

GIRL CHILD WORKERS AND HOUSEHOLD POVERTY: A CASE STUDY

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Child worker though a product of multiple factors viz. social, economic, cultural etc., girl child worker is the result of poverty. Parents in many families still consider girl child as a liability, as the girl after marriage would leave them, and hence they are not concerned about their education and skill formation. The low value placed on the girl child within the family is itself a major concern. As soon as the girl child starts walking and is able to understand language, work is entrusted to her as a routine affair. The girl child has to undertake a variety of tasks in and outside the house depending upon the nature and type of family and customs in society. Mothers without realizing the consequences, slowly inducts the girl child to shoulder many responsibilities by prescribing do's and don'ts. She also prepares the girls to behave in a different way from the boys. An attempt is made in this research paper to present the household poverty of child workers both girls and boys with regard to their caste-communities. This paper also examines the per capita income requirement of child workers in the study area.

Keyword: Child Labour, Girl Child

INTRODUCTION

In India, the bulk of urban child labour is unpaid, particularly those engaged in household activities in their homes and those supporting their parents and other family members at work sites such as construction and mining. However, the micro level study reveals that urban working child's earning vary between 0 to 200 to 300 rupees per month, depending on the nature of their work are paid on piece rate basis, weekly basis, contract basis and monthly basis, depending on the nature of their work. Again there exists wage discrimination between adults and child workers and male and female child workers.

The basic factor responsible for child labour is the poverty of households. In order to examine the household poverty and children's earnings, it is felt necessary to calculate household poverty on the basis of the poverty line so that it could analyse as to how many households would fall below the poverty line when children's contribution is withdrawn from household income. Economists and various organizations had estimated poverty lines differently on the basis of the calorie intake required for minimum level of living. They have calculated poverty lines separately for rural and urban areas as the cost of living differed between the regions. The poverty line for urban Assam at 2004-05 prices, as given in the State-wise poverty lines was Rs.600.00. This was inflated by the consumer price index for industrial workers of Kokrajhar for 2004-05 and it worked out to be Rs.624.00 at 2004-05 prices. This estimate of poverty line was used to find out the households and population who fell below the poverty line. Since most of these households were relatively low-income households, income was treated on par with expenditure. Per capita income was used proxy for per capita expenditure in identifying poverty of households.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the context of an economy with poor households, Baland and Robinson (2000) describe child labour as arising as a result of the impossibility of inter-generational contracting. They show that a socially inefficient level of child labour can arise when bequests (transfers at death) from parents to children are zero or when credit markets are imperfect, even if parents are altruistic and child labour is socially inefficient.

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The conditions under which child labour tends to arise are more likely to characterize poor rather than rich households. In the zero bequests case, child labour is a substitute for negative bequests, that is, a mechanism for transferring income from children to parents. In the imperfect credit markets case, it is a substitute for borrowing, a mechanism for transferring income from the future to the present. Given this, it would appear that there is a case for banning child labour. The authors analyse the welfare implications of a ban. They show that while a ban may have the potential to raise welfare, it may be difficult to generate political support for it from richer sections of society.

So far, child labour has been accepted because it is believed to have economic basis that fit into a demand-supply framework. In the demand side there are two sets of reasons why employers prefer to use children, one of them deals with the fact that employing children is a cheaper and more stable proposition and hence a more profitable one children can be employed at much lower wages than adults and made to work longer period. The piece rate system of remuneration to child labour benefits only the employers. Children do not form unions, they are less likely to change jobs quickly, at the same time, they can be easily laid off should the need arise without any form of compensation. The other reasons why there exists a demand for children in the work force are to do with special characteristics of children which lend themselves to employment in certain industries. In general children are considered "more active, agile and quick and feel less tired than adults in certain jobs". Also they can be cleared, admonished, pulled up and punished for faults without jeopardizing relations (Singh and Mahanty, 1980).

On the supply side, the most commonly cited explanation given for child labour is the poverty of households that supply children to the labour force. The perceptions that exist towards children and work are dictated by the low economic status of families where children are seen as economic assets. It is contended that families of the working children are so poor that their very survival is threatened by them from the labour force thus, children are in various activities including working as family labour in a household enterprise, assisting in contracts undertaken by parents, taking over various household duties to enable parents to do other work, and working outside the home as cheap labour in small factories, commercial and domestic establishments. The cost category often forces them to spend large amounts of time away from their homes working in conditions not conducive to their health and safety. Not only do the children earn their own livelihood and often that of others as well, they allow parents to spend more time on income generating work by taking charge of household duties. Further greater importance is given to the learning of skills from an early age, as opposed to school education as it is believed that school curricula detach children from the village economy, creating aspirations for white collar jobs that are hard to get. The skills on the other hand will enable them in securing employment in their adult life. Thus, child labour is considered as a kind of process and in no way detrimental to the child's development and finally the quality of the schools (those that exists at all), is so poor that parents are induced to send their children to them and children are not motivated to attend either. Hence, it appears that the overall economic situation coupled with a lack of proper educational facilities justifies the persistence of child labour.

METHODOLOGY

The study is based on primary data. For providing a national level picture of the problem, the analysis of the situation of Kokrajhar district in Assam, is used. The primary data, is collected from a sample survey. The present study is made its sample from a list of 300 slums for which lists of household poverty are available.

As the study relates to the problem of child labour and poverty conditions and per capita income requirement at work sites in the informal sector, certain qualitative techniques like direct observation of the work process at various work sites, informal discussions with work contractors as well as child workers and

parents are adopted to obtain in-depth insight into the problem. The quantitative techniques like frequency distribution of data, simple averages, multiplications etc. are applied for the tabulation of data.

Particulars relating to the caste-wise households and the children's contribution in the mitigating of household poverty are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 : Household Poverty with and without Children's Contribution

Poverty Line Rs.624.00

Caste/Community	Total Number of Households	Number of Households Below Poverty Line			
		With Children's Income	% of Households	Without Children's Income	% of Households
Scheduled Caste	77	20	25.97	47	61.04
Scheduled Tribes	58	24	41.38	49	84.48
Backward Castes	67	25	37.31	57	85.07
Muslim Community	86	33	38.37	70	81.40
Others	12	6	50.00	10	83.33
Total	300	108	36.0	233	77.67

Source: Field survey.

As the table reveals, the percentage of households falling below poverty line was highest in the Scheduled Tribes (41.38%) followed by Muslims (38.37%), Backward Castes (37.31%) and Scheduled Castes (25.97%). However, when children's contribution was withdrawn from the household income, the community which was affected most was the Backward Castes because the percentage of households falling below poverty line in this community increased to 85.07 which was the highest among those of all the caste-communities. Next to Backward Castes, the corresponding increase among households which fell below the poverty line was 84.48% in Scheduled Tribes, 81.40% in Muslims and 61.04% in Scheduled castes. In the total 300 households, due to the withdrawal of children's income, the proportion of households below the poverty line increased from 36% to 77.67% which was more than two times. Thus, a substantial increase in the percentage of households below the poverty line was observed in all the caste-community households.

SAMPLE POPULATION AND BELOW POVERTY LINE

Table 2 shows both the proportions of households as well as the population in the respective households along with the incidence of poverty. Like households, even the population below the poverty line was also highest in the Scheduled Tribes (45.01%) followed by Backward Castes (37.10%) and Muslim community (35.76%). Further, when children's contribution was withdrawn from household income, it was again the Backward Caste households that suffered most as the proportion of population below the poverty line in this community increased to 86.41%, the highest increase (i.e., by 49.31%) as compared to the corresponding situation in all other caste-communities. The lowest increase was recorded in the Scheduled Castes in both, households (i.e., by 35.07%) as well as in population (i.e., by 31.3%) after the withdrawal of their childrens' contribution from household income. On the whole, the proportion of households and population below

the poverty line rose substantially when the income from child labour was not considered. The population below the poverty line would increase from 35.84% to 76.52% if childrens' contribution from household income was withdrawn. Therefore around 41.67% (77.67-36.00) of households and 40.68% (76.52-35.84) of population seemed to have crossed the poverty line by supplementing their income through child labour.

Table 2 : Distribution of Households, Population and Incidence of Poverty

Poverty Line = Rs.624.00

Caste/Community	No. of Households	No. of Households Below Poverty Line		Total Population	Population Below Poverty Line	
		With Children Income	Without Children Income		With Children Income	Without Children Income
Scheduled Caste	77 (25.67)	20 (25.97)	47 (61.04)	527 (25.05)	141 (26.76)	306 (58.06)
Scheduled Tribes	58 (19.33)	24 (41.38)	49 (84.48)	411 (19.53)	185 (45.01)	352 (85.64)
Backward Castes	67 (22.33)	25 (37.31)	57 (85.07)	434 (20.63)	161 (37.10)	375 (86.41)
Muslim Community	86 (28.76)	33 (38.37)	70 (81.40)	674 (32.03)	241 (35.76)	531 (78.78)
Others	12 (4.0)	6 (50.0)	10 (83.33)	58 (2.76)	26 (44.8)	46 (79.31)
Total	300 (100)	108 (36.0)	233 (77.67)	2104 (100)	754 (35.84)	1610 (76.52)

PER CAPITA INCOME OF THE SAMPLE HOUSEHOLDS

The per capita income of both the entire households as well as the households below poverty line was calculated and the details are presented in Table 3. The data of this kind was felt necessary for calculating per capita income to be required for households to cross poverty line and this data were presented in Table 6.4. As can be noted from the Table 6.8, the average per capita income of the people in the Scheduled Caste households was the highest (Rs.729.50) followed by the Scheduled Tribes (Rs.675.90), Muslims (Rs.642.40) and Backward Castes (Rs.637.70).

When their children's income was withdrawn, the average per capita income in Scheduled Caste households reduced from Rs.729.50 to Rs.569.20 (i.e., by 160.30), in scheduled tribe households the decline was from Rs.675.90 to Rs.518.10 (i.e., by 157.80), in Muslim households, it was declined from Rs.642.40 to Rs.533.10 (i.e., by 109.30) and in Backward Caste households, it was from Rs.637.70 to Rs.550.40 (i.e., by 87.30). That is, the reduction in average per capita income of households was the highest in Scheduled Castes (i.e., Rs.160.30) and the lowest in the Backward Castes (i.e., by Rs.87.30). Further, when the income from the child labour was not considered, the average per capita income of the households in all the caste-communities fell much below the poverty line. This shows the extent of poverty the people are living in.

Table 3 : Distribution of Per Capita Income of the Households and Incidence of Poverty

Poverty Line = Rs.624.00

Caste/Community	Per Capita Income of all the Households		Per Capita Income of the Households Below Poverty Line	
	With Children's Income	Without Children's Income	With Children's Income	Without Children's Income
Scheduled Caste	729.50	569.20	573.80	470.10
Scheduled Tribes	675.90	518.10	580.00	483.90
Backward Castes	637.70	550.40	578.30	535.50
Muslim Community	642.40	533.10	566.30	504.80
Others	637.50	520.80	555.80	494.60
Total	670.00	542.80	565.50	500.50

In the case of households below the poverty line, the incidence of poverty was still greater if the children did not join the labour market. In the Scheduled Castes, the average per capita of the households below poverty line was Rs.573.80 which declined to Rs.470.10 (i.e., by Rs.103.70), when children's income was not considered, in Scheduled Tribes, the decline was from Rs.580.00 to Rs.483.90 (i.e., by Rs.96.10), in Muslim households, it was from Rs.566.30 to Rs.504.80 (i.e., by Rs.61.50) and in Backward Caste households, the decline was from Rs.578.30 to Rs.535.50 (i.e., by Rs.42.80). The decline in average per capita income of the households below poverty line was the highest in Scheduled Caste households and lowest in Backward Class households. This reveals that the childrens' contribution was the highest in Scheduled Caste households and the lowest in the Backward Caste households. Referring to the earlier table 6.7, however it could be observed that when childrens' contribution from the household income was withdrawn, the proportion of households below poverty line increased from 37.31% to 85.07% (i.e., by 47.76%) in Backward Castes and in Scheduled Castes, increase in the proportion of households was from 25.97% to 61.04% (i.e., by 35.07%). In other words, the increase in the proportion of households below poverty line due to the exclusion of childrens' contribution was highest in Backward Castes and lowest in Scheduled Castes among all the caste-communities. The inference is that though the childrens' contribution was the lowest in Backward Caste households, it enabled the largest proportion of households to cross the poverty line while it was the other way round in the Scheduled Caste households.

PER CAPITA INCOME REQUIREMENT

The children's contribution had certainly helped the households to lessen their poor living conditions. Despite the hard-earned incomes of the children, it was found that nearly 36% of households were below poverty line. This percentage would increase to about 78% if children were withdrawn from labour market. In this context, it would be appropriate to calculate per capita income requirement, an amount of income by which households incomes would have to be raised so that they could afford to live without childrens' contribution. The estimated per capita income was calculated taking the amount of poverty line as the cut-

off income and this data was presented in Table 9. As can be noted from the table, in Scheduled Castes, in the absence of childrens' contribution, a per capita income of Rs.153.90 was needed for the households to across the poverty line. Similarly, the per capita income required by Backward Caste households, which were below poverty line, was Rs.88.50. Since the childrens' contribution to Backward Caste households was lowest, it was obvious that in the event of their withdrawal from labour market, the per capita income requirement for the households to cross the poverty line was also lowest. For all the 36% of households which were below poverty line with childrens' contribution, an average per capita income of Rs.58.50 was required, or if childrens' contribution was withdrawn, the total of about 78% of households that would eventually fall below poverty line would be in need of per capita income of around Rs.123.50 to cross the poverty line.

Table 4 : Households Poverty and Requirement of Per Capita Income

Poverty Line= Rs.624.00

Caste/Community	Per Capita Income of all the Households		Per Capita Income of the Households Below Poverty Line		Per Capita Income Required to Enable the Households Cross the Poverty Line	
	With Childrens' Income	Without Childrens' Income	With Childrens' Income	Without Childrens' Income	With Childrens' Income	Without Childrens' Income
Scheduled Caste	729.50	569.20	573.80	470.10	50.20	153.90
Scheduled Tribes	675.90	518.10	580.00	483.90	44.00	140.10
Backward Castes	637.70	550.40	578.30	535.50	45.70	88.50
Muslim Community	642.40	533.10	566.30	504.80	57.70	119.20
Others	637.50	520.80	555.80	494.60	68.20	129.40
Total	670.00	542.80	565.50	500.00	58.50	123.50

The above analysis on household poverty indicated that child workers by contributing their meager earnings to household income were able to mitigate the intensity of poverty in their households' with the contribution of children's income; about 41.67% (77.67-36.00) of households were able to cross the poverty line. If the children were withdrawn from labour market, it was found that an appropriate amount of per capita income of Rs.123.50 must be added to the households to cross the poverty line.

GIRLS' CONTRIBUTION AND HOUSEHOLDS POVERTY

Though the girls' contribution to household income was 11.9% in the total sample households, their income in some of the households constituted substantial part and thus enabled them to cross the poverty line. In order to examine the role of girls' contribution in the alleviation of poverty, those households which had exclusively girl workers were taken into account. Accordingly, 188 households were found having at least one girl worker in each of the households.

Table 5 : Contribution of Girl Workers and Household Poverty

Poverty Line = Rs.624.00

Caste/Community	Number of Households	Number of Households Below Poverty Line			
		With Girls' Income	% of Households	Without Girls' Income	% of Households
Scheduled Caste	58	15	25.9	36	62.1
Scheduled Tribes	33	11	33.3	19	57.6
Backward Castes	32	18	56.3	27	84.4
Muslim Community	59	28	47.5	39	66.1
Others	6	2	33.3	4	66.7
Total	188	74	39.4	125	66.5

Source: Field Survey.

The caste-wise details of households and those falling below poverty line with and without girl workers' contribution to household income are shown in Table 5. As can be seen from the table, the percentage of poor households was the highest in Backward Castes (56.3%) followed by Muslims (47.5%), Scheduled Tribes (33.3%) and Scheduled Castes (25.9%). When girls' income was withdrawn from the household income, as many as 84.4% of households in Backward Castes would fall below the poverty line. The relative increase in the proportion of households below the poverty line was found highest in Scheduled Castes where the proportion of households increased by 36.2% (from 25.9% to 62.1%) and it was lowest in Muslim households where the proportion increased by 18.6% (from 47.5% to 66.1%). In the total of 188 households, 39.4% of households were below poverty line, which would increase to 66.5%, if girls' income was withdrawn from the household income. It means that nearly 27% (from 39.4 to 66.5) of households were able to cross the poverty line by supplementing their income through girls' contribution.

GIRL WORKERS' HOUSEHOLDS AND PER CAPITA INCOME REQUIREMENT

The data on per capita income of the households, household poverty and minimum per capita income needed for the households to cross the poverty line were presented in Table 6. As per the table, it can be noted that the per capita income of the girl worker's households was highest in Scheduled Castes (i.e., Rs.702.40) and the lowest in Backward Castes (i.e., Rs.4519.80). When the girls' income was withdrawn, the decline in per capita income was highest in Scheduled Caste households, from Rs.702.40 to Rs.584.40 (i.e., by Rs.118.00) followed by scheduled Tribe households from Rs.695.60 to Rs.580.00 (i.e., by Rs.115.60) and lowest in Muslim households from Rs.621.20 to Rs.560.50 (i.e., by Rs.60.70). When considered households below poverty line, the highest decline in per capita income due to the withdrawal of girls' income was recorded in Scheduled Castes from Rs.559.30 to Rs.410.60 (i.e., by Rs.148.70) followed by Scheduled Tribes from Rs.577.60 to Rs.429.50 (i.e., by Rs.148.10) and it was lowest in Muslims from Rs.542.80 to Rs.510.0 (i.e., by Rs.32.80). It means that the girls' contribution was the highest in Scheduled Caste households and lowest in Muslim households. The proportion of households that seemed to have crossed the poverty line with the contribution of girls' income was highest in Scheduled Caste i.e., 36.2 percent (i.e., from 25.9% to 62.1%) and lowest in Muslims, i.e., 18.6 percent (i.e., from 47.5% to 66.1%) as already noted in table 6.6. The inference therefore was that where the girls' contribution was highest, a larger proportion of households were able to cross the poverty line where the girls' contribution was lowest.

Table 6 : Girl Workers' Household Poverty and Requirement of Per Capita Income

Poverty Line= Rs.624.00

Caste/Community	Per Capita Income of all the Households		Per Capita Income of the Households Below Poverty Line		Per Capita Income Required to Enable the Households Cross the Poverty Line	
	With Girls' Income	Without Girls' Income	With Girls' Income	Without Girls' Income	With Girls' Income	Without Girls' Income
Scheduled Caste	702.40	584.40	559.30	410.60	64.70	213.40
Scheduled Tribes	695.60	580.00	577.60	429.50	46.40	194.50
Backward Castes	619.80	521.80	563.90	488.60	60.10	135.40
Muslim Community	621.20	560.50	542.80	510.00	81.20	114.00
Others	629.00	541.90	500.00	478.90	124.00	145.10
Total	653.50	565.20	549.10	504.50	74.90	119.50

The data on per capita income requirement also revealed that if girls' income was withdrawn from household income, the per capita income needed by the households to cross the poverty line was highest in Scheduled Castes i.e., Rs.213.40 and lowest in Muslims i.e., Rs.114.00. The increase in per capita income requirement in Muslim households due to withdrawal of girls income was Rs.32.80 (i.e., from Rs.81.20 to Rs.114.00). In Muslim households, a majority of girls were engaged in poorly paid household occupations where the remuneration was paid on piece-rate basis. Since almost all the occupations of girl workers, except Construction and Rag picking industries were of home-based industries, most of the girl workers combined work with invisible household activities. Yet, their contribution to household income saved many households from financial crisis. From the above analysis, it can be stated that with girls' contribution, around 27% of the households were able to cross the poverty line.

Thus, the above findings indicate the proportionate significance of the girl child labourers' contribution to income of the sample households in the study area. It has been observed that it was sheer necessity on the part of young children to supplement family income without which the family, in some cases, might have starved. In view of this state of affairs, it is suggested here that implementing the policy of elimination of child labour is neither feasible nor desirable as it is likely to do more harm than good to the poverty stricken parents who are forced to seek the help of their children to earn a living. Therefore for the gradual elimination of child labour, mainly two approaches must be adopted, viz., (1) to raise the income levels of poor parents by providing better paid alternative occupations to adult members of the family so that they can afford to live without depending on the earnings of their children, and (2) to provide quality education (with all recreation facilities) at convenient places so that no child is deprived of basic education due to non-availability of schools at suitable timings. That is, raising the levels of household income, they should ensure that children, who are unfortunately driven to work must be able to pursue their studies, so that they may be able to learn while they earn.

Among other occupations of girl workers, it was found that the services of domestic servants were invisible and the remuneration they receive was arbitrary. Though, in some cases, employers were kind in terms of granting paid holidays occasionally, lending advances and extra payment in the form of kind or cash for additional work, the practice of whims of the employers in the field of remuneration was very much prevalent. It is therefore suggested that NGO's (Non Government Organizations), Social Activists

should initiate a process by which the scattered Domestic Servants are brought under one roof and form a registered association on the analogy of the Domestic Workers Association which is very active in Mumbai. The office bearers of this association should evolve a method for terms and conditions of the employment. The employers must be motivated for the enrolment of domestic servants in the schools. The working hours should be regulated so that Domestic Servants can devote adequate time for their studies and vocational training.

It is therefore suggested that employers in the informal sector who hire the services of children should be made responsible for the education of the child workers working in their units. Strict vigilance should be maintained and employers erring in this respect should be brought to book. Likewise, for enabling the working children to continue education, the Adult Education Programmes should be extended to these children also. These programmes may be renamed as Child Labour and Adult Education Programmes and the departments concerned with the implementation of the Adult Education Programmes should be entrusted with the responsibility of creating awareness among the children caught in trap of child labour, about the advantages of literacy. This does not require any additional personnel. The existing officers on these programmes should be able to undertake this responsibility. Once awareness is created, these unfortunate but enthusiastic children will automatically attend educational programmes which, in principle, are conducted in the evening time.

CONCLUSION

Child labour cannot be approached as an isolated problem. It is a complex socio-economic-demographic phenomenon, which can be reduced and eliminated by a multiplicity of actions both by government and public, at social as well as individual levels. The aim of the social policies should be to reduce the intensity of child labour and improve the quality of working conditions for children in the short-term, and finally, eradicate the child labour in long-term planning.

The following measures are suggested to improve the work and living conditions to minimize the negative effects of the early employment:

The protective laws on the age at employment, minimum wages, working hours, rest interval, weekly offs need to be enforced more rigorously than at present. There should be a complete ban on child labour in hazardous industries.

Nutritional food and protective clothes should be provided to the working children at subsidized rates at the place of work.

The working children should have access to periodic medical check-ups and treatment through their employers.

Their places of work and residence should be provided with adequate infrastructure, like safe drinking water and proper sanitation facilities.

Besides, provision of gloves and other protective items to children working in the industrial units; protection to self-employed children against the occupational competition with the adults; moral education and protection against misguidance by anti-social elements; and occupational guidance, education and recreational facilities for the working children.

The long-term policies should be oriented to the eradication of poverty through employment generating policies and maintenance allowance to the needy families; the spread of school education with provision of vocational training; creating public awareness to the consequences of early employment and towards the existing laws concerning child labour; effective role trade unions in implementing the existing laws on minimum age for entry in the labour force, minimum wages, working hours, rest interval, etc., creating

public opinion about improving the quality of environment at work and a balanced regional development on socio-economic fronts.

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