

CHILD LABOUR AS A GLOBAL CONCERN AMIDST COVID-19

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Abstract

There is a worldwide discussion on child work, with the potential for global persuasion and policy intervention, replacing the previous focus on regional and national issues. Furthermore, it came back to light as a crucial matter, particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, children have encountered several difficulties worldwide, with child labour being one among them. Thus, the paper attempts to discuss child labour and how it relates to the pandemic. The paper moreover examines records from international agencies with an emphasis on the dynamics of child labour. It also examines the reasons for the sharp rise in child labour during COVID-19 worldwide.

Keywords: COVID-19, Child Labour, Children rights, SDG, UNICEF

1. Introduction

As the most valuable resource in society, children should have the right to a secure, supportive environment where their growth and development may be supported and nurtured. They make up the nations' human resource bases. However, children are the most vulnerable group in society and are thus more likely to be the victims of child labour and other types of exploitation.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) specifies that not all work performed should be considered child labour, positively encompassing the involvement of minors or young adults beyond the legal working age in jobs that do not negatively impact their health and personal growth. (IPEC) Consequently, child labour is defined as employment that is detrimental to a child's physical and mental development and robs them of their youth, potential, and dignity. By international law, "child" in this text refers to anyone under the age of 18. According to International Labour Organisation regulations, hazardous work performed by minors under the age of eighteen or by youngsters below the minimum working age is considered "child labour." To put it more technically, child labour is any work that is done by children in any kind of employment, with two significant exceptions: work that is not considered to be among the worst forms of child labour, especially hazardous work, for children who are older than the general minimum working age, and permitted light work for children within the age range specified for light work. Hazardous unpaid household services, often known as hazardous domestic duties, are included in a more comprehensive statistical definition.

ILO Conventions No. 138, which addresses minimum age, and No. 182, which addresses the worst types of child work, are the two conventions that address child labour. These agreements are regarded as "fundamental" agreements. This means that, even in cases where they have not ratified the relevant Conventions, all ILO member states are required to uphold, advance, and achieve the eradication of child labour. With the acceptance of the Child Labour Conventions, several nations have now passed laws that forbid or severely restrict the employment and work of minors. Despite

these initiatives, child labour is still widely used, sometimes in horrifying conditions, especially in underdeveloped nations. This is because child labour is a very complicated problem. (UNICEF, 2020)

In addition, a wide range of sectors and issues are linked to child employment, including domestic work, agriculture, the armed forces, gender difficulties, commercial social exploitation, education, sexual diseases, migration, and human trafficking. In terms of occupational diseases, non-fatal accidents, and work-related deaths, agriculture stands out as one of the riskiest sectors. The ILO reports that 60% of all child labourers between the ages of 5 and 17 globally are employed in agriculture, which includes forestry, fishing, farming, aquaculture, and raising animals. The study also details that the worst kind of child employment is that tens of thousands of boys and girls are forced to participate in adult wars in at least 17 different nations throughout the globe. Growing concern is now being expressed about the commercial sexual exploitation of minors. This includes using boys and girls for sex-related purposes in public or indoor spaces for payment in cash or kind, trafficking in young people for sex-related purposes, child sex tourism, the creation, promotion, and distribution of child-oriented pornography, and the use of kids in sex shows. Moreover, according to Convention No. 189. Work done in or for a household is referred to as domestic work. When children undertake domestic labour below the legal minimum age, in dangerous conditions, or a manner akin to slavery, it is referred to as child labour in this context. The migration of children is another factor. Both good and bad experiences can arise from child migration; the former involves threats of being reported to the authorities, subpar working conditions, assault, isolation, and non-payment of wages. Research indicates that migrant children are more likely than native children to be child workers, receiving lower wages, working longer hours, attending school less frequently, and experiencing a higher risk of workplace fatality. The trafficking of children comes next. It involves removing kids from their haven and taking advantage of their susceptibility to abuse. According to the report, there is a strong correlation between the demand for inexpensive, pliable labour in industries and among employers where the working conditions and treatment of the children seriously violate their human rights, and the trafficking of children within countries, across national borders, and continents. (UNICEF, 2020) Thus, child employment perpetuates intergenerational cycles of unskilled labour and ongoing poverty while also exposing kids to violence. They are denied every chance for their children's cognitive and physical growth. The risk of child labour has increased as a result of the pandemic. This is a result of families being denied reasonable choices due to school closures and a substantial increase in poverty.

2. Literature Review

There is a vast amount of literature on the subject due to the increased knowledge and concern around child labour in recent years. Cross-national data was used in several early studies on child labour. The ILO's LABORSTA database provides estimates of economically active populations across national boundaries. Non-governmental organisations, trade unions, governments, intergovernmental organisations including UNICEF and ILO, politicians, and human rights campaigners have all presented documented work on child employment. Furthermore, the poverty

hypothesis—which holds that children are sent to work to augment low-family income—is supported by empirical data provided by Bonnet (1993), Krueger (1996), Grootaert (1999), Grootaert and Patrinos (2002), and Edmonds (2005). A few scholars concentrated on the inadequate quality of education and the collapse of the capital market as the reasons for child work. Prominent studies by Jafarey and Lahiri (2002, 2005), Baland and Robinson (2000), and Ranjan (1999, 2001) highlighted the significance of imperfect capital markets as a contributing factor to inefficient child labour. Besides, there is a dearth of research on COVID-19 and child labour. Thereby, by making a connection between child labour and COVID-19, the paper aims to shed new light on the problems surrounding it.

3. Methodology

The study searched for original publications using the terms "child/children work," "child/children labour," "adolescent/s work," or "adolescents' labour" in the title, the body of the text, or as descriptors to analyse the global scientific literature on child labour. Subsequently, a database search was conducted. The articles' content was analysed using broad categories, and the more critical and recurring ones came out of the analysis: 1) Child labour: kinds during COVID-19; 2) Child labour as it relates to the gap between urban and rural areas and gender; 3) COVID-19 and Child labour. The analysis just used the data generated about the COVID-19 context.

4. Covid-19 and Child labour

Child labour remains unacceptably common in the world today. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, 1 in 10 children globally, or 160 million children—97 million boys and 63 million girls—were working as child labourers by the beginning of 2020. Ninety-nine million children, or about half of all those involved in child labour, worked in dangerous jobs that directly threatened their moral development, health, and safety. (UNICEF, 2020) After the pandemic data asserts that approximately 4 billion people, or 55% of the world's population, lack social protection. They were quite susceptible to shocks both immediately and later on. Reduced demand for labour, reduced salaries, and the elimination of employment that led to poverty likely resulted from declining working capital from company bankruptcies and remittance losses. Thereby the pandemic resulted in millions of households losing their employment or money. Further, families who experienced financial hardship frequently felt pressured to send their kids to work to pay for their necessities. Child work is therefore a part of poverty as households must employ any means necessary to survive. Studies by UNICEF and the ILO show that for every 1% increase in poverty, there is a 0.7% increase in child labour. (UNICEF, 2020) Because of such an economic downturn and the resulting increased poverty, the COVID-19 epidemic has resulted in enormous school closures, the loss of carers from sickness and death, and lax enforcement of child labour laws, all of which have put pressure on teens to enter the job.

The COVID-19 pandemic wrought an economic downturn likely to continue long after the current period of sheltering in place. Some 55 per cent of people globally – about 4 billion – do not have any social protection. They are extremely vulnerable to shocks now and over the long term. Declining working capital from losses in remittances and business failures are likely to continue

reducing demand for workers, lower wages and eliminate jobs leading to poverty. Millions of families have lost jobs or income due to the pandemic. The World Bank estimates that the number of people in extreme poverty (those living on less than US\$1.90 per day) grew by 88 to 93 million in 2020, and projects further increase during 2021. When families lose income, it often creates pressure to send their children to work to meet their basic needs. As such with poverty comes child labour as households use every available means to survive. According to ILO and UNICEF studies, a one per cent rise in poverty results in a 0.7 per cent rise in child labour. ((UNICEF), 2020) Approximately 90% of children of school age throughout the world were affected by massive school closures in 190 nations, which resulted in the absence of 1.4 billion students from education. A lack of computers, internet connectivity, or other mobile devices was the main reason why over a third of them were unable to access remote education. For many children and their families, work seems like a sensible choice if they cannot attend school. Thereby Covid-19 pandemic increased pressure on children to enter the workforce, due to the economic crisis and escalating poverty it has caused, alongside massive school closures, the loss of caregivers due to death and illness, and limited enforcement of child labour standards.

Furthermore, the illness, incapacity, or death of a parent is a major contributing factor to child labour. When a wage worker in a home passes away from COVID-19-related illness or disease, children may be compelled to labour to provide for their families as well as themselves.



Figure 1: Number of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour and hazardous work (UNCF, 2021)

5. Child labour: Gender differences & Urban-Rural differences

Certain countries have notable disparities in the activities of different genders. Boys often participate in market employment at higher rates than girls, whereas domestic work participation rates are lower, as the United Nations Children's Fund data illustrates. According to the 2020 ILO study, boys are more likely than girls of all ages to be involved in child work. There are 34 million more boys than girls working as children. Furthermore, gender norms frequently dictate the kind, circumstances, and duration of employment that boys and girls undertake. Within families, girls typically perform more household chores, a burden likely to increase during school closures. Girls are thereby more likely to engage in domestic work. This form of child labour normally remains hidden from public view. Further, according to the 2020 ILO study, child labour is far more prevalent in rural regions. Compared to 37.3 million children in cities, 122.7 million youngsters in

rural areas are employed as minors. Furthermore, the estimations for worldwide child labour in 2020 show that child employment is most commonly found in agriculture. (UNCF, 2021) The figure 2 & 3 show the data relating to both the context of gender differences and urban-rural differences of child labour.

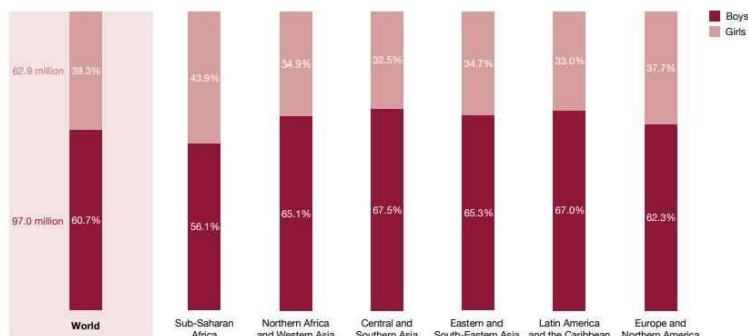


Figure 2: Percentage distribution of children aged 5 to 17 in child labour, by sex across all regions (UNCF, 2021)

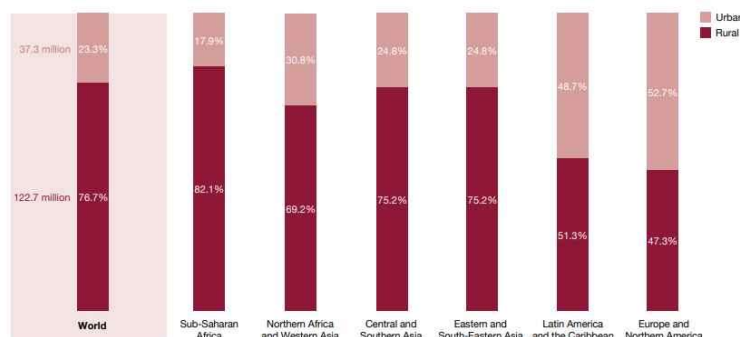


Figure 3: Percentage distribution of children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour in rural and urban areas. (UNCF, 2021)

6. Combating Child Labour: Analysing via SDG

The three pillars of sustainability—economic, social, and environmental—are all included in the 2030 Agenda. With 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that prioritise people and the environment, it provides the global community with a framework for addressing the myriad issues that face mankind, including those related to the workplace. It prioritises decent work.

Moreover, SDG goals 8.7 and 16.2 are pertinent to child labour. Target 8.7 states “Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms.” Target 16.2 states “End abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence and torture against children.”

The SDGs integrate the ILO's methodology, which guarantees a more efficient contribution towards the eradication of child labour. It consists of:

- a. International ratification of all of the ILO's basic conventions, including those about child labour.

- b. Ensuring a renewed emphasis on national policies and initiatives to support an integrated approach to all core values and rights in the workplace
- c. Setting a minimum age requirement for work and a deadline for completing mandatory education.
- d. Fostering the global campaign against child labour and maintaining the growth of advocacy and strategic alliances at the local, national, and international levels.
- e. Extending coordinated, region-based strategies to address the underlying causes of child labour.
- f. Extending and replicating effective strategies that have yielded long-lasting outcomes
- g. Encouraging and bolstering the operation of organisations and systems designed to keep an eye on the proper implementation and enforcement of fundamental rights at work, such as the prohibition of child labour.

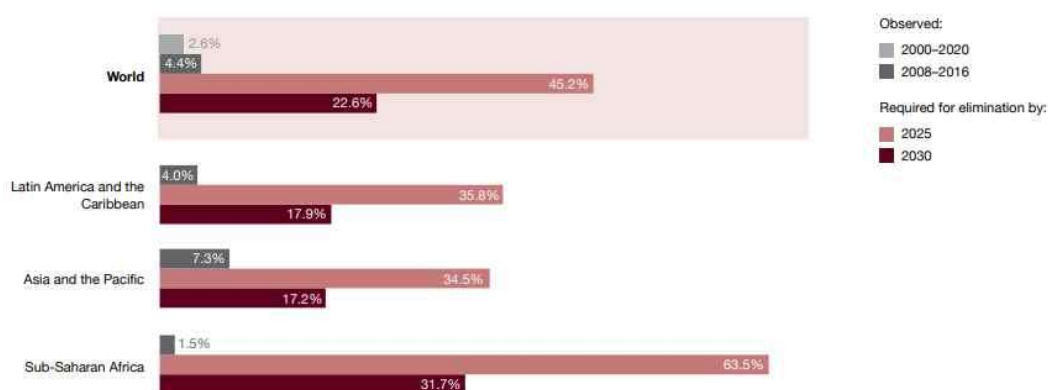


Figure 4: The average yearly rate of decrease in the proportion of children between the ages of 5 and 17 who are employed as child labour, as observed and necessary for removal. (UNCF, 2021)¹ It moreover shows the SDG target to eliminate child labour.

7. Analysis and Discussion on Child Labour

Based on international norms, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) offers four policy pillars to address the COVID-19 situation. Start by boosting the labour market and economy. Second, encourage businesses, employment, and earnings. Third, safeguard employees at work. Fourth, look to social discourse for answers. The ILO urges governments, employers, and labour unions to collaborate on effective measures to address the health, social, and economic aspects of the issue from a whole-of-society perspective. Certain policy measures, like social protection, intersect with all four pillars, therefore their advancement should involve all four. In addition, UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund, advocates for international cooperation to prevent

¹ Notes: The observed average annual rates of reduction qualify the rate of progress in the prevalence of child labour over each period. A higher rate indicates faster progress. Required rates are calculated to illustrate rates necessary to end child labour by 2025 and 2030. These estimates do not take into account the possible impact of COVID-19. This figure shows regional groupings used for ILO reporting.

a health crisis from turning into a problem involving children's rights. It promotes taking action to keep kids healthy and fed, provide water, sanitation, and hygiene to vulnerable kids, keep kids learning, help families meet their needs and raise their kids, shield kids from abuse, exploitation, and violence, and safeguard kids who are refugees, migrants, and those impacted by conflict. (ILO, 2020)

Moreover, there is a close connection between education and child work. There is a broad consensus that increasing access to and calibre of education is the single most effective way to stop the flow of school-age children into child labour. This will allow families to invest in their children's education, with greater returns than those that come from having them work. To combat child labour, strategies that lessen household financial vulnerability will also be necessary. Among these will be initiatives that give financially disadvantaged families with children stipends. For adults and young people of working age, good, safe, and fairly compensated employment continues to be an important component. The lack of access to suitable labour might result in child labour. In this case, social protection falls short of closing the poverty gap brought about by a lack of good jobs. Furthermore, to ensure that short-term emergency interventions are congruent with and aid in longer-term efforts to reduce child work, development and humanitarian actors must collaborate more effectively and quickly when tackling child employment. (ILO, 2020)

8. Observation and Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic has devastating impacts across the world. They not only contain vital to health but also expose children to increased risk. There is good reason to be concerned about the pandemic's worldwide junction with child work. An increasing amount of anecdotal evidence clarifies this point. It shows how COVID-19 poses a danger to further undermine previous achievements.

The financial and human benefits of investing in long-term child labour are immeasurable. Freed from the shackles of child labour, children may fully exercise their rights to leisure, education, and healthy growth. This, in turn, lays the groundwork for future social and economic progress, the eradication of poverty, the advancement of human rights, and the well-being of all people. Furthermore, education, social support, job markets, legal requirements, and regulation continue to be the cornerstones of child labour. Child labour has been eliminated as a result of official responses to these issues, but social discourse is still necessary, which calls for the actualization of freedom of association and the effective acknowledgement of the right to collective bargaining.

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