

Environmental and Occupational Health Problems of Child Labour: Some Issues and Challenges for Future

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ABSTRACT The relationships between child labour and health are complex. They can be direct and indirect, static and dynamic, positive and negative, causal and spurious. There is epidemiological evidence of greater impact of some occupational exposures on child health as compared to adults. Adverse environmental health conditions affect children more as these have negative effects not only on health but also on the development. Children are more prone to and more at risk than adults because of rapid skeletal growth, organ and tissues development, greater risk of hearing loss, greater need for food and rest, higher chemical absorption rates, smaller size and lower heat tolerance due to their physiological and immunological countenance; some additional factors also contribute to this. Documented reports show the impact on health viz. poverty related (e.g. Malnutrition, fatigue, anemia etc), psychological effects and distress of child labour, occupational cancers, neurotoxicity, injuries, exposures to adverse physical factors, skin ailments etc. A multi-disciplinary approach involving specialists from medical, toxicological, environmental, psychological and socio-anthropological fields shall produce integral information and, approach on various aspects of child development to prepare a better policy for child labour. India has the highest number of child workers, but unfortunately, there is hardly any research done or policies framed for their occupational safety and health. Hence there is an urgent need for intensive focus and research along with political and practical decisions to improve the conditions of working children for the betterment of their health and development.