

A Study on the Status of Working Conditions of Child Labourers Employed in Hotels and Restaurants of Silchar Town, Assam

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Abstract

The present study was undertaken to examine the status of the quality of work life of child labourers employed in the restaurants and hotels of Silchar town, Assam. The study considered the following parameters to examine the quality of the work life of the child labourers : (a) the nature and duration of the jobs performed by them, (b) nourishment and health care benefits provided to them, (c) matters related to the monetary and non monetary benefits provided to them. The findings of the present study are alarming and frustrating. The study revealed that the 'future citizens' of our country are put to work for such jobs in deplorable conditions (cleaning the utensils, tables, and floors ; tolerating abuses and reprimands ; working for more than 10 hours a day on a remuneration that is less than ₹ 50/- a day ; having access to little or no medicines when physically indisposed ; working for all 7 days of the week ; and on the top of all this, taking rest at night on tables/combination of benches for less than 6 hours a day). The academicians and researchers need to put these matters on high agenda for a detailed and truthful probing of the matter.

Keywords: child labour, work life, nourishment and health care benefits, monetary and non- monetary benefits

JEL Classification : J13, J24, O15

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The basic prerequisites for the development of any country include education for all and a life with equal dignity for all. Unfortunately, in a good number of developing and almost all the undeveloped countries, this is not possible to a large extent, as a section of their population is not only deprived of education, but also of a life with dignity. A substantial population of the above stated countries (children and adolescents) is denied the opportunity of basic education and living their life with dignity as they are forced to work to earn their bread and butter even at an age when they should have been in school and should have been treated with love, affection, and care. Child labour is one such blot on the face of any country. Illiterate/uneducated and/or ill treated children/adolescents cannot contribute in the economic, social, political, and otherwise any development of the society. At times, they can become a burden on the society as their mental and physical growth does not take place in a proper manner (United Negro College Fund, 2006).

The history of child labour clearly suggests that despite the fact that for more than seven decades, the International Labour Organization has not only been reminding the concerned nations about the need and

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importance of eradicating this social evil, but has also been providing all kinds of information and data which might facilitate the concerned countries to wash out this blot of child labour. However, only some of the countries, till now, have been able pursue this matter successfully, and that too, to a certain extent. Unfortunately, India occupies a high position in the list of such countries, though it was around half a century back when our country had promised (ratified the concerned ILO convention) to not only reduce the number of child labour, but also improve their 'quality of work life' in phases (United Nations Development Programme, 1993). The present study was undertaken to identify the status of the 'quality of work life' of children (child labour) serving in the restaurants and hotels of Silchar town.

Literature Review

In order to get acquainted with the quality of work life of child labour, substantial literature on the concerned subject was reviewed. Some of the relevant literature that were reviewed in the process of the study are as follows :

Sahu (2013) revealed that historically in our country, child labour has been seen as an economic phenomenon. As per his study, the relationship between children and work is dictated, to a great extent, by the state of economic development or the system of production prevalent in the country. Singh (1980) revealed that in the age group of 6-15 years, it was found that most of the working children belonged to low income groups in urban centers who generally resided in slums and depressed areas. The study was conducted on 203 boys (67.7%) and 97 girls (32.3%). Out of these 300 working children, 211 (70.3%) worked under an employer and 89 (29.7%) were self-employed.

Mohapatra and Dash (2011) revealed that the implementation of various laws for the working conditions and welfare of child labour are concerned with employees who have colossal ignorance about the existing laws. The study revealed that only 20 were in favour of legislation for regulating employment of children. The major findings of the study were that the street children in the city of Bhubaneswar are rag pickers who generally stay with their parents and family members. Their parents and family members were Bengali Muslim migrants from various districts of West Bengal. Their socioeconomic conditions are very poor, which makes them involved in rag picking activities for their livelihood, which ultimately makes children to drop out from schools and involve themselves in rag picking activities from early childhood.

A study of the Committee on Child Labour (1979) appointed by the Ministry of Labour, Government of India examined various dimensions of child labour in different occupations. The study revealed that the incidence of child labour was highest in Andhra Pradesh, where it accounted for about 9% of the total labour force, 9.2% of the total child population, and 3.7% of the total population of the state in 1971. Child labour was more prevalent in rural areas than in urban areas. The participation of children in the labour force in the age group of 10-14 years was very high (28.9%) for males as compared to females (20%) (Jangir, 2013).

The plight of working children has a close relation with certain aspects of individual capitalism (Sharma, Kukreja, & Sharma, 2012). As per a UNESCO report, in the year 2011, there were 28 million children who were working as child labourers in India, and the figure for the world in the year 1998 itself was 250 million. There are several factors that force children to work; these factors are inadequate economic growth, poverty, unemployment, over-population, and lack of education & health care (Ahmad, 2012 as cited in Osment, 2014).

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to examine the quality of work life of child labourers working in hotels and restaurants of Silchar town. In order to achieve the above objective, the sub-objectives that were set for the purpose of the present study are :

Table 1. Profile of the Respondents

Demographic factors	Number of Respondents	%
Age (in years)		
9	4	7.02
10	13	22.81
11	6	10.52
12	8	14.04
13	11	19.30
14	15	26.31
Total	57	100
Formal Level of Education		
NIL	19	33.33
1st	7	12.28
2nd	4	7.02
3rd	7	12.28
4th	9	15.79
5th	4	7.02
6th	3	5.26
7th	4	7.02
Total	57	100

- (1) To examine the quality of work life of the child labourers on the basis of the nature and duration of the jobs performed by them.
- (2) To examine the quality of work life on the counts of nourishment and health care benefits provided to the child labourers.
- (3) To examine the quality of work life based on the matters related to the monetary and non monetary benefits provided to the child labourers.

Research Methodology

The Municipal Area in Silchar town is divided into 28 wards. Even though there was a target to record the views of the respondents from all the wards, during the course of data collection, it was realized that almost one fourth wards either did not have any such restaurants or hotels where child labor was employed, or there were one or two such hotels or restaurants. Out of the remaining three fourth wards, one third wards could not be reached due to the remoteness of these wards clubbed with paucity of time. Thus, only 14 wards could be contacted to elicit the responses of the children working in hotels and restaurants in these wards. On the whole, 57 children (who were working in hotels and restaurants spread over 14 wards of Silchar Municipal Corporation) were interviewed. Owing to time and resource constraints, the sample respondents were picked up conveniently. The details of the same can be inferred from the Table 1. Finally, the responses of 57 children were captured in an excel sheet and descriptive analysis was conducted in order to grasp the working reality of child labour in Silchar town in Assam.

Frequency and percentage methods were used for the purpose of analysis. For concentrating on the matters related to the quality of work life of child labour, a structured schedule covering major components of the quality of work life of child labor was prepared. The schedule sought information relating to education; profile of the

Table 2. Details Related to the Nature of Job Performed

Nature of the Job i.e., Performing the job of a-	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Server	7	12.28
Cleaner & server	34	59.64
Cook & server	4	7.02
Cleaner, server, & sweeper	8	14.04
Cleaner, server, & cook	4	7.02

family ; nature, duration, and period of the job performed ; remuneration, fooding and lodging ; holidays & leave ; medical facilities, and so forth. We kept a provision in the schedule for noting the grievances of the children (respondents) and told the children to share any such information with us, which might not have been covered by the questions in the schedule. Unfortunately, not even a single child shared any such extra information with us. It is possible that either we could not communicate with them properly, or they hesitated to communicate with us, or at random, nothing came to their mind apart from the answers to the questions posed to them. Since the children in question, who were in the age group of 9 to 14 years, were not in a position to write down their responses (due to poor or non - existent reading and writing skills), their responses were noted down by us. In order to ensure that the respondents understood the questions properly, we took great pains not only to translate the questions in the schedule in the local language, but also, to the extent possible, explained the questions to the respondents. There were instances where we had to describe the background and the necessity of the question. The time period of the study is from January 12 - June 13.

Analysis and Results

In order to address the objectives of the study, the responses of the respondents were analyzed and interpreted one by one.

*** Quality of Work Life of the Child Labourers in Relation to the Nature and Working Hours of the Jobs Performed :** The Table 2 displays the details relating to the nature of the job performed. The nature of the jobs performed by the children included cooking along with different combinations of providing services to customers by way of cleaning, cooking, and sweeping. It is evident from the Table 2 that 12.28% of the sample respondents (child labourers) were engaged only in providing direct service to the customers in hotels and restaurants, that is, serving food items to the customers. The biggest chunk of the child labourers, that is, 59.65% were engaged in serving, cleaning, and washing, tasks which involve drudgery, but not a great amount of skills. Serving food items to customers as well as cleaning and washing utensils of both types, that is, the ones used in cooking as well as the ones used by the customers in which they have their food, cleaning chairs and other such furniture, and brooming and moping the floor are menial jobs which don't require a great skill set, but are also often considered derogatory by the adults.

Children are unable to speak for themselves and are easily subjugated; therefore, they are put on these jobs, which contribute to a higher degree of occupational diseases. Furthermore, the Table 2 also shows that only 7.02% of the total respondents were engaged in cooking as well as serving. To the question that why such a small percentage of child workers were assigned cooking as well as serving jobs, the clarification could be that cooking is a job which not only requires substantial height, but also requires physical strength, mental acumen, and skill. Out of the total respondents, 14.04% of the respondents were found engaged in cleaning, serving, and sweeping & moping, which confirms the earlier assumption that child labour is used for menial jobs, which do not require great skill. The percentage of those who were put to cleaning, serving, and cooking is also meagre, that is, 7.02%,

Table 3. Details Related to Working Hours Spent While Working

Working Hours in a Day	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
9-10 hours	5	8.77
11-12 hours	17	29.83
13-14 hours	26	45.61
15-16 hours	9	15.79

Table 4. Details of Monthly Remuneration

Remuneration (₹)	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Below 1000	11	19.30
1000-1500	44	77.19
Above 1500	2	3.51

Table 5. Details Related to Sleeping Arrangement Provided at Night

Arrangement to Sleep at Night	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
A Bed with a Rug	27	47.37
A Combination of Benches with a Rug	9	15.79
A Combination of Table with a Rug	3	5.26
Floor With a Rug and Other Stuff Material	10	17.54
N.A	8	14.04

which is a similar percentage to those who were assigned mundane tasks of serving, though presumably, they were sometimes put to assist in the task of cooking too. Thus, it is evident from the above data that children, who are unable to speak for themselves and have a poor bargaining power, are put to such jobs which involve drudgery, cause fatigue, and do not lead to any kind of skill development among the children (the children are assigned tasks of cleaning, serving, sweeping, moping, washing utensils, which are menial jobs and do not lead to any kind of skill or vocational development (like, learning to cook different kinds of dishes) which can be used by them in the future). Small restaurants are frequented by customers (majority of who belong to the middle class), who often find it 'more appropriate' to reprimand the waiters (servers) (in this case, children) for poor quality of food. Such humiliating jobs can probably only be performed by children, who are not allowed to argue even when they are not at fault.

The Table 3 shows the duration of the jobs performed by the sample respondents interviewed for the present study. It is evident from the Table that only a small percentage (8.77%) of the respondents (child labourers) worked for 9 to 10 hours in a day. Throwing all the norms of labour laws to the winds, the restaurant and hotel owners in Silchar town, like probably elsewhere in the country, employed the 'future of the country' for either 11 to 12 hours (29.83%) or 13 to 14 hours (45.61%) in a day. The deaf and dumb authorities can try to improve their image by noting this nude, but harsh reality. The fact that 15.79% of the total respondents worked for 15 to 16 hours a day, as it is evident from the Table, may be an alarming fact, which displays the apathy of the society and the authorities and the gross inhumanity of the restaurant and hotel owners to employ innocent children. The fact that not even a single sample respondent was not found to be engaged in work for less than 9 hours a day is something which requires a thorough review of our machinery to implement the labour laws and juvenile justice. The above explanation clearly indicates the harsh reality of child labourers in the study area.

*** Quality of Work Life of the Child Labourers with Respect to Matters Related to Monetary and Non-Monetary Benefits :** In order to ascertain the quality of work life of the children with respect to matters related to

Table 6. Details Related to Weekly Holiday

Weekly holiday provided	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Yes	13	22.81
No	44	77.19

Table 7. Details of the Meals Provided at the Workplace

Food Provided	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Breakfast, Lunch	3	5.26
Breakfast, Lunch, and Evening Snacks	7	12.28
Breakfast, Lunch, and Dinner	5	8.77
Breakfast, Lunch, Evening Snacks, and Dinner	42	73.69

monetary and non-monetary benefits, three parameters were considered, that is, monthly remuneration, sleeping arrangements, and weekly holidays. The results of these have been depicted in the Tables 4, 5, and 6 respectively.

The Table 4 shows the monthly remuneration received by the sample respondents. It is evident from the Table that 19.30% of the sample respondents (child labourers) were paid less than ₹ 1000 a month, which in no way compensates for their contribution, which is largely on the cost of their self respect, health, social life, and future. ₹ 30 plus-minus a day is not the remuneration any one can justify for working any duration ranging from 10 to 14 hours. The fact that 77.19% of the children were provided some amount between ₹ 1000 and ₹ 1500, that is, between ₹ 33 to ₹ 50 a day does not provide any solace to any sympathizer of child labour for the reason that it is a known fact that this amount does not even remotely parallel with the fair wages for working such long hours. The data in the Table shows that 3.51% of the respondents were getting above ₹ 1500 is not capable of bringing a shine in the eyes of anyone for the reason that this amount, that is, ₹ 60 or ₹ 70 a day, is still less than the minimum wages fixed by the government for working only 8 hours a day. With this money, the future citizens cannot either buy food having the requisite calorie and nutritional requirements for a day, nor can they enjoy other 'musts' of life.

The Table 5 shows the different sleeping arrangements provided by the employers to the sample respondents (who used to stay with their employers at night). It is evident from the Table that 47.368% of the sample respondents (child labourers) were provided "a bed with a rug". Here, it may not be out of context to clarify the justification behind asking this question. The pilot survey revealed that a good number of children serving in these restaurants and hotels were not provided even the basic amenities, it was thought to probe the matter objectively and pin pointedly. Hence, they were asked about the quantity (not quality) of the arrangements for taking rest at night. Again, 15.79% of the respondents were provided "a combination of benches with a rug". Lack of proper bedding does not provide the requisite comfort to a fatigued child. The situation of those who were found to have been forced to sleep on the table was not better. The respondents (child labourers) who were provided with "a combination of table with a rug" was comparatively low (5.26%). This data brings into focus the deplorable living conditions of the sample respondents. Furthermore, from the Table, it can be observed that 17.544% of the sample respondents slept on the "floor with a rug and other stuffy material". It is known and believed that floors, for sleeping purpose, are vulnerable for all, but are naturally more dangerous for our 'budding flowers,' especially in light of the fact that the area of south Assam is snake prone due to the humid climate. It is to be noted that the remaining 14.035% of the respondents (child labourers) were not provided any sleeping arrangement as they returned home after 7 PM in the evening.

The fact that 21% (15.79% + 5.26%) of the sample respondents slept on benches or on tables naturally draws our attention to the sleeping arrangement provided to the children. This arrangement did not provide adequate hours of sleep to the children, as they first have to wait for the closure of the restaurant, then clean it, rearrange it, and wake up early in the morning so that the tables and benches can be arranged as usual for the customers. Restaurants generally close down after 10 PM. It is obvious that the children can take their dinner only after the

Table 8. Details of the Medical Facilities Provided

Medicine	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
With doctor's advice	4	7.02
Without doctor's advice	29	50.88
No Medicine	24	42.10

restaurant has closed, and then they make arrangements for sleeping at night. Since the morning tea and breakfast is to be prepared and served early in the morning, the children got only a couple of hours of sleep each night.

The Table 6 shows that less than one fourth (22.81%) of the sample respondents were allowed to enjoy a weekly leave and the remaining (77.19%) children were exploited all seven days a week. How much more gloomy could the picture be of child labour in our country ? A weekly holiday is a fundamental right as per the laws, and any denial of it is not less than a crime.

★ **Quality of Work Life of the Child Labourers with Respect to Account of Nourishment and Health Care**

Benefits : The quality of work life of the child labourers on account of nourishment and healthcare benefits was measured by considering the parameters - food facilities and medical facilities provided to them. The details of the same are depicted in the Tables 7 and 8.

The Table 7 shows the different food facilities provided to the respondents. It is evident from the Table that 5.26% of the sample respondents (child labourers) only received breakfast and lunch, since they were allowed to go home after 7 PM or 8 PM in the evening. As the data speaks, they were not provided any snacks after they were provided lunch during the noon hours. This cannot be justified as children have greater nutritional and calorific requirements due to their growing age, and hence, they need to be given something to eat every 3-4 hours. The argument that they are released after 7 PM does defend the people at the helm of affairs. The Table also shows that 12.28% of the respondents were provided breakfast, lunch, and evening snacks as they went home in the evening. Furthermore, it was found that 8.77% of the respondents were provided breakfast, lunch, and dinner but not evening snacks, even though they continued to work for 6 to 7 hours after the lunch and before they ate their dinner. The fact that the highest number of respondents, that is, 73.69% were provided all food facilities, that is, breakfast, lunch, evening snacks, and dinner does not allow us to stay contented on the matter as this is not a philanthropic act, it is rather a compulsion on the part of the profit makers. It is only expected that at least the bellies of the budding flowers are filled properly if they are to work for more than 10 hours a day.

The Table 8 shows the medical facilities provided to the sample respondents. It is evident from the Table that only 7.02% of the sample respondents (child labourers) were provided medical facilities with doctor's advice, and 50.88% of the respondents were provided medical facilities without doctor's advice, that is, without getting a proper prescription from a registered doctor. In other words, 57.90% of the total respondents were provided medical facilities either with doctor's advice or without doctor's advice. However, the remaining 42.10% of the respondents were provided no medical facilities at all. This, again, is not only highly disappointing, but is highly objectionable too.

Summary of Findings

The above findings can be summarized as follows :

- ★ Eighty six percent of the respondents were engaged in tasks that involved a great amount of drudgery.
- ★ Ninety one percent of the respondents worked for more than 10 hours each day.
- ★ A whopping 96.49% of the respondents earned below ₹ 1500 per month.
- ★ A majority of the sample respondents (52.63%) were not provided proper sleeping conditions.

- ★ In cases of medical facilities, a shocking 42% were not provided any medicines/ medical attention.
- ★ A majority of the sample respondents (77.19%) were not given any holidays on weekends.

□

Conclusion

When it was decided to probe the matters related to child labour, we were expecting that the picture probably may not be very encouraging. It was also apprehended that the commitment made by the country to the ILO in this regard, by way of ratifying the concerned convention of this international body, might not have been taken care of either by the officers of the labour department, or by the 'profit makers' who run the restaurants and hotels in Silchar. With great sadness, we report that the findings are alarming and frustrating. If a substantial percentage of our 'future citizens' are put to work for such jobs in deplorable conditions (cleaning the utensils, tables, and floors; tolerating abuses and reprimands; working for more than 10 hours a day on a remuneration that is less than ₹ 50/- a day; having access to little or no medicines when physically indisposed; working for all 7 days of the week; and on the top of all this, taking rest at night on tables/combination of benches for less than 6 hours a day), what kind of a shining India is this? We need to awaken as a society to fight this menace of child labour to ensure a bright future of these young children who, otherwise, face a bleak future.

Implications

Our planners need to review the whole scenario of child labour in our country. The law interpreters need to be a little more cautious while interpreting the implementation of laws, keeping in mind the ground scenario. The law executors, if they want to avoid further criticism, need to be very objective and comprehensive in their approach. The academicians and researchers need to put these matters on a high agenda for a detailed and truthful probing of the matter. The trade unions need not be complacent by counting their contributions for the workers serving the organized sector. The media persons need to bring the matter more honestly (but correctly) to the notice of the society. Last but not the least, the NGOs should strive hard and unleash a tirade against this social menace.

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Further Research

The study was conducted only in Silchar town of Assam by considering a sample size of 57 respondents, which is an inherent limitation of the study. Future studies can replicate this study on an all India basis. Meta analysis of individual studies conducted on a similar topic in India can be a useful exercise in this field. It would help to generalize the findings of these studies in the Indian context.

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