

# EMPLOYMENT PATTERN AND WAGE STRUCTURE OF CHILD LABOUR IN AGRICULTURAL TOOL MAKING UNITS IN PUNJAB

Navjot Kaur\* and Mini Goyal\*\*

*Mandi Ahmedgarh, a small town in Sangrur district of Punjab is well known for its sickles called datti, which is a small but very important agricultural tool used particularly at the time of wheat harvesting. The children of poor families of nearby villages work in this agricultural tool making units. The present study has been conducted to know the employment pattern and wage structure of child labour engaged in agricultural tool making units in Mandi Ahmedgarh in Sangrur district of Punjab. The study is based on a sample of 102 children working in thirty one such units found in Mandi Ahmedgarh. The study revealed that only male child labour was engaged in sickle making in these units. Children were involved in iron moulding, assembling the sub parts and nailing activities. The children worked hard, were poorly paid and exploited by employer. Sickle making, is a hazardous work for children and the state should strictly check and prohibit the employment of children in these units. As a majority of children worked for full time in sickle making, the study suggested that a provision of night classes should be made to make them independent and to secure their fundamental right to education.*

**Keywords:** Sickle, Sangrur, Working Conditions, Moulding, Nailing, Assembling

## INTRODUCTION

Child labour is one of the evils of the society born out of poverty and illiteracy. It exists in many countries and has taken firm roots in India. The children up to age of 14 years engaged in employment are deprived of the opportunities of development (Ahmed, 2004). A working child is subject to work, paid or free instead of being at the school at a tender and formative stage of his or her life. The children usually work under conditions that interfere with the physical development, education and recreation which they require (Gupta, 1999).

Apart from poverty, there are numerous other factors which give rise to child labour. Unemployment and under employment among the poor strata due to sharp growth of population is also responsible for it. Large families with low income, chronic illness as well as the death of bread winner (Murthy, 1985), lack of education facilities, illiteracy and ignorance of parents about the importance of education are some of the other reasons which breed child labour. Diverting the child from work means loss of income to the parents and an additional expenditure on education (Burra, 1998), however small it may be. The immediate economic benefits resulting from child employment seems to be high as it generates an income which is sometimes higher than what is consumed in the family. Though these children are adding to the family's income to live comfortably and make other members to enjoy amenities and facilities yet they encounter many problems during their work. They are underpaid, underfed and made to over work, ill-treated and deprived of social life. They always have a fear of losing work and are scared of the employer.

Even in terms of earnings, it is observed that the market value of children's labour is even less than half the value for adult (Gupta and Voll, 1999). Apart from employment and earnings, child labour is directly related to child health and exerts a negative effect upon it. It

\*Research Scholar and Professor, Dept. of Economics and Sociology, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana.

\*\* Professor, Dept. of Economics & Sociology, PAU

seriously interferes with their overall bringing up and strikes at very root of normal and healthy development (Anonymous, 2012). Moreover, the work results in loss of schooling, physical strain and deprivation of avenues for sport and pastime which are vital to a child's normal growth (Bhatty, 1996).

Around the world nearly 168 million children work (ILO, 2013) and most of them are full-time workers. More than half of them are exposed to the worst forms of child labour such as work in hazardous environments, slavery or other forms of forced labour, illicit activities including drug trafficking and prostitution, as well as involvement in armed conflict. In India, the employment of child labour is prohibited in hazardous occupations and processes under section 3 part a and b of Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 and in dangerous occupations under section 87 of Factories Act, 1948 where the work may cause serious hazard by the way of injury, poisoning or disease to the body. In order to achieve the goals of social, economic and political justice the constitution of India empowered the states to make special provisions to protect the welfare of children so as to bring them at par with other sections of the society. Besides the regulations regarding work hours, the Acts clearly mention that the government may by notification in the official gazette make rules for the health and safety of the children employed. But child labour is still rampant across the country and states.

The state of Punjab in rural sector (Dhillon et al., 1993) mainly employ children for field operations, like cotton picking, harvesting, potato digging, pea plucking, cattle grazing, crop watching etc. (Goyal, 2011). However some studies point out the presence of urban child labour in sports goods industry of Jalandhar (Khandelwal, et. al., 1998), carpet making in Amritsar and hosiery industry in Ludhiana (Goyal, 2005). The total number of working children in Punjab in 1991 was 1.32 lakh out of which 83.68 per cent were in rural and 16.32 per cent were in urban area. In 2001, the state had 1.11 lakh working children out of which 71.55 per cent were in rural area and rest 28.45 per cent of them were in urban area. In the rural sector of the state, 72.31 per cent were male and 27.69 per cent were female child workers. Whereas in the urban Punjab, 61.19 per cent of male and 38.81 per cent of female child workers were engaged in different activities during the above mentioned year (Anonymous, 2013).

Children are also employed in agricultural tool making units in Mandi Ahmedgarh, a small town in Sangrur district of Punjab. There are dozens of small and micro units that produce sickles called *datti*, which is a small but very important agricultural tool used particularly at the time of wheat harvesting. It fulfills 90 per cent of the country's demand for sickles (Anonymous, 2002). Some of these units produce sickles at very small scale as they make sickles only for domestic use or local use. Others produce at large scale as they export sickles to other countries. Hundreds of children of nearby villages work in these units due to family poverty and their parents have not enough money to spend on their studies or daily needs. These children work hard, are poorly paid and get exploited by employer.

## OBJECTIVES

Keeping in view the above stated facts, the present study was undertaken with the following objectives:

1. to examine employment pattern and wage structure and
2. to study the working conditions of child labour engaged in agricultural tool making units in Mandi Ahmedgarh in Sangrur district of Punjab.

## METHODOLOGY

The investigation was carried out in Mandi Ahmedgarh in Sangrur district of Punjab. A complete list of sickle making units was collected from municipal committee office. On personal visit to all such units, total 31 such units were found where children up to the age of 14 years were found working as labour. In all these units taken for study, 102 children were found working as labour. All the children working in the sickle making units were made the respondents in the study. In order to achieve the stipulated objectives, a specially designed schedule was pre tested and used. Questions were framed in a simple and easy manner for the children to answer. Primary data was collected through direct interview method.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results revealed that all the working children (100 per cent) engaged in agricultural tool making units were male. It means that no female child labour was engaged in agricultural tool making units. The possible reasons for being the employment of only male child labour was that the work of agricultural tool i.e sickle making was not suitable for girl child labour hence the parents did not send their female wards to work in sickle making units. The sickle making work in these units being a tough work was considered to be unsuitable for girls. Moreover the girls were not found suitable to do the required work by the employers also so only male children were found working in these units.

## ACTIVITIES DONE BY CHILD LABOUR

Table 1 shows various activities which child labour performed in sickle making units. About 20.59 per cent of the working children were involved in the very first step of the sickle making i.e. iron molding. It was found that maximum number (47.06 per cent) of child labour were doing the next part of the work i.e. assembling the two semicircular main parts of the sickle i.e. the one plain iron part with the other iron part having blades which is the mainly used to cut the crops. Nearly 32 per cent of the working children were found doing the last segment of sickle making i.e. nailing in which they were found fixing the upper main assembled iron part with wooden handle with the help of nails.

**Table 1: Distribution of Child Labour on the Basis of Activities done in Agriculture Tool Making Units in Mandi Ahmedgarh of Punjab**

Age of child labour (years)	Activity						Total	%age
	Iron molding		Assembling		Nailing			
	No. of Child Labour	%age	No. of Child Labour	%age	No. of Child Labour	%age		
5-8	-	-	1	100	-	-	1	100.00
8-11	4	19.05	10	47.62	7	33.33	21	100.00
11-14	17	21.25	37	46.25	26	32.50	80	100.00
Total	21	20.59	48	47.06	33	32.35	102	100.00

The activities performed by the children in sickle making were analyzed on the basis of their age. The table revealed that all the working children (100 per cent) in age group five to eight years

were engaged in assembling activity. None of the working child in this age group was found in iron molding and nailing activity. The children in eight to eleven years of age were engaged in assembling (47.62 per cent) followed by nailing (33.33 per cent) and iron molding (19.05 per cent). Nearly 46.25 per cent, 32.50 per cent and 21.25 per cent of the working children in eleven to fourteen years of age were engaged assembling, nailing and iron molding activities respectively.

## **BASIS OF WORK, PAYMENT AND WORKING HOURS OF CHILD LABOUR**

Table 2 revealed that majority of the child labour 86.27 per cent in sickle making units in Mandi Ahmedgarh were employed on full time basis. Only 13.73 per cent of child labour was on part time basis in these units. The results showed that the children had worked full time to earn more to support and fulfill the needs of their families.

**Table 2: Distribution of Child Labour According to Basis of Work, Payment and Working Hours in Agricultural Tool Making Units in Mandi Ahmedgarh of Punjab**

<b>Work Characteristics</b>	<b>No. of Child Labour</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Working hours</b>		
Up to 2	1	0.98
3-5	13	12.75
6-8	27	26.47
9-11	61	59.80
<b>Basis of work</b>		
Full time	88	86.27
Part time	14	13.73
<b>Basis of payment</b>		
Amount of work done (unit rate)	50	49.02
Fixed ( monthly basis)	52	50.98

A majority nearly 59.80 per cent of the child labour worked for nine to eleven hours in a day, while 26.47 per cent of the children worked for six to eight hours in a day. In case of 12.75 per cent and 0.98 per cent of them were working for three to five hours and up to two hours a day respectively. The working children those worked for lesser time or part time were found going to school in the morning and after that, they were working in these units. A relatively large number of children i.e. 49.02 per cent got payment on the basis of amount of work done and 50.98 per cent of children got payments on fixed monthly basis as their salary was fixed irrespective of the amount of work they do in a month.

## **WAGES OF CHILD LABOUR**

Table 3 showed that per day mean wages of child labour were very low (Rs. 82.35). Nearly 62 per cent of child labour got ₹50 to 100 for whole day work while 26 per cent earned ₹100 to 150 as wages in sickle making units of Mandi Ahmedgarh. About 12 percent of them got less than ₹50 per day for their work which was quite meager. It was also examined whether the working

children were getting any type of wages in kind. The study found that the working children were getting clothes or tea free of cost by the employer along with the payment of wages in cash for their work in sickle making. A large number of child labour i.e 71.56 per cent received clothes either on Diwali and Lohri festivals, or on the change of season i.e. in winter and summer as per the wishes of the employer. As regarding the provision of free food provided by the employer at the work place, it was found that none of the working child in the agricultural tool making units in Mandi Ahmedgarh was given free food by the employer at the start, middle or end of the day. The children were found bringing their own food at the work place. However, all the working children were being provided free of cost one or two cups of tea daily during the work by the employer at the work place.

**Table 3: Distribution of Wages in Cash and Kind of Child Labour in Agricultural Tool Making Units in Mandi Ahmedgarh of Punjab**

<b>Wages in cash (Rs. / Day)</b>	<b>No. of Child Labour</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Less than 50	12	11.76
50-100	63	61.77
100-150	27	26.47
Mean Wage (Rs) 82.35	102	100.00
<b>Wages in Kind</b>		
Clothes	73	71.56
Food	-	-
Tea	102	100.00
Total	102	100.00

## HEALTH HAZARDS DURING WORK

A number of child labour had suffered minor wounds and cuts in hands, fingers and feet while working in sickle making units in Mandi Ahmedgarh as shown in Table 4. Nearly 69 per cent of the working children had wounds on their hands or feet, whereas 31.25 per cent of the working children had got their fingers damaged permanently while working with iron nails, hammers and other sharp tools and parts of the product.

**Table 4: Distribution of Child Labour on The Basis of Health Hazards during Work in Agricultural Tool Making Units in Mandi Ahmedgarh of Punjab**

<b>Mishappening</b>	<b>No. of child labour</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Wounds on Hands or Feet	99	68.75
Damage of Fingers	45	31.25
Total	144*	100.00

\*multiple response

**Table 5: Extent of Working Conditions Provided by The Employer to The Child Labour in Agricultural Tool Making Units in Mandi Ahmedgarh of Punjab**

Facilities	No. of Child Labour	Percentage
<b>One day weekly Rest</b>		
Yes	102	100
No	-	-
<b>Help from Employer at Mishap during Work</b>		
Yes	98	96.08
No	4	3.92
<b>Clean Drinking Water</b>		
Yes	30	29.41
No	72	70.59
<b>Cleanliness at Work Place</b>		
Yes	12	11.76
No	90	88.24
<b>Proper Light Arrangement</b>		
Yes	80	78.43
No	22	21.57
<b>Proper Ventilation</b>		
Yes	47	46.08
No	55	53.92
<b>Behaviour of the Employer</b>		
Bad	79	77.45
Good	23	22.55

## EXTENT OF WORKING CONDITIONS

As shown in Table 5 it was found that all the employers were giving one day weekly rest to all the children. About 96 per cent of child labour had got either financial support by employer at the time of any mishap occurred during the work i.e the employer was found giving money to the child or the parents for the first aid or they were provided free medical help by employer. In the later case employer personally took the victim to the doctor for the treatment in case of any accident, cut or bleeding during the work. On the other hand, 3.92 per cent of the child labour did not have any financial or medical help at the time of any mishap during work.

Nearly 70 per cent of child labour informed that they had no provision of clean drinking water at their working place and they usually had to drink poorly stored, uncovered and unhygienic water which was very harmful for their health. Only 30 per cent of child labour informed that they had hygienic, clean, fresh and potable drinking water at their work place.

Provision of cleanliness at the work place was examined under the study. It was found that 88 per cent child labour had been working in unhygienic conditions in the absence of cleanliness

at the work place and which were not good for their health. Nearly 12 per cent of child labour informed that the place where they worked was clean and hygienic enough.

Provision of proper light at work place is very important. Hence, it was examined and found that 78.43 per cent of child labour worked in proper light conditions, while 21.57 per cent had no proper arrangements of light at work place.

From the study it was found that 53.92 per cent of children working in tool making units in Mandi Ahmedgarh, had no ventilator at the work place whereas 46.08 per cent informed that the work place had proper ventilator arrangements. The behavior of the employer towards the child labour was found unsatisfactory as 22.55 per cent of children were satisfied with the behavior of employer, whereas 77.45 per cent of them responded that the employer treated them badly. The employer was found abusing or scolding the children in case of their slow work.

## CONCLUSION

It may be concluded from the study that sickle making was a hard work as only male children were doing it. The children of younger age were involved in assembling the parts of sickle whereas the elder ones were doing all activities in sickle making. Majority children were full time workers and were getting very low wages. The working conditions were also not good. The children worked for even up to 11 hours in a day which is a clear violation of child labour Prohibition and Regulation Act 1986, which states that no child is allowed to work for more than six hours a day with a rest of one hour after three hours work. There was no provision of clean drinking water, ventilator and proper light arrangements at the work place. The employer's behavior towards the working children was also not good. The child labour must have access to secure, healthy and hygienic atmosphere which is extremely important to ensure their physical growth as a citizen of free India. Sickle making is a hazardous work for children hence the state should strictly check the employment of children in these units. Majority of the children worked for full time in sickle making thus a provision of night classes for them should be made to make them independent and to secure their fundamental right to education.

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