sexual abuse at the hands of employers, supervisors, and sometimes older co-workers. In many cases, children are forced into submission through threats,

punishment, and manipulation, making it nearly impossible for them to speak out or seek help.

Physical abuse is common in industries such as construction, agriculture, brick kilns, factories, and domestic work. Children are beaten or physically punished for making mistakes, asking for rest, or trying to leave the job. In domestic work, especially where girls are employed, beatings and physical punishment are used to enforce control and fear. In many workshops and small manufacturing units, children are made to work in unsafe conditions with dangerous tools, and when they get injured or sick, they are often blamed or punished rather than cared for. Such harsh treatment not only harms their bodies but also scars their minds.

Exploitation in terms of wages and working conditions is another widespread issue. Child labourers are often paid far less than adults for the same work. Some are not paid at all or are paid irregularly. Many are promised payment later or are trapped in bonded labour, working to repay family debts that are often manipulated by employers to keep them enslaved. Children are made to work long hours—sometimes up to 14 or 16 hours a day—without proper rest, food, or safety measures. They are denied basic rights like breaks, healthcare, and a safe working environment. In many cases, children do not even know they are being exploited, because they have never been taught what fair treatment looks like.

Harassment—both verbal and sexual—is an often hidden but extremely damaging aspect of child labour, especially in sectors where children are isolated or unprotected. Girls working in domestic settings, street vending, or hotels face frequent sexual harassment, inappropriate touching, and sometimes sexual assault. They are threatened to remain silent and are often too afraid or ashamed to report it. Even boys are not free from such risks; they too may face sexual violence or coercion, particularly if they are homeless or trafficked. Emotional abuse—such as constant scolding, insults, name-calling, and humiliation—is also widespread and deeply affects a child's mental well-being, leading to anxiety, depression, low self-worth, and even suicidal thoughts.

These abuses are allowed to continue because child labour often occurs in hidden, unregulated, or informal sectors, where there is little oversight or accountability. Many families are unaware of what their children endure, and even when they are aware, poverty and lack of alternatives leave them feeling helpless. The failure of law enforcement, corruption, and societal apathy contribute to the persistence of these inhumane conditions.

GENDER DIMENSIONS OF CHILD LABOUR

The issue of child labour cannot be fully understood without examining its gender dimensions, as boys and girls often experience labour in different ways due to societal roles, expectations, and vulnerabilities. Gender plays a critical role in determining the type of work children are assigned, the conditions they face, and the forms of abuse or exploitation they may suffer. While both boys and girls are affected by child labour, the nature, visibility, and impact of their experiences differ significantly.

Boys are more commonly found in physically demanding and visible forms of child labour, such as construction work, street vending, agriculture, mining, and industrial work. These sectors often involve hazardous conditions like exposure to machinery, chemicals, and dangerous tools. Boys are usually perceived as being stronger and more capable of handling hard labour, which leads to their engagement in jobs that demand physical strength, long hours, and endurance. As a result, they face a high risk of physical injuries, accidents, and chronic health issues. However, because their work is often more visible and in public settings, it can be easier to identify and address compared to that of girls.

Girls, on the other hand, are more likely to be engaged in less visible, private, and domestic work. They are frequently employed in households as maids or caretakers, where they clean, cook, care for children, and perform other chores. This kind of labour is often hidden behind closed doors, making it difficult to monitor and regulate. Girls in domestic work are especially vulnerable to emotional, physical, and sexual abuse, as they are isolated from the public and from any form of social support. In many cases, they are overworked, underpaid, or not paid at all. Additionally, girls are often expected to manage household responsibilities in their own homes before or after their jobs, leading to double workloads and exhaustion.

Gender discrimination also influences the wage gap among working children. Even in similar job roles, girls often receive lower wages than boys, reflecting broader societal inequalities. Moreover, girls' labour is frequently undervalued or unpaid, especially in domestic and care-related work. In some regions, cultural norms that prioritize boys' education over girls' can force girls into labour early, as they are seen as less worthy of investment in schooling. Girls may also be pulled from school to help with household chores or to supplement family income, reinforcing cycles of poverty and limited opportunity.

Early marriage and child labour are often interlinked, particularly for girls. In poor communities, girls may be forced into early marriages as a way to reduce household burdens. These young brides often become child labourers within their new homes, performing domestic duties and child-rearing without rest, support, or education. They face added risks to their physical and mental health, especially during pregnancy and childbirth, as their bodies are not fully developed.

Furthermore, girls involved in child labour are more likely to face long-term consequences such as interrupted education, poor health, reduced self-esteem, and limited future opportunities. While boys may also suffer from similar issues, the gendered nature of their work means that interventions must be tailored to address the unique challenges faced by both genders.

ROLE OF EMPLOYERS AND SOCIETY IN SUSTAINING CHILD LABOUR

Child labour is a deep-rooted social issue that continues to thrive due to the active and passive roles played by employers and society. While poverty, lack of education, and weak enforcement of laws are often cited as causes, the demand for cheap and compliant labour by employers, and the indifference or normalization of child labour by society, are key factors that sustain and perpetuate this harmful practice. Understanding the role of these stakeholders is crucial to addressing the root of the problem.

Employers, especially in the informal and unorganized sectors, play a direct role in sustaining child labour. Many business owners, contractors, and household employers prefer to hire children because they are less likely to demand fair wages, ask for leave, or protest against exploitation. Children are viewed as obedient, easy to control, and inexpensive compared to adult workers. This mind-set encourages the employment of children in small workshops, factories, agriculture, domestic service, hotels, roadside stalls, and other settings. In some industries such as carpet weaving, bangle-making, and embroidery, children's small hands are considered better suited for intricate work, further incentivizing their recruitment. Moreover, employers often justify their actions by claiming they are helping poor families or that the work teaches children skills. However, these justifications ignore the long-term harm and violation of rights that child labour causes.

In many cases, employers take advantage of the lack of legal awareness among

children and their families. They do not provide contracts, pay below minimum wage, and deny basic protections like rest, safety gear, or healthcare. They also sometimes use threats, physical punishment, or false promises to keep children working. In bonded labour systems, children may be forced to work for long periods to repay debts, often inherited from parents, making them virtual slaves with no freedom.

Beyond employers, society at large plays an indirect but powerful role in sustaining child labour. In many communities, the sight of children working is considered normal or even acceptable. People frequently employ children as domestic help or buy goods and services from businesses that exploit child workers, without questioning the ethics behind it. Social tolerance for child labour often stems from deep-rooted inequalities, traditional mindsets, and a lack of awareness. In some families, sending children to work is seen as a necessity or even a responsibility, especially when education is not seen as yielding immediate economic returns.

Society also fails when it comes to reporting and resisting child labour. Many people turn a blind eye to child labour in their neighborhoods, workplaces, or markets. There is often a lack of collective action to hold employers accountable or pressure local authorities to enforce laws. Community leaders, religious institutions, and local influencers may avoid addressing the issue, either due to complicity or ignorance.

Furthermore, systemic failures like poor access to quality education, lack of social welfare programs, and weak legal enforcement make it easier for child labour to continue. When schools are distant, poorly equipped, or unfriendly to children from marginalized backgrounds, families may see work as the only viable option. The failure of society to demand inclusive, child-friendly, and accessible education contributes to the continuation of child labour.

CONCLUSION

The various conditions under which child labourers work reflect a grim reality of exploitation, deprivation, and neglect. Children engaged in labour are often subjected to long working hours, minimal or no wages, hazardous environments, poor hygiene, physical and mental strain, and in many cases, abuse and harassment. These conditions not only rob children of their right to education and a dignified childhood but also expose them to lifelong health and psychological consequences. Gender-based disparities further worsen their situation, with girls facing additional layers of vulnerability, particularly in domestic and invisible sectors. Employers, driven by the pursuit of cheap and obedient labour, along with a society that normalizes or ignores the issue, continue to sustain this exploitative system. Addressing child labour requires more than just legal bans—it demands collective action, awareness, social responsibility, and the political will to ensure every child is protected, educated, and allowed to grow in a safe and nurturing environment. Only through a united and sustained effort can we hope to eliminate the cruel practice of child labour and build a just and equitable society for future generations.

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