

ISSUES OF CHILD LABOUR IN NEPAL

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Abstract

Background: Children under 18 years who work in different sectors are considered child workers. The Child Labour Act clearly states that those children who are under 18 years should not be employed in material, spiritual or physical states. Similarly, they are prohibited to work in the hazardous form of work.

Objectives: The major objective of this study is to analyze the issues associated and reasons of child labor in Nepal

Methodology: This study has followed both descriptive and empirical approach of research. A questionnaire survey has been conducted to get the answer of research questions. Cronbach's Alpha test has been done to test the reliability of data which was above 81%. Total number of respondents was 384, out of which 261 respondents were male and 123 respondents were female.

Findings: 'Domestic Problem' and 'Poverty' are the main reasons behind children working outside of their homes. Among the child workers 86 percent are from Janajati group followed by Brahmin, Chettri and Madhesi. Most of the child workers earned less than Rs. 12,000 per month and are suffering from different diseases.

Key Words: Child workers

Paper Type: Research

Background

The latest census of Nepal reported that population aged below eighteen years constituted about 40 percent of total population in the country out of which about 15 percent are working children aged between 5 to below 18 years of age. About 2 million children in Nepal are engaged in economic activities out of which about 70% children are involved in agricultural work and rest is working in non-economic sector. The children are being used as laborers for brick kilns, agricultural work, street hawking, construction work, shoe shining, car washing, auto repair, conducting minibuses & local tempos, domestic workers, child porters, waiter in restaurant, shepherd and sex workers etc. (CWIN 2075).

In Nepal, the issue of child labor has attracted considerable attention in the recent years. One of the reasons of prevalence is that child labor is cheap and children can be put to work for long hours for low wages. Apart from cost consideration child labor is preferred because children are docile, incapable of organizing themselves and easily available. Several studies from Nepal and other countries have indicated that some core reasons for child labor are

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poverty, discrimination of gender & caste/ethnicity, dysfunctional families, present illiteracy and unawareness towards children education.

The 'Child Labour Act 1992' defines a childhood to those children who are under 16 years of age. It explicitly states that those children who are under 14 should not be employed as material, spiritual and physical status. Children under the age of 18 are also prohibited to work in the hazardous form of work. Similarly, the convention of the 'Right of the Child 1989' talks of the right of children to be protected from hazardous work that is likely to interfere with the child's education, to be harmful to child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.

The child workers usually work 5 hours to 16 hours per day. Their working areas are not so goods and they suffer from different diseases such as headache, stomach pain, malnutrition, skin diseases, fever etc. The major problem with child labor is poverty and lack of education. Most of them originate from rural areas and are isolated from their families, working at very high risk.

Child labor was an ignored issue in Nepal until 1990. The government that was formed later has identified and addressed child labor as a serious area of concern. Today, child labor has become a strong political and social agenda with education and awareness being facilitated. Nevertheless, although the country has ratified several international and regional conventions concerning protection of the rights of the child, including the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), children's rights continue to be violated.

Constitutional and Legal Provision related to Children in Nepal

The constitution of Nepal 2071/72 has well addressed the provisions of rights of children to justice education and health including rights of children in conflict with law and rights against exploitation.

The child right related to provisions are presented as follows:

- a. Every child shall have the right to education, health, maintenance, proper care, sports, entertainment and overall personality development from the families and the state.
- b. No child shall be employed to work in any factory, mine or engaged in similar other hazardous work.
- c. No child shall be recruited or used in army, police or any armed group, or be subjected, in the name of cultural or religious traditions, to abuse, exclusion or physical, mental, sexual or other form of exploitation or improper use by any means or in any manner.
- d. No child shall be subjected to physical, mental or any other form of torture in home, school or other place and situation whatsoever.
- e. Every child shall have the right of access to basic education

Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study are as follows:

- a. To analyze the reasons behind child labor in Nepal
- b. To analyze the reasons why children, leave home
- c. To analyze the working environment and conditions of child labor

Methodology Used

This study has followed both descriptive and empirical approach of research. A questionnaire survey has been conducted to get the answer to the research questions. The questionnaire includes 8 questions in total. The questions cover different issues such as socio-economic condition, health, working & living conditions, income, education, age, gender and ethnicity of child labor.

In order to increase the reliability and number of responses, personal visits to each and every respondent were made to distribute and collect the questionnaire.

Cronbach's Alpha test has been done to test the reliability of data. Every variable has been tested and it was found that every variable reliability test was above 81%.

Similarly, the secondary data has been collected from the websites and published & unpublished books, reports & articles

Total number of respondents was 384, out of which 261 respondents were male and 123 respondents were female.

Analysis and Findings

Age and Gender Distribution of Child Labour

The following table analyzes the age and gender wise distribution of the 384 child labors:

Table 1
Age and Gender Distribution of Child Labour

Age Group	Male	Female	Total	%
Below 6	2	1	3	0.78
6 to 10	57	25	82	21.35
10 to 14	100	45	145	37.76
14 to 18	102	52	154	40.11
Total	261	123	384	100

Table 1 reveals the fact that the number of both male and female child workers has been seen to be more from the age group 14-18 i.e. male 102 and female 52 whereas workers from the age group below 6 years have been seen to the least i.e. male 2 and female 1. It means that children from the age 14-18 were economically active. Owners gain financial benefits from child's labours young age as it is cheaper than paying adult workers are. In the research it was found that number of male child worker are high than female worker.

Caste Distribution of the Child Labours

The following table analyzes the caste distribution of the 384 child worker:

Table 2
Caste Distribution of the Child Labours

Caste/Ethnicity	Male	Female	Total	%
Brahamin	50	16	66	17.19
Chehtri	46	18	64	16.67
Newar	29	11	40	10.42
Madhesi	48	17	65	16.92

Janajati (Sherpa, Magar, Gurung and Tamang etc.)	48	38	86	22.39
Others (Muslim & Dalits etc.)	40	23	63	16.41
Total	261	123	384	100

Table 2 explains that the majority of the child workers come from the oppressed class compared to so-call upper caste. Children from such class are relatively poor and majority of them are not going to school. Very high 22.39% child workers i.e. male 48 and female 38 were from “Janajati” community. Only 10.42 percent were from ‘Newar’ community. But ratios of Brahamin, Chetri, Madhesi and Other Caste were about 16 to 17 percentages.

Educational Status

Majority of child workers are illiterate and the following table analyzes 384 child labor from class wise educational status:

Table 3
Educational Status of Child Workers

Class	Male	Female	Total	%
Illiterate	79	45	124	32.29
1 to 2	67	32	99	25.78
3 to 5	64	28	92	23.96
6 to 7	42	15	57	14.84
8 to 9	9	3	12	3.13
Total	261	123	384	100

Table 3 shows that 32.29 percent of the child workers i.e. male 79 and female 45 were illiterate. The trend among the literate children has been decreasing i.e. the higher the grade level the lower the school is attending. Only 12 child workers i.e. male 9 and female 3 were found in grade in 8 to 9 class. Similarly, 99 child workers were found in grade 1 to 2, 92 child workers were found in class in grade 3 to 5, 57 child workers were found in grade 6 to 7. Not a single child worker has been found who had completed grade 10.

Most of the parents are illiterate and they are not sending their children to school because they cannot afford for schooling due to little alternative source of income. Parents perceive high opportunity cost of children going school in relation to work. The main reasons are poverty, educational unawareness of parents and negative attitude towards daughter's education etc.

Reasons for Leaving Home by Child Workers

The following table analyzes the reasons for leaving home by 384 child workers:

Table 4
Reasons for Leaving Home by Child Workers

Symptoms	Male	Female	Total	%
Parents Interest	58	22	80	20.83
Domestic Problems	54	35	89	23.18
Personal Reasons	49	29	78	20.31
Others Influences	36	27	63	16.41
Poverty	64	10	74	19.27
Total	261	123	384	100

Table 4 explains the most important reasons for leaving home by child workers were 'Domestic Problems' for both male and female children followed by 'Parents Interest' and 'Personal Reasons' which were 23.18 percent and 20.83 percent respectively. Male child was high in 'Poverty' and female child was high in 'Domestic Problems' compared to other reasons i.e. 64 and 35 respectively. Only 16.41 percent has been seen in the reason of 'Other Influences' and 'Poverty' was also the other important reason for leaving home for the child workers i.e. about 19 percent.

Reasons for Working

The reasons for working by 384 child workers are shown below:

Table 5
Reasons for Working Reported by Child Workers

Symptoms	Male	Female	Total	%
Avoiding Study	53	35	88	22.92
Attraction to City	70	31	101	26.30
Helping to Parents	58	29	87	22.66
Learning and Experience	43	17	60	15.62
Independence	37	11	48	12.5
Total	261	123	384	100

Table 5 reveals that the most important reason for working was 'Attraction to City' which was about 26 percent i.e. 70 male child workers and 31 female child workers. Similarly, about 22 percent each was 'Avoiding Study' and 'Helping to Parents' were the reasons for child workers.

About 12 percent were working for 'Independence' this indicates children's responsibility to their parents and awareness towards their poverty.

Duration of Working Time

The following table analyzes the duration of working time of the 384 child workers:

Table 6
Duration of Working Time

Working hour	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
Less than 6	67	41	108	28.12
6 to 8	68	44	112	29.17
8 to 10	70	28	98	25.52
10 to 12	48	8	56	14.58
Above 12	8	2	10	2.61
Total	261	123	384	100

Table 6 shows that, about 29 percent child workers i.e. 112 (68 male workers and 44 female workers) worked for 6 to 8 hours followed by less than 6 hours i.e. 108 child workers. Only 2.61 percent workers i.e. 10 worked for above 12 hours. The number of child workers who works 8 to 10 hours and 10 to 12 hours were 98 and 56 respectively.

Wage Payment to the Workers

Table 7
Wages to Child Workers

Amount (Rs.)	Male	Female	Total	Percentage
Less than 3,000	65	21	86	22.39
3,000 – 6,000	66	54	120	31.25
6,000 – 9,000	60	32	92	23.96
9,000 – 12,000	56	12	68	17.71
Above 12,000	14	4	18	4.69
Total	261	123	384	100

Table 7 explains that, about 31 percent child workers i.e. 120 (66 male workers and 54 female workers) have been earning Rs.3,000 to Rs.6,000 per month followed by Rs.6,000 to Rs.9,000 earned by 93 child workers. Only 4.69 percent workers i.e. 18 child workers earned more than Rs.12,000 per month. The number of child workers who earned less than Rs. 3,000 were 86 i.e. 22.39 percent. This is an intolerable form of exploitation of children.

Health Risk of Children

The symptoms of sickness reported by 384 child workers have been given below:

Table 8
Symptoms of Sickness Reported by Child Workers

Symptoms	Male	Female	Total	%
Headache	63	20	83	21.61
Stomach pain	35	41	76	19.79
Cough	63	19	82	21.35
Fever	41	18	59	15.36
Common cold	43	17	60	15.63
Others	16	8	24	6.26
Total	261	123	384	100

Table 8 reveals that the major symptoms of sickness were headache (21.61 percent) stomach pain (19.79 percent), cough (21.35 percent), fever (15.36 percent), common cold (15.63 percent) and other diseases (6.26 percent). Other symptoms include chest pain, eye, nose pain and hand/leg pain, respiratory problem, malnutrition, skin disease etc.

Number of male child workers suffered from 'Headache' and 'Cough' were 63 each and female child workers were 20 and 19 respectively. Only few number of child workers i.e. male 16 and female 8 were from 'Others'. Number of female workers suffered from 'Stomach Pain' was 41 high compared to other diseases.

Conclusion

Domestic problems, attraction to an urban life, poverty, meeting household expenditure and avoiding studies are the main reasons for children working outside home. Many households in the rural areas of Nepal are struck with poverty and desperately seek opportunities to support their livelihood. In this context, participation of children in any income generating activities is not uncommon. Economic & social status of every child worker is poor and they have lack

of awareness and education. Because of these reasons the behavior and condition of these children is very different and distressing from ordinary children.

Most of the child workers suffer from different diseases during their working period such as cold, cough, stomach pain, headache and fever etc. From the research it is found that childworkers from Janajaticommunity are high compared to other castes. Similarly, most of them are illiterate and none of them have completed schooling. A significant number of children are exploited, harassed and abused in their workplaces physically, economically, mentally, sexually & psychologically and they are paid very low wages. The issue is still highly prevalent and the country requires structured and rigorous actions to monitor and address child labor.

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