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A Study of Child Labour and Its Effect on Attitude of an Employer

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ABSTRACT

The study also focuses on the attitudes of employers who hire child laborers, exploring how they rationalize or justify the use of child labor despite the negative consequences it has on the children's well-being. Employers often perceive child labor as a cost-effective solution to labor shortages, believing that children are more malleable, obedient, and willing to accept lower wages than adults. Some may even view the practice as a way of helping impoverished families, though this view is often shaped by economic self-interest rather than genuine concern for the children's welfare. The research further investigates how employers' attitudes are influenced by cultural norms, economic pressures, and legal frameworks. In regions where child labor is deeply embedded in the socio-economic fabric, employers may feel little pressure to change their practices, as the exploitation of children may be normalized or overlooked by local communities. The sociological implications of child labor are profound, as it not only affects the children involved but also contributes to the broader social and economic challenges facing societies. Child labor perpetuates generational poverty, hinders social mobility, and exacerbates inequality. The study suggests that employers' attitudes towards child labor are often shaped by broader societal and economic structures, which may overlook the long-term costs of exploiting children in favor of short-term economic gains.

KEYWORDS- Child Labour, Attitude, Employer, children's well-being, children's welfare, social mobility, cultural norms

INTRODUCTION

Child labour is a persistent social issue that continues to plague many developing and underdeveloped countries despite numerous legal frameworks and international conventions designed to eradicate it. It refers to the employment of children in any work that deprives them of their childhood, interferes with their ability to attend regular school, and is mentally, physically, socially, or morally harmful. Employers play a crucial role in the perpetuation or eradication of child labour, and their attitudes significantly influence this dynamic. The presence of child labour in workplaces is not merely a reflection of economic necessity but also mirrors the mind-set, beliefs, and ethical stance of employers towards vulnerable groups. The attitude of employers towards child labour affects not only the children involved but also the broader socio-economic fabric and the overall perception of business ethics within a society.

At its core, the phenomenon of child labour arises from a complex interplay of poverty, lack of education, social norms, and inadequate enforcement of labour laws. Employers in certain sectors, especially informal and unregulated industries such as agriculture, textiles, small-scale manufacturing, and domestic work, often prefer child labour because it offers cheap, compliant, and readily available labour. This economic incentive forms a major factor shaping employers' attitudes. Many employers view children as an economical resource; they can pay them significantly less than adult workers and impose longer working hours with less resistance. This practical approach, however, is deeply problematic and morally questionable because it overlooks the children's rights, well-being, and future prospects.

The attitude of employers who engage in or tolerate child labour tends to be utilitarian, focusing on immediate business benefits rather than long-term social responsibility. Such employers may rationalize their actions by believing that child labour is a necessity in poor communities, or that it provides some income to impoverished families, thus seeing themselves as fulfilling a social role. This perspective often blinds them to the detrimental effects child labour has on children's development, health, and education. Employers with this mindset may display indifference or a lack of empathy towards child workers, treating them merely as a means to an economic end rather than human beings deserving dignity and protection.

On the other hand, there are employers who oppose child labour and actively advocate against it, often driven by ethical, legal, or social motivations. Such employers tend to have a more progressive and humane attitude, recognizing that employing children is exploitative and detrimental not only to the children but also to society as a whole. They understand that child labour perpetuates the cycle of poverty by denying children education and the opportunity to develop skills necessary for better employment in the future. These employers often implement strict hiring policies, support educational initiatives, and participate in awareness campaigns to combat child labour. Their attitude is grounded in corporate social responsibility and the belief that businesses should contribute positively to societal development.

The divergent attitudes of employers towards child labour are also influenced by their awareness and understanding of labour laws and human rights conventions. In regions where labour laws are well-publicized, strictly enforced, and employers are held accountable, attitudes towards child labour tend to be more negative. Employers in such contexts are cautious and avoid child labour to protect their reputation and avoid legal repercussions. Conversely, in areas where laws are weak, enforcement is lax, and corruption prevails, employers may feel emboldened to exploit child labour without fear of consequences. This creates an environment where the utilitarian attitude towards child labour flourishes, reflecting a cynical view of law and ethics.

Moreover, cultural and societal norms play a significant role in shaping employer attitudes. In some traditional societies, child labour is normalized or even expected as part of family survival strategies. Employers embedded in such social milieus may adopt attitudes that view child labour as acceptable or unavoidable. They might justify it as part of children's contribution to family income or skill acquisition. This cultural acceptance reduces the stigma associated with child labour and diminishes the impetus for employers to change their practices. However, globalization, education, and international pressure have begun to challenge these norms, encouraging more employers to reconsider their stance on child labour.

The effects of child labour on employers' attitudes also extend to how they perceive their workforce and business environment. Employers who rely on child labour may develop a paternalistic attitude towards their young workers, viewing them as

dependent and in need of strict control rather than as empowered employees. This can result in exploitative labor relations characterized by harsh working conditions, lack of workers' rights, and minimal concern for the welfare of child employees. Such attitudes negatively impact workplace morale, productivity, and the quality of output. Conversely, employers who reject child labour tend to cultivate more respectful and equitable relationships with all employees, fostering better work environments, enhancing employee motivation, and ultimately benefiting their businesses.

Importantly, the presence of child labour and the attitudes of employers towards it also affect public perception of businesses and industries. Companies known to employ child labour face criticism, boycotts, and damage to their brand image, especially in an era of heightened consumer awareness and ethical consumption. This societal pressure has led many employers to reconsider their attitudes and adopt child labour-free policies as a strategic business move. Employers increasingly recognize that a positive corporate reputation linked to ethical labour practices can be a competitive advantage, attracting customers, investors, and talent. The psychological effect of child labour on employers is also noteworthy. Employers who engage with child workers might develop a desensitized or normalized view of child exploitation, which can dull their sensitivity to broader human rights issues. Alternatively, some employers may experience cognitive dissonance—a conflict between their actions and moral beliefs—which may motivate either justification of child labour or eventual reform in their practices. Employers who resolve this dissonance by valuing children's rights often become advocates for change, influencing their peers and contributing to a larger movement against child labour.

From a policy perspective, changing employer attitudes is critical to eradicating child labour. Legal provisions alone are insufficient without a fundamental shift in employer mindset. Governments, NGOs, and international organizations therefore focus on awareness campaigns, education, and incentives to reshape how employers view child labour. Training programs that highlight the long-term economic benefits of education and adult employment, as well as the legal and reputational risks of child labour, are effective tools in altering employer attitudes. Successful case studies where employers voluntarily abandoned child labour and implemented ethical labour practices serve as powerful examples.

IMPACT ON CHILD LABOR

Child labor exerts a profound and often devastating impact on the children involved, affecting their health on all levels (physical, psychological, and emotional) and changing their lives. This issue perpetuates a cycle of poverty and limits opportunities for personal growth, while societies that tolerate or rely on child labor face economic, social, and ethical challenges. Children forced into labor are often deprived of education, robbed of their childhoods, and exposed to dangerous working conditions that can cause lasting physical harm. Additionally, the psychological toll of child labor can be immense, leading to a lifetime of mental health struggles and impeding their ability to build stable and fulfilling lives as adults. At a broader level, child labor weakens a nation's future workforce, reducing the capacity for economic growth and development by limiting human capital. For society as a whole, the prevalence of child labor erodes social equity and undermines efforts toward a more just and prosperous future.

At the individual level, child labor severely hinders the development of the children involved. Physically, the impact can be irreversible. Children who engage in labor are often subjected to strenuous tasks that exceed their physical capacity, leading to injuries and long-term health complications. For example, children working in agriculture are often exposed to hazardous chemicals and pesticides, which can cause respiratory

issues, skin conditions, and other chronic health problems. Similarly, children involved in construction or mining face a constant risk of physical injury from heavy machinery and unsafe work environments. Without the protection of labor laws or adequate healthcare, these children are left to endure the consequences of these dangers, often with little to no recourse. The high demands of physical labor, combined with the malnutrition that frequently accompanies poverty, can impair a child's growth and development, leaving lasting effects that hinder their productivity and health well into adulthood.

Beyond the physical harm, the psychological consequences of child labor are equally damaging. Children in labor often experience stress, anxiety, and depression due to the harsh conditions and expectations they face at a young age. Unlike a nurturing environment that fosters a sense of security and growth, work environments often introduce them to exploitation, intimidation, and sometimes even physical abuse. This early exposure to trauma can lead to psychological conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), low self-esteem, and difficulty forming trustful relationships. These issues can persist throughout life, as the trauma inflicted during formative years shapes the way these individuals interact with the world and cope with challenges. As a result, they may face challenges in building healthy relationships and achieving emotional stability, affecting every aspect of their adult lives, from family dynamics to professional interactions.

IMPACT OF CHILD LABOUR ON EMPLOYERS' BUSINESS PRACTICES

The use of child labour by employers significantly influences various aspects of their business practices, often in ways that may seem beneficial in the short term but prove detrimental in the long run. Initially, employers might be attracted to child labour due to its apparent economic advantages—children can be paid lower wages, are less likely to demand better working conditions or benefits, and may be perceived as more manageable or obedient compared to adult workers. This perception encourages some employers to incorporate child labour into their operational practices, especially in labor-intensive industries such as agriculture, manufacturing, textiles, and informal sectors where regulation is minimal.

However, reliance on child labour affects business practices beyond mere cost savings. One major impact is on the overall quality and productivity of work. While children can perform certain tasks, their physical and cognitive limitations often mean their work is less efficient and prone to errors. This can lead to lower product quality, increased waste, and potential damage to the employer's reputation for reliability and standards. In industries where quality control and safety are critical, employing children can pose risks not only to the product but also to workplace safety, resulting in higher accident rates and potential legal liabilities.

Moreover, the presence of child labour can negatively affect workplace morale among adult employees. Adult workers may feel resentful or demoralized if they perceive that children are being exploited or if their own wages and working conditions are being undercut by cheap child labour. This can lead to conflicts within the workforce, decreased motivation, and higher turnover rates, which ultimately reduce overall productivity and increase recruitment and training costs for the employer.

Another significant effect is on compliance and legal risk. Employers who use child labour expose their businesses to potential sanctions, fines, and legal action as most countries have laws prohibiting or regulating child labour. Violations can result in shutdowns, loss of licenses, and damage to business operations. Beyond legal penalties, employers risk public backlash, consumer boycotts, and loss of partnerships with companies or organizations committed to ethical sourcing and corporate social

responsibility. In today's globalized economy, businesses are under increased scrutiny by consumers, advocacy groups, and regulators who demand transparency and ethical conduct, making the use of child labour a serious reputational risk.

Furthermore, businesses employing child labour often neglect the importance of investing in employee development and training, since child workers are viewed as temporary and replaceable. This shortsighted approach prevents the development of a skilled and committed workforce, limiting innovation and growth. Companies that rely on child labour may also miss out on opportunities to improve productivity through modernization, automation, or better work practices because of their focus on low-cost, low-skill labour inputs.

In contrast, employers who reject child labour tend to adopt more sustainable and ethical business practices. They invest in adult workers by providing fair wages, better working conditions, and skill development opportunities. These practices enhance employee loyalty, improve productivity, and contribute to a positive workplace culture. Additionally, such employers often benefit from stronger relationships with consumers, investors, and regulatory bodies, which can translate into greater market opportunities and long-term profitability.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND EMPLOYER AWARENESS OF CHILD LABOUR

The fight against child labour is strongly supported by a comprehensive legal framework at both international and national levels, designed to protect children from exploitation and ensure their right to education, health, and development. These laws and regulations aim to regulate or prohibit the employment of children, setting minimum age limits for work, restricting hazardous labour, and mandating compulsory education. However, the effectiveness of these legal provisions largely depends on how well employers understand and comply with them, making employer awareness a critical factor in the eradication of child labour.

At the international level, several key instruments guide the global stance against child labour. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has established core conventions such as Convention No. 138 on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment and Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour. These conventions urge countries to set and enforce laws that prohibit employment of children below a specified minimum age, typically 14 to 16 years, depending on the country, and to eliminate the most hazardous and exploitative forms of child labour immediately. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) also emphasizes the protection of children from economic exploitation and harmful work.

National governments adopt these international standards into domestic legislation, tailoring laws to their specific social, economic, and cultural contexts. Most countries have enacted laws that prohibit child labour, establish minimum working ages, regulate working hours, and define hazardous work that children cannot perform. Additionally, education acts enforce compulsory schooling to prevent children from dropping out and entering the workforce prematurely. Labour inspection systems and penalties are designed to ensure compliance and deter violations. Despite this extensive legal framework, the awareness and attitude of employers toward these laws are often inconsistent. In many regions, especially where child labour is prevalent, a significant number of employers are either unaware of the legal restrictions or deliberately ignore them to benefit from cheap labour. Lack of awareness may stem from low literacy levels, poor dissemination of information, or inadequate training on labour laws, particularly among small and informal sector employers who operate outside formal regulatory oversight.

For employers who are aware of the laws, attitudes vary widely. Some view legal regulations as obstacles that increase operational costs and reduce flexibility, fostering a mindset of non-compliance or attempts to circumvent the law through informal arrangements. Others may have a basic awareness but lack a deep understanding of the implications of child labour laws, leading to accidental violations. Conversely, a growing number of employers, especially in formal and organized sectors, increasingly recognize the importance of compliance—not just to avoid legal sanctions but also to maintain business reputation and meet ethical standards demanded by consumers and global supply chains.

Legal enforcement mechanisms play a crucial role in shaping employer awareness and attitudes. In countries with strong labour inspection regimes, transparent legal processes, and stringent penalties, employers tend to be more vigilant and cautious in adhering to child labour laws. Regular inspections, public reporting, and community involvement in monitoring encourage employers to respect the law. However, where enforcement is weak due to corruption, limited resources, or political challenges, employers may feel emboldened to exploit child labour without fear of repercussions, perpetuating the problem.

Furthermore, government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a vital role in raising employer awareness about child labour laws and ethical employment practices. Awareness campaigns, workshops, and capacity-building programs educate employers on the legal requirements, the benefits of ethical labour practices, and the social costs of child exploitation. These initiatives also highlight alternatives to child labour, such as adult employment schemes and education support for children, encouraging employers to adopt responsible business models. The emergence of corporate social responsibility (CSR) frameworks has also influenced employer awareness. Many businesses, especially multinational corporations and larger domestic companies, have incorporated child labour policies into their codes of conduct and supplier requirements. This shift, driven by consumer demand and investor scrutiny, compels employers to align their practices with legal standards and international norms, increasing their awareness and accountability.

CONCLUSION

Child labour is deeply intertwined with the attitudes of employers, which range from exploitative and indifferent to ethical and socially responsible. The economic benefits that child labour provides to employers often overshadow the moral and social costs in their calculation, perpetuating harmful practices. However, growing awareness, legal frameworks, cultural shifts, and societal pressure are fostering a more positive and responsible employer attitude towards child labour. The eradication of child labour depends not only on enforcement of laws but also on transforming employers' perceptions to view children as rights-holding individuals rather than cheap labour. Only when employers embrace this change can sustainable progress be made towards eliminating child labour and ensuring a future where every child enjoys education, health, and dignity.

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