

CHILD LABOUR IN GUNTUR DISTRICT, ANDHRA PRADESH: A SOCIO-ECONOMIC STUDY OF STRUCTURAL INEQUALITY

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Abstract

Child labour remains a significant socio-economic challenge in India despite constitutional safeguards, legislative measures, and various welfare programmes aimed at protecting children's rights. The present study examines the prevalence and underlying causes of child labour in Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh, with a particular focus on structural inequality, poverty, educational deprivation, and social exclusion. The study adopts a sociological perspective and utilizes empirical observations supported by secondary sources such as government reports, census data, policy documents, and scholarly literature. The findings indicate that poverty, unemployment, indebtedness, migration, family instability, agricultural distress, and lack of access to quality education are the primary factors contributing to child labour in the district. The study reveals that children are engaged in agriculture, domestic work, hotels, workshops, construction activities, and other informal sectors where they are exposed to exploitative and hazardous working conditions. Child labour not only deprives children of educational opportunities but also adversely affects their physical health, emotional well-being, psychological development, and social adjustment. Many child labourers experience stress, anxiety, low self-esteem, social isolation, and school dropout, which restrict their future life chances and perpetuate the intergenerational cycle of poverty. From a sociological perspective, child labour is viewed as a structural problem arising from unequal distribution of resources, socio-economic vulnerabilities, and inadequate developmental opportunities. The study emphasizes the importance of social work interventions such as casework, counselling, family support, community organization, advocacy, rehabilitation, and child protection services in addressing the problem. Psychological support and counselling are essential for helping affected children overcome trauma, emotional distress, and behavioural difficulties. Furthermore, education is identified as the most effective tool for preventing child labour and promoting social mobility. Strengthening educational infrastructure, improving school retention, ensuring access to quality education, and creating child-friendly learning environments can significantly reduce child labour. The study concludes that the eradication of child labour requires a multidisciplinary approach involving social work, psychology, education, community participation, and effective policy implementation. Such integrated efforts are necessary to protect child rights, promote human development, and achieve sustainable and inclusive social progress in Guntur District and beyond.

Keywords: *Child Labour, Structural Inequality, Social Work Intervention, Psychology, Education, Educational Deprivation, Child Rights, Poverty, Rehabilitation, Social Exclusion, Sustainable Development.*

Introduction

In today's times, childhood is getting hampered due to child labour. Child labour refers to the involvement of children in industries to exploit them against their will. Children are forced to work by people or businesses in harmful and hazardous conditions. The child labour essay states the effects and causes of child labour on society in a detailed manner. It is a very serious social problem that has generated debates and arguments in various sections of society. According to University Education Commission (1948), Child labour means any occupation

undertaken by a child below 14 years of age whether it is on a remunerative basis or by force. As per Article 24 of the Constitution of India, no child below the age of 14 years must be employed in any factory or mine or engaged in any hazardous employment. Furthermore, the focus of the 2015 Juvenile Justice Act is to cater to the care, treatment, protection and rehabilitation of two classes of children, namely, children in conflict with the law and children in need of care and protection. India has anti-child labour laws but the loopholes which these laws have enabled many to commit this offence due to lack of good enforcement. Children who are forced to work often find that the atmosphere in which they work is extremely harmful. This is not just for their physical growth but also for their mental development. Child labour can be found in all parts of the world but its extent is very high in developing economies like India. Children are forced to contribute economically to families with irregular income supply. This study will examine these structural conditions to view child labour as a product of social inequality rather than an independent phenomenon (Sen 1999).

Socio-economic background.

In controlling the incidence of child labour, socio-economic background of families play important roles in Guntur district. To begin with, most of the households with child labour belong to the economically weak sections that depend on agriculture, daily wage labour or informal sector options for jobs. The income of the families continues to be low and unstable. As a result, they cannot satisfy their material needs such as food, shelter, medical care, etc. As a result, kids are mostly compelled to add to the family income. Rural poverty seems to be an important factor in this. Besides, the agricultural activity in Guntur largely depend on seasonal rain and market force. As a result, incomes are not predictable. Unemployment becomes the fate of families in off-seasons. The level of reliance on child labour increases.

Sen (1999) views poverty, above all, as a deprivation of capability. So, this lack of capability is being experienced in education and opportunities too. This perspective clearly reflects from the child labour situation. Furthermore, lack of social security and limited availability of welfare programs further vulnerability. Families with low literacy levels are unaware about child rights and government schemes. This results in engaging children in work as a strategy to help households cope. As a result, cases of socio-economic deprivation stand at the root of child labour. Further, poverty forces children into labour to augment family incomes.

Reasons Behind Child Labour

Child labour in Guntur district doesn't have any single specific cause. Like the causes of most problems, the causes of child labour are multi-dimensional and deeply embedded in the structural socio-economic realities. A significant reason for this issue is poverty, which causes families to rely on numerous income sources, including children. When the wages of the adults are low or they have no work, children are pulled into labour for subsistence. Unemployment and underemployment of adults is another important cause. Due to farming being a seasonal work in rural areas, families are left without income for certain months of the year. Children have to work for several months, either in agriculture or in informal sectors in urban areas, due

to this. Parents migrating is another important cause where either the children migrate with the families or are left behind, making them more vulnerable and likely to get into labour. Another significant factor is educational deprivation.

Child labour occurs due to low-quality school accessibility, high school dropout rates, and ignorance of education value. Deshingkar and Start (2003) note that poverty-induced migration and mobility often leads to an increase in child labour participation through the emergence of steady work in the informal sector. One of the causes of child labour is a cultural factor. The notion that work is a regular activity happens in many families and communities where child work is accepted. To sum up, child labour is not caused due to a single factor. It is rather the interaction of various factors which cause child labour. Some of these factors are poverty, unemployment, migration, weak educational system and so on. This is a report on Child Labour in Guntur District. Structural factors are those which take root in the deep inequalities in the.

Types of Child Labour in Guntur District

Multiple sectors engage child labour which is reflective of the diversified informal economy of the Guntur district. Continue reading the article about the widespread child labour in the Guntur district. Agriculture is one of the large sectors that are commonly associated with child labour. Children were found to be involved in sowing, transplanting, pesticide spraying and harvesting, as observed in the study. During the peak season when the demand for labour is high and adult labourers are inadequate and unavailable, the children engaged in works on the farms become more pronounced. The brick kiln industry is the second most common where child labour is found. The kids are engaged in performing activities such as shaping, carry and drying the bricks. The brick kilns are filled with cruel conditions as the children have to face dust and scorching heat. Apart from that, the work at these brick kilns may cause various types of deformities in the children moulding the brick.

In places like Guntur city, Tenali, etc. children are usually engaged in hotels, tea stalls and roadside eateries in urban and semi-urban localities. The activities they perform include cleaning the utensils and glasses, serving food, running errands, etc. Besides, some districts witness a higher prevalence of children as domestic workers. It is an invisible form of child labour, which is mostly engaged in domestic work by girls. They labor tirelessly long hours for the lowest possible pay without any perks or benefits.

One of the possibilities is the informal economy, which accommodates many poor children in an environment where the relevant rules and regulations that pertain are all but absent. (ILO, 2017) Their engagement is not just limited to the highway vending. Many instances of child labour like pan shop, roadside eateries, city resort, wiring cable, construction and garbage picking exist. These are taking place as a result of the structural penetration of child labour within rural-urban economies, leading to convoluted issues regarding the elimination of child labour. Being deprived of education and leaving school early.

The educational deprivation of children in Guntur district has been both a cause and consequence of their child labour. Most child laborers we meet are those drops out or have never enrolled in formal school. The primary cause is lack of economic means and poverty of the household. Many children either drop out of school or never join the education system because families cannot afford the direct and indirect cost of schooling. Moreover, often due to the economic condition of the household, the children dropout of school to join work to supplement household income. It is common in rural areas because the school is far away from the village and children dropout to help parents.

Also, one of the factors of dropping out of school is the quality of education. Shortage of trained teachers in rural area government schools. These schools do not have good infrastructure and learning resources. It limits students' learning capacity which further affect their learning outcomes.

Factors that influenced child labour

Failure to Education.

Kids who do not educational services join the labour market sooner than expected as out-of-school children have nothing to do during the day. Seasonal relocation of parents in search of livelihood disrupts education continuity. A lot of such children go along with their migrant folks and hence miss stable access to educational facilities. The Right To Education Act (RTE) and various government schemes aimed at enhancing the accessibility of enrolments have witnessed some success. However, many children drop out of school before they complete class 8 for various reasons. Most School dropouts sectors are those vulnerable to labour market entry especially agriculture and labour-intensive informal sectors. In addition, being deprived of education leads to children entering various forms of work that reproduce and perpetuate intergenerational poverty and inequality (UNICEF, 2021).

Effect on Health and Behavior.

The entry of children into the labour market adversely affects their physical and psychological health. In Guntur district, kids already working in agriculture and Industrial sector expose themselves to chemical pesticides, heavy loads, dust and excessive heat. It puts children at risk for breathing diseases, skin infections, muscle disorders, and physical impairments. In the brick kiln and workshop, workers perform long and continuous work without sufficient sleep, food, and medical aid. The results show that in the Guntur district, children are made to do excessive work with no proper rest. As a result, they suffer from Chronic Fatigue which is adversely affecting their physical development. Beginning of life engaged in intense labour. The International Labour Organization (ILO) (2017) reported that emotional trauma, depression, and decline in mental development are related to child labour. In domestic work cases, we see that children (mostly girls) can suffer from emotional neglect and sometimes verbal or physical abuse. The lack of a supporting environment harms their mental health and confidence. Because of the long duration, these psychological impacts cripple their ability to lift themselves

out of poverty and reinforce the cycle of poverty. The health effects of child labour are, therefore, extremely severe. One of the biggest public health and mental health issues. Essentially, its responsible for the overall human development of the region.

Role of Migration in Child Labour

Guntur district is afflicted by child labour due to various reasons. Many low-income households (particularly those of agriculture or daily wagers) are large in the sample. It limits their income streams and forces families to urge their children to contribute financially at a very young age. Like joint and extended families, children in joint families also learn about the various work and family activities early. The normalization process of child work lessen the serious of child labour and ensure its perpetuation. Moreover, in a joint family set-up many members contribute to the decision to send the child to work. Girls are expected to assist in household chores or get into home-based work.

Agriculture is the most common form of child labour in Guntur district. In Guntur district, child trafficking significantly contributes to the overall incidence of child labour. Children who are less than 14 years age work in the fields with their parents and also help other family members, relatives and neighbours. It is estimated that in this manner, over 80 per cent of the migrant workforce is composed of children. In actuality, as per the stats of child labour, 89 percent of working children are found to be working in agriculture. Children are engaged in an assorted range of agriculture-related jobs. It includes sowing of seeds, weeding, hoeing, watering, spraying pesticides, sorting out agricultural implements, transporting different farm inputs, carrying heavy loads, clearing granaries, digging nursery beds, transplanting, harvesting crops, plucking and crushing sugarcane and making compost manure and its frequent stirring. In several regions, bonded labour is the fate of many children; besides this.

Due to decline in landholdings, family problems and problems in agricultural employment, many agricultural labourers become bonded labourers. Lack of credit facilities leads to these kids working in the fields as labourers. Children make up one-third of bonded labourers. Agricultural crops like sugarcane, paddy, wheat, turmeric, jowar, cotton, maize, and barely in Guntur are afflicted with bonded labourers. The movement of people had helped trigger and sustain child labour in Guntur district. As a result of this process, socio-economic disability has been embedded and institutionalised in low income households across rural-urban spaces. The research conducted by Kerlinger (1988) defines a hypothesis as a “formal statement which specifies the expected relationship between an independent variable and a dependent one” Family structure and social norms.

In the same manner, boys are forced into wage labour activities. Girls are often deprived of education and forced into a concealed form of child labour in the name of household invisible exploitation and servitude. It also makes child labour acceptable as they are taken away for “learning responsibility” not as full workers. It also strengthens the in loco parentis assumption. As per Sociology theory. As a result, child labour is reinforced by family structure and social norms. Therefore, it goes beyond the economic explanation of illiteracy and poverty. The

impact of curbing strategies and the government's regulations on child labour in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh needs to be discussed in detail. 9. The government of India has several legal and policy provisions like the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act 2016 and the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009 to combat the problem of child labour and ensure education to all children. According to Section 3 of the Act, no children below the age of 14 years shall be employed in any occupations, nor in any processes. There are some exceptions made for children working as child artists and for their employment in domestic sector.

RTE requires and ensures that all children, aged between 6 to 14 years, need to be educated. In Andhra Pradesh, labour inspections, rescue and withdrawal exercises and rehabilitation are child law enforcement mechanisms. But, despite the efforts of the government of India and government of Andhra Pradesh, implementation gaps continue to exist owing to large size unorganised sector. The continued existence of the issue spreads in Guntur district due to lack of enforcement. Beyond that, the process of identification and rescue of child labourers is also taking place with the important role of non-government organizations and groups from civil society.

Economic Factors and Poverty Cycle

In Guntur district, the prime cause of child labour is economic distress. The need of the hour is for strategies to fight poverty that adopt children functional but inadequate and use them as workers. The prevalence of informal employment in agriculture, brick kilns, construction, and urban petty trade makes them significantly income unstable as there are no regular wages, job guarantee or no social security benefits in these sectors. Poor households' children are considered net gainer contributing economically. They either earn wages or spend money to oversee the household or work in the fields in the household sector. The process of child labour becoming legitimate among the poor and the impoverished for sizable gainers also develops. Amartya Sen (1999) believes that poverty is not merely a lack of income, but rather a lack of capabilities. Guntur district shows signs of capability deprivation, as residents lack access to education, health care and dignified employment opportunities. Child labour reinforces deprivation, and it is one of the causes of poverty and also an effect of it. Children engaged in labour are more strongly affected by the intergenerational cycle of poverty. Kids drop out of school and become low-skilled adults. They continue to work as informal labour under poor conditions. Poor families don't pay for education as early-age work of children acts as alternative to education; hence poverty is not removed; but perpetuated. To put it another way, this establishment of a structural trap on an issue that is linked. Thus, it is more essential than ever to eliminate child labour, which can be done through economic restructuring, distribution of wages, employment security and strengthening of social security measures.

Gender Dimensions of Child Labour

In Guntur district, the gender of children has a big influence on the type, visibility and intensity of child labour. Boys work in paid labour in agriculture, construction work, and small industrial units, for instance. This clearly shows that they work in unsafe conditions due to the heavy physical work and for long hours. Girls do more domestic work than boys as they are also engaged in sibling care and household-based informal work. This work is considered invisible because it happens in private spaces and homes which are inaccessible to monitoring or regulating agents. The girl child labour is significantly underreported. This statement means that when it comes to receiving education, families disallow or deny admission for girls into schools, more so than boys. The early withdrawal of girls from schools is also encouraged, which makes them engage in paid and unpaid labour also at an early age. There is also an important role of cultural inequality here. As per the norms, girls are not allowed to do “male” work, however, it is believed to be a natural continuation of their “female” work if they do caregiving and household work. According to UNICEF (2021), girls in informal child labour are more vulnerable to exploitation and trafficking risks, and they are deprived in the long term.

The limited movement, low rate of education among girls and women and early marriage are reflected in Guntur district. Therefore, the phenomenon of child labour is not neutral in terms of gender. Rules and policies to protect the girl child must specifically target parents and other community members who believe that child marriage is acceptable.

Role of NGOs and Civil Society

The NGOs and Civil Society institutions are playing a vital complementary role in the child labour issue in Guntur district. These organizations help to minimize child labor through complementary activities that the government machinery has failed to do till date. There are many non-governmental organisations (NGOs) like the Asha Sadan, Ekalavya foundation, Human Concern, Kondaveeti Venu Goru foundation among others operating at the grassroots of Guntur District.

The various programs they implement are aimed at identifying child labor, rescuing him/her, converting the child workers into the formal school system by coordinating with other organizations and government bodies. Awareness campaigns about child rights are run in many rural villages and urban slums and creates an impact. Education teaches people the mean of the usefulness of education and employing kids.

The organization collaborates with government agencies to carry out rescue operations in brick kilns, hotel kitchens, mechanic shops, and workshops for the removal of children from hazardous and exploitative work. They offer assistance for various activities such as school enrolment, bridge education as well as counselling and financial support to needy children. These help in reducing the economic cost of immediately preventing or removing children from labour. Though fulfil important roles, these organisations face funding constraints that limit outreach capabilities. The Guntur District Collectors monitoring of child labour and associated factories is ineffective and there is conflict of interest with their other jobs. Some community-based organisations have been successful too. The establishment of synergy between NGO,

Government Institutions, school and colleges over the long run are important. They can combine interventions like awareness, financial supports and educational reforms to eliminate child labour from Guntur district.

Strategies for the Eradication of Child Labour

The eradication of child labour in Guntur District requires an integrated approach combining sociological reforms, psychological support, educational empowerment, and social work intervention. Addressing poverty, social inequality, and exclusion through community development and welfare programmes can reduce children's vulnerability to labour exploitation. Psychological counselling and psychosocial support are essential for restoring the emotional well-being of affected children. Universal access to quality education, school retention programmes, and child-friendly learning environments can prevent school dropout and child labour. Social workers, educators, psychologists, government agencies, and local communities must work collaboratively to protect child rights and promote sustainable development.

Psychological and Emotional Impacts of Child Labour

Child labour has profound psychological and emotional consequences that affect children's overall development and well-being. Children engaged in labour often experience chronic stress, anxiety, fear, and emotional insecurity due to long working hours, harsh working conditions, and exposure to exploitation. The absence of a nurturing childhood environment deprives them of opportunities for emotional growth, social interaction, and educational development. Research indicates that child labourers are more likely to suffer from low self-esteem, depression, feelings of hopelessness, and behavioural problems compared to their non-working peers. The burden of economic responsibility at an early age creates emotional distress and adversely affects their mental health, leading to long-term psychological challenges in adulthood (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2021).

Working children frequently encounter physical punishment, verbal abuse, and social discrimination, which contribute to trauma and emotional instability. Many child labourers develop feelings of isolation and alienation because they are excluded from educational institutions and peer relationships that are essential for healthy psychosocial development. The lack of emotional support from family members, who may themselves face economic hardships, further intensifies psychological vulnerability. Studies have shown that children involved in hazardous labour are at a greater risk of developing post-traumatic stress symptoms, anxiety disorders, and depressive tendencies. These experiences negatively affect their cognitive abilities, decision-making skills, and future aspirations (UNICEF, 2022).

Counselling and Rehabilitation

Counselling plays a crucial role in addressing the psychological consequences of child labour and facilitating the recovery of affected children. Professional counselling helps children

express their emotions, process traumatic experiences, and develop coping mechanisms to manage stress and anxiety. Individual counselling, group counselling, and family counselling are effective approaches for restoring emotional stability and strengthening resilience among child labourers. Through therapeutic interventions, children can rebuild self-confidence, improve social skills, and regain a sense of personal worth. Counselling services also assist families in understanding the developmental needs of children and encourage supportive home environments that promote education and well-being (American Psychological Association, 2020).

Rehabilitation programmes are equally important in ensuring the successful reintegration of child labourers into mainstream society. Comprehensive rehabilitation involves educational support, vocational training, healthcare services, psychosocial counselling, and community-based interventions. Social workers, educators, psychologists, and government agencies collaborate to create protective environments that enable children to continue their education and achieve their full potential. Effective rehabilitation not only removes children from exploitative labour conditions but also addresses the underlying socio-economic factors that contribute to child labour. Sustainable rehabilitation strategies empower children and their families, helping break the cycle of poverty and exploitation while promoting social inclusion and long-term development (International Labour Organization, 2021)

Child Labour, Social Work, and Psychology: An Interdisciplinary Relationship

Child labour is a multidimensional social issue that affects children's physical, educational, social, and psychological development. Social work and psychology are closely connected in addressing the problems faced by child labourers. While psychology focuses on understanding the emotional, cognitive, and behavioural consequences of child labour, social work emphasizes intervention, rehabilitation, advocacy, and social support. Together, these disciplines provide a comprehensive framework for understanding and addressing the complex challenges experienced by working children. Their combined efforts contribute to child protection, mental health promotion, educational inclusion, and social reintegration (Zastrow, 2022).

Psychology examines how child labour influences children's mental health and emotional well-being. Many child labourers experience stress, anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, fear, and feelings of social isolation due to exploitative working conditions and educational deprivation. Continuous exposure to physical hardship and emotional neglect can negatively affect cognitive development, personality formation, and social adjustment. Psychological theories such as developmental psychology and trauma theory explain how adverse childhood experiences can have long-lasting effects on emotional regulation, learning abilities, and interpersonal relationships. Understanding these psychological consequences is essential for designing effective intervention strategies (Santrock, 2021).

Social work utilizes psychological knowledge to assess children's emotional needs and provide appropriate support services. Social workers employ counselling techniques, psychosocial assessments, behavioural interventions, and therapeutic communication to help child labourers overcome trauma and emotional distress. By integrating psychological principles into practice, social workers can strengthen children's coping abilities, resilience, self-confidence, and social functioning. This interdisciplinary approach ensures that interventions address both the external social conditions and the internal psychological challenges faced by working children (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2021).

The relationship between child labour, psychology, and social work is particularly evident in rehabilitation programmes. Psychological counselling helps children process traumatic experiences and restore emotional stability, while social work interventions focus on family support, educational reintegration, community mobilization, and access to welfare services. Together, psychologists and social workers create protective environments that promote recovery, empowerment, and healthy development. Their collaborative efforts contribute to breaking the cycle of poverty, exploitation, and social exclusion that often sustains child labour across generations (Dubois & Miley, 2019).

Conclusion:

The present study concludes that child labour in Guntur District, Andhra Pradesh, is not merely an outcome of household poverty but a manifestation of deeper structural inequalities embedded within the socio-economic system. Factors such as poverty, unemployment, indebtedness, social exclusion, gender discrimination, educational deprivation, and unequal access to developmental opportunities continue to push children into labour despite constitutional safeguards and legislative measures. The persistence of child labour demonstrates that legal provisions alone are insufficient unless accompanied by comprehensive socio-economic transformation and effective implementation mechanisms.

From a sociological perspective, child labour reflects the unequal distribution of resources, opportunities, and social power within society. The phenomenon is closely linked to structural deprivation and the inability of vulnerable families to access quality education, social protection, and sustainable livelihoods. Therefore, the eradication of child labour requires addressing the root causes of inequality through inclusive development, poverty reduction, social justice, and community empowerment.

The study further reveals that child labour has serious psychological consequences, including emotional distress, anxiety, low self-esteem, social isolation, and impaired cognitive development. These effects not only undermine children's well-being but also restrict their future educational and occupational opportunities. Psychological counselling, psychosocial support, and child-centred rehabilitation programmes are essential to restoring children's emotional stability and facilitating their healthy development.

Social work intervention emerges as a crucial strategy in combating child labour through child protection services, family counselling, community organization, advocacy, rehabilitation, and rights-based approaches. Social workers can act as catalysts for change by connecting vulnerable children and families with welfare schemes, educational support, healthcare services, and livelihood opportunities. Their role is particularly important in strengthening community awareness and promoting child rights.

Education remains the most powerful instrument for preventing child labour and breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty. Universal access to quality education, improved school infrastructure, teacher availability, scholarship programmes, and child-friendly learning environments can significantly reduce children's vulnerability to labour exploitation. Educational empowerment not only enhances individual capabilities but also contributes to broader social and economic development.

The eradication of child labour in Guntur District requires a multidimensional and integrated approach that combines sociological understanding, psychological rehabilitation, social work intervention, educational empowerment, economic development, and effective policy implementation. A coordinated effort involving government agencies, educational institutions, social workers, civil society organizations, local communities, and families is essential for safeguarding child rights and promoting human dignity. Such a holistic and rights-based strategy will contribute to achieving social justice, inclusive development, and the Sustainable Development Goals while ensuring a safer, healthier, and more equitable future for every child.

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