

Small Hands in Silicon City- Bangalore: Some Facts and Experiences at Grass Root Level

D.C. Nanjunda¹ and M. Annapurna²

Department of Anthropology, University of Mysore, Mysore-06, Karnataka, India

2. Telephone: 091-0821-2419702 (O), 091-0821-2428185 (R)

1. E-mail: dcnvision2020@yahoo.com; ²E-mail: iyergoodu21@yahoo.com

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ABSTRACT The problem of child labour in India has of late assumed the proportion of a social menace threatening the very fabrics of a social milieu. It has remained both an economic and a social problem for a long time. According to the latest ILO report more than 100 million children below the age of 14 years are toiling in different corners of India. As different cultures and societies define childhood in different ways Government policies and programmes should be culturally and geographically specific. Recent studies have revealed that there are many reasons other than economic compulsion to perpetuate child labour. In this paper here is an attempt has been made to examine the different causes of child labour emphasizing, on the factors other than poverty at grass root level, in Bangalore city and community perceptions about child labour and government efforts to eradicate this problem. Also this paper adding the general knowledge base of how community evaluates the risk and age associated with the child labour, an understand crucial to advancing global efforts to immediately remove children from the most hazardous forms of work.

INTRODUCTION

Even though child labour is the oldest phenomenon the world over the measurement of child labour depends on how it is defined. It largely depends on social and cultural views. The different societies will have its own age criteria to draw a clear line to differentiate between child hood and an adulthood. Some analysis shows that all non-school, non leisure activities of children constitute child labour. This may include household enterprises work, domestic work, watching siblings etc. As we observed in Bangalore city in many families, belongs to different castes and religion, a 10-year-old boy who plays a vital role in contributing a major part of the income to the family is not considered a child. It proves that fulfilling of certain social and cultural obligations are absolutely necessary in conceptualizing the words between child and an adult. So the empirical analysis of child labour and related policies and programmes of both Government and NGO's should be culturally and socially specific (Grootaert, 1999: 271-277).

Among the developing countries of the world India has world's largest child workers working in all three sectors. More than 86 percent are in

agricultural sectors, which is a major hidden form of child labour. Poverty and illiteracy, two basic reasons of low economic growth, have long been identified as the prime factors influencing supply of child labourers. Child labour is a global problem but it is more prevalent among underdeveloped countries. As per as India is concerned it is due the result of traditional attitude, rapid urbanization, population explosion, modern industrialization, urban migration, less investment on primary education, lack of Anthropological role in welfare policies, and globalization. But however, The major causes are acute poverty, with high rate of illiteracy, which leads to the low economic growth (Mithal, 2001: 122-134).

Recent studies have revealed that concept of children's work must be geographically, temporally, and ethically deconstructed and historically situated giving attention to place, era, generation and social class. Critics have further asserted that given the socio economic realities of most developing countries even if children were prohibited from working they would be unable to experiences the kind of child hood envisioned as appropriate in developed countries. To succeed in the short term in removing children from the most hazardous forms of the work will require culturally and geographically specific data concerning how community classify the particular type of work

Address correspondence to: D.C. Nanjunda, No 29, 8th cross, Udayagiri I st stage, Mysore-19, Karnataka, India
E-mail: dcnvision2020@yahoo.com

as being appropriate for different age groups, how they judge the degree of risk associated with each type of work, and how community social economic resources can be mobilized for remediation campaigns (Nicuwenhuyas, 1996: 56-67)

METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLING

Bangalore is a fast growing city in India. There is no complete census of child labourers in Bangalore city to serve sampling frame for random sampling. So the researcher choosed carefully designed purposive sampling for gathering representative data. Researcher had choosed occupations where large cluster of child workers found employed 1 hotels 2 garages 3 construction sites 4 small scale or cottage industries/factories 5 bar and restaurants 6 domestic service 7 shops and establishments 8 family occupations. Data collected from child workers, parents of child workers, community members, employers, and NGO's. This research had three major components 1 House holds survey, 2 Community norms study, and 3 Institutional ethnography. The qualitative data has been analysed with NUD*IST database and quantitative data analysis using SPSS software.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Since the last decade Bangalore has become a silicon city of India. This research survey conducted with selected 500 families having different socio-economic background and who are sending their children to work for various reasons. Results have revealed that, 24.15 percent children are working in garages, 21.38 percent are in construction cites, 18.35 percent are in hotels, 10 percent are in small scale/cottage industries or factories which does not comes under factories act-1948. Also 7.15 percent are in automobiles, 8.34 percent are in shop and establishments. 6.45 percent are in family occupations 3.12 percent are in pavement selling, and 3.45 percent are in glass, stone cutting and metal work.

A large percent (38.45 percent) of girl child workers are employed in domestic sectors, 32.67 percent small scale or cottage industries, 19.45 percent are in house hold works. Also it should be noted that some considerable number of girls are (16.56 percent) working in shop and

establishments, 2.56 percent are in construction sites. 3 percent are in pavement selling.

The analysis of data has showed that poverty (32.78 percent) and inadequate family income (23.45 percent) together account for (56.23 percent) of those who are sending their children to work largely due to their poor economic conditions. Single largest proportion 34.78 percent mentioned that presence of more number of children is the single most and basic reason for sending their kids to work. So (56.23+34.78 percent) 91.01 percent of the families are sending their children to work for two major reasons 1 acute poverty 2 high rate of fertility. The result of the study shows that 76.34 percent of child workers are male and more than 61.23 percent are in the age group between 9to13. We found that 5-7 percent are aged between 7 to 9. Most of these children are working usually in hotels and garages as a helpers. Average they are getting wage around 275to 350 Rs per month and a lunch. Children above 16 years will get around 750-1000 depending on nature of the job and rate of business. But in house hold works majority of girl child workers of this (7-9) age groups are not getting any wage except left over food of fortnight or break fast or lunch. Mostly they are working as a helpers to their respective mothers.

As per as education level is concerned 67.45 percent of parents are illiterates and they are sending their children to the unskilled work. Further it is interesting to know that 37.45 percent of primary /middle school educated parents (either parents) are sending their children only to skilled work. Because they think, children can choose that field as their career in the future adult hood. Also study has revealed that both primary schools educated (31.45 percent) and uneducated (69.23 percent) parents would like to withdraw their daughters from the work after attaining puberty. However they don't mind to send them to any job, which is very near to their dwelling places. But there should be no adult male colleagues. After the puberty 67.58 percent parents don't like to send their daughters to work out side of home at any cost, as they think lot of risks involved. Among the working children 55.18 percent are illiterates, 23.15 percent have studied up to primary, 14.25 percent middle, and only 7.27 percent up to High school standard.

A little over two third of the child workers are from the small households. Here small house hold menace having 3-5 children and parents. 17.34

percent child workers are from joint families. Since here more earning members, usually monthly income of the family also get increases. Small size of the family of child labour and high monthly income indicates that large size families and poor families income do not necessarily contribute to the increasingly high incidence of child labour and their huge number (Patil, 1986).

It is also interesting to note that the occupational status of a larger percentage of girl working children than boys were low 69.23% as against 47.34%. It shows that while boys are sent to the work to earn extra income to the family when it is rather inevitable, the girls are sent to work to earn a living for the family in most cases or to supplement the inadequate family income. The parents of nearly two third of child workers are daily laborers and mostly their jobs are highly seasonal 23.23 percent children are working because the main bread wiener of the family are highly alcoholic and gives no money to run the family. We found in this survey that 21.23% children wages are directly goes to the repayment of the old loan. 4.56% parents are sending their children to save money for their daughter's marriage especially for the dowry. We noticed that largely poor people are barrowing the money for the following major reasons 1 inadequate family income 2 prolonged illness 3 marriage 4 festivals.

Reasons Other Than Poverty

We found some noticeable reasons for the existence of child labour problem other than acute poverty. More disaster fact is that 20.45 percent parents are sending their children to the work because of cost of education is more and they said we couldn't afford it. More than 21.15 percent children are working because they had failed in the same standard more than one time for various reasons. 8.34 percent children expressed the views that classes were stereotypic and we did not have any more interest so we left the school. Hence parents of these children are sending their children to the work just avoid them to being always with the bad companies and not because of any financial problems. 12.84 percent children are working because of pressure by their parents to continue inherited family occupations. Here tradition, caste, nature of head of the household and other earned members plays a vital role regarding at which age the boy has to

start to learn the work. 8.44 percent children left school because they were below average students and more than that due to the fear of corporal punishment by the teachers. 19.39 percent of children are working on part time basis to finance their education and also they are contributing to the inadequate family income. 4 percent expressed they don't like government schools because no good quality of teaching and they says it is common to know that there is a wide gap in learning achievements between government and private schools. 6.31 percent of parents who are government workers are sending their children to work because of fear or threat of probable unemployment in the future. They told better start to learn some good skilled job now itself and he can open his own business in the future.

How Family Shares the Income?

The money earned by the children by fledging their precious child hood constitutes major parts of the income in many families. 10.56 percent of the family is completely depending on the income earned by their children. 38.34 percent children are earning 65 percent of total family income and 27 percent children earning 40-45 percent of total family income. These contributions are no doubt and good supplement to the inadequate family income. More than ¾ families are using the money in following order of importance 1 food 2 cloths 3 rents 4 loan repayments, 5 education 6 festivals and celebrations and 6 health. The main problem lies in the amount of investments on education and health. Our study has revealed that only 3-4 percent of the families are spending considerable amount of money on the health care for working children than non-working children of the same house hold. Also we found that only 7-9 percent of working children are getting larger allocations of food in general and high quality of food in particular. 17 percent of family members are using the money for the treatment for prolonged illness of the family member's. It shows the necessity of compulsory health insurance in our country for the poor and marginalized people.

How the Community Classifies and Evaluates the Appropriate Age and Risks Associated with the Job Respectively?

Here data collected from both parents who

are sending their children to the work and other members of the community. More than 67.34 percent poor parent's feels that work at the hotel is a safest job to the children who are between 6-12 yrs as, no specific risk involved. But 83.67 percent people felt that since they expected to work always with water there is a heavy chance of having severe skin and nerves problems in the future. To work in a hotel as a cleaner/helper children must be above 14 yr. because they are expected to carry prepared hot food items and they should have some skills to deal with the costumers. But poor parents are categorically reject these views and says these are not serious risks in the hotel job. Most of all people (73.45 percent) feels that construction sites, garages and workshops, bar and restaurants, small scale/cottage industries like bidi and incense making, carpet and silk weaving, commercial establishments and domestic sectors are the most hazardous sectors in their order of being dangers to the children (More to Less). Also they said construction sites and garages are highly dangers to the children, than any other jobs But 59 percent poor parents feels that children between 11-14 yrs can work as helpers in construction sites, because employers does not demand to carry heavy cement sacs/bricks/rocks. But more than 79.45 percent children have admitted that irrespective of age we should do all the work like adults but wages less. Also 61.34 percent poor parents feels that the boy has to start this kind of work early from the beginning because they can learn well in the early ages and when he reaches 18-20 yrs he can became an independent and skilled mason worker. They defend their voice by saying that such a type of small risks is quite common in all jobs. However more than 79 percent community member says, that children should be at least 20 yrs old to work in these kind of jobs. Because they says, this kind of work has involved heavy risks like always children may have to carry heavy bricks, rocks, mixed cements some time up-to first and second floor of the building (irrespective of age). Some time he may have to work by standing on the scarfold/s. If any misbalance it may leads to sever injuries or death. Also it causes burning of palm and foot. Since usually in their early ages children will be physically too week, they can't perform these kind work. 41.34 percent parents feel that children can work just as helpers in the garages from 7 yrs on words. But only 28 percent parents have

admitted that if boys are expected to work in welding section /before the fire they must be at least above 10-11 yrs old. But community members feels since children always works with heavy and sharp tools, oil and greases, welding and fire, they must be at lest 16yer old. If not, it cuses many health problems like, burning, deep injuries and blindness etc. Most interesting is that above mentioned parents said these kinds of risks are very uncommon. Few parents said it is very rare. Only 11.34 percent parents demands employers should provide required protective equipments to the children who works in hazardous sectors like garage, construction sites-etc. 58.34 percent parents felt that carpentry, tin making, handicrafts, small workshops are different kinds of family occupations, which children should start to learn these kind of work in their early ages. So that when he reaches an adult hood he would be a perfect skilled worker. This is the most important date as this kind work does not comes under any specific acts. We can say these are the most hidden and unpaid nature of work. However 79.34 percent people adds, children should be at least 15/16 yrs old to work with sharp tools. They also cited some of their personnel examples how they had faced severe deep cuttings and loosing of fingers when they had started to work in their early ages. But 61.56 percent poor parents think that 8 or 9 yrs old children can work with sharp tools and injures are common. But they should work under supervision of the parents.

Our survey has revealed that 83.38 percent people responded that children should be 16 yrs old to work in a bar and restaurants. Because at that age they will be mentally matured and they can distinguishing between good and bad habits. Yet here chances are more of being smoker and alcoholic in the future. Most interesting fact is that 17.56 percent fathers of working children admitted that they had been working at the bars when they were children and now they are all heavy alcoholics. Majority of the parents (71.89 percent) of girl child worker admitted that domestic work is a safest work for girls. Because here no needs of working with the male counter part and no heavy such risks involved. 51% of moderately educated parents and 49.32 percent illiterate's parents don't like to send their daughters to work where she is suppose to work with male counter parts. If so, these parents thinks that they may fell in love each other and may get

elope or it may result in teenage pregnancy. But majority of community members admits that those heavy chances of sexual harassments in domestic sectors. In some cases both educated and uneducated parents told that girls should work between 9.00-4.30 evening. But community says now a day's girls can work until 6p.m and they, better not to go out side home after 8 clocks. Because lot of risk involved now a days like teasing by the bad people and kidnapping-etc. Only 9.34 percent parents said, in case of household work there are more chances of girl child abuse. As majority of the people expressed the opinion that in case of small scale /cottage industries risks varies with nature of the work. Community asserted that the age structure of girl child work force is lower than that of boys so higher rate of school drops out among girls than boys. Since large forces of girl child workers are working in unskilled/unorganised sector the chances of their carrier in the future is nil. Most shocking factor is that 29.45 percent parents don't know any thing about the risks involved in their children occupations, even though they are working in hazardous sectors. Negligible numbers of parents have agreed that children should have special rights. It was a unanimous opinion of the community that human rights and child rights should immediately implemented. Only 3.31 parents and 13.12% community members have admitted existence of mental risks in children work.

Community Perception of Child Labour

To collect data about community perception on child labour issue the researcher has conducted some focus group interviews with NGOs, employers, community leaders, teachers, local politicians, religious leaders, parents of non working children, officials from the labour department, collage and university students. More than ¾ of the community members have admitted that poverty, high fertility rate, and adult unemployment are the root causes of child labour. They said poverty alleviation programme should be vigorously implemented with necessary changes in the tax structure. Also they asserted that government should revise national population policy and invest more money on social and infrastructure development especially in rural areas. Some of the intellectuals of the society says that all drops out children are not

child labourers, because, among other reasons, it sounds as if work and schooling are mutually exclusive activates for children. Referring to them as educationally deprived children is justified from the perspective of human capital, development and human right (Venkatanaryan, 2004: 4219-4221). Many NGO's criticizes the government policies on childlabour issues and they demand that all working children between 6-18yrs old should be considered as child labourers. More than two third of the community members feels that government is not willing to impose strict ban on employers because many industries, and commercial establishments are belongs to the politicians/ rich and highly influential persons. Also they says, the present acts and legislations are not quite enough to tackle this problem. So the Government should revise the acts and bring more occupations under the hazardous sectors. Community is highly sensitive to the process of globalization and privatization as it is creating more jobless main bread winners in many families. We got an unanimous opinion that banning on the child labour is not practicable as, government and NGO's should provide special benefits like alternative income generation programmes to the former child labourer families and who are sending their children to the school now. Also community members feels that higher education should be free irrespective of cast, sex and religion to such children. Also community feels that universalisation of elementary education is not quite practicable and possible unless we address three important areas namely: pre-school education, remedial teaching and bridge course programmes for the dropout/ unable to cope, and post primary education (Ramachandra, 2001: 960-968). 71 percent People said that government should keep an eye on the NGOs who are working against this issue by using grants-in-aid. 79.45 percent people expressed that primary education must be compulsory and more than it should be meaning full and government should improve the quality of education in Government schools. They adds either Govt/ NGOs should establish special training centers to train children in their interested working field who are not like to go to the school after primary education. 43 percent people ask since child labour is inevitable why government don't bargain with the employers regarding improvement of working conditions? 81% people demanded that government should

ban on liquor and gambling centers because they think as basic reasons for existence of the child labour problem.

CONCLUSION

Banning child labour under domestic or industry may not serve any useful objectives as children may just shift to any other alternative job. So the Government, NGOs and community should play as a highly coordinated role in tackling this problem. (Aggarwal, 2004: 173-178). Community should be intolerant to the child labour. Government must and should consult Anthropologists before framing welfare policies. Primary education should be compulsory and it should be more meaningful. Provision of multiple entries in school should be promoted. There should be lot of scope for vocational education too. Government should bring more jobs into hazardous sectors and should revise the existing acts and legislatures and stretch the definition of the term child labour. National employment guarantee programme should also cover urban marginalized people. If not, it should seriously think about alternative income generation programmes for the people who are sending their children to work just because of acute poverty. Also it should invest more percentage of GDP in social development sector. Finally there should be a strong linkage among poverty alleviation

programmes, educational policies and child labour. Involvement of Anthropologist in framing policies really gives a cutting edge to the success. Since we have a heterogeneous society unlike western as much as possible all welfare programmes and policies must be geographically and culturally specific with flexible bureaucracy and it should be reachable to the last lay man of the society (Prasad, Narandra, 2002).

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