

A Sociological Study on Socio and Economic Condition of Child Labour in Nepal

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Abstract

This article offers a comprehensive analysis of child labour in Nepal, emphasizing the socio-economic factors that sustain this pervasive issue. It delves into the historical evolution of child labour, the legal frameworks governing childhood, and the interplay of poverty, illiteracy, and cultural norms that perpetuate the exploitation of children. The 2015 earthquake is identified as a critical event that intensified child labour due to its profound socio-economic repercussions. The article also examines the regional and industrial distribution of child labour, revealing a multifaceted problem deeply rooted in Nepal's socio-economic fabric. While legislative measures, such as the Child Labour Act, are recognized, the persistent challenges in enforcement, particularly within the informal sector, are highlighted. The article concludes by advocating for a holistic and sustained approach to eradicate child labour, ensuring the protection of children's rights and fostering a society that prioritizes their development and well-being.

Keywords: *child labour, legislation, poverty, child rights, enforcement, socio-economic conditions*

Introduction

Despite global advancements in reducing child labour, Nepal continues to grapple with this issue at alarming rates. Children in Nepal are disproportionately engaged in child labour compared to other South Asian nations, with significant implications for their health, education, and future prospects (Khan & Lyon, 2015). In 2008, nearly 21% of children aged 5 to 17 were involved in child labour, and of these, approximately 39% (around 0.6 million) were engaged in hazardous work (CBS, 2011). This not only exposes them to severe physical and psychological risks but also deprives them of opportunities for education and personal growth. In many communities, child labour is socially normalized, perceived as a necessary step in a child's socialization process, with little regard for its long-term consequences.

Marginalized groups, such as Dalits and indigenous communities, bear the brunt of this issue. A lack of awareness and educational opportunities often

compels families in these communities to prioritize immediate economic gains over their children's schooling (Bishwakarma, 2009). Employers frequently exploit these vulnerable children, subjecting them to grueling work conditions with minimal or no compensation. Common sectors employing child labour include domestic work, brick kilns, garment factories, restaurants, transportation, and construction. The disparity in poverty rates between rural and urban areas further exacerbates the problem, with rural poverty standing at 27.4% compared to 15.5% in urban regions (World Bank, 2011). This economic divide drives many rural families to rely on child labour as a means of survival.

Literature Review

The phenomenon of child labour is not a modern invention but has deep historical roots. In ancient societies, children were often involved in household chores, agricultural activities, and apprenticeships as part of their upbringing. However, the Industrial

Revolution marked a significant shift, as children became a cheap and expendable workforce in factories, mines, and mills. The deplorable conditions faced by these young workers sparked widespread public outrage, leading to the introduction of labour laws aimed at safeguarding children's rights.

In Nepal, child labour emerged as a pressing concern following the restoration of multi-party democracy. Numerous studies have documented the harsh realities faced by child workers, particularly in hazardous occupations. Despite legislative efforts to curb this practice, child labour persists due to a complex interplay of socio-economic factors, including entrenched poverty, limited access to education, and deeply rooted cultural norms that normalize the exploitation of children.

Theoretical Framework

The concept of childhood is not universal but varies significantly across cultures and societies. According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), a child is defined as any individual under the age of 18, unless national laws stipulate otherwise. In Nepal, the Labour Act of 1992 sets the minimum working age at 14, while the Children's Act of 1992 raises it to 16. However, the enforcement of these laws remains inconsistent, particularly in the informal sector, where many children continue to work in hazardous and exploitative conditions. This discrepancy between legal frameworks and their implementation underscores the need for stronger regulatory mechanisms and greater societal awareness.

Causes of Child Labour in Nepal

The persistence of child labour in Nepal can be attributed to a combination of interrelated factors:

1. **Poverty:** Economic hardship is the primary driver of child labour, as families struggling to meet basic needs often rely on their children's

income to survive. In many cases, children are seen as additional breadwinners rather than individuals entitled to education and care.

2. **Lack of Education:** Limited access to quality education, particularly in rural areas, perpetuates the cycle of child labour. Without viable alternatives, children are often forced into work at a young age, depriving them of the skills and knowledge needed to break free from poverty.

3. **Social Norms:** Cultural attitudes and traditions play a significant role in normalizing child labour. In many communities, work is viewed as an integral part of a child's upbringing, with little consideration given to its detrimental effects on their physical and mental well-being.

4. **Natural Disasters:** Catastrophic events like the 2015 earthquake exacerbate socio-economic vulnerabilities, pushing more children into labour. The destruction of homes, schools, and livelihoods forces families to prioritize immediate survival over long-term development, often at the expense of their children's futures.

Impact of the 2015 Earthquake

The 2015 earthquake in Nepal was a devastating event that claimed 9,000 lives, destroyed 600,000 homes, and damaged 7,000 schools. The disaster not only caused immediate physical destruction but also disrupted livelihoods and child protection systems, leaving many families in dire straits. As a result, countless children were forced into labour to help their families cope with the economic fallout. The increased demand for construction materials in the aftermath of the earthquake further intensified the exploitation of children in industries such as brick manufacturing, where they are often subjected to hazardous working conditions.

Government Efforts and Challenges

Nepal has made notable progress in addressing child labour through legislative

measures and international commitments. The Child Labour Act of 1992 and its subsequent amendments aim to protect children from exploitation and hazardous work. Additionally, Nepal has ratified several international conventions, including the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Minimum Age Convention, which sets standards for the minimum working age. However, the enforcement of these laws remains a significant challenge, particularly in the informal sector, where regulatory oversight is weak. The government has also launched various programs to combat child labour, such as awareness campaigns and educational initiatives. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these efforts is often hampered by limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of coordination among stakeholders.

Conclusion

Child labour in Nepal is a complex and deeply entrenched issue driven by a combination of poverty, lack of education, and cultural norms. While legislative efforts and government programs have made strides in addressing the problem, significant challenges remain, particularly in the enforcement of laws and the protection of children in the informal sector. The 2015 earthquake underscored the vulnerability of children to socio-economic shocks, highlighting the urgent need for comprehensive and sustained efforts to eradicate child labour. A holistic approach that addresses the root causes of child labour, strengthens enforcement mechanisms, and promotes access to education is essential to safeguarding children's rights and ensuring their well-being. Only through collective action and

a commitment to long-term change can Nepal hope to create a future where every child is free to learn, grow, and thrive.

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