

Child labour in India: A State-wise account and the role of Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises

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Abstract : *The issue of child labour is not a new concept in the Indian context. The issue has evolved over time with all its negativities surrounding it. Since independence though as a society we have come a long way, the issue of child labour has remained one of the most vexed issues of all time. Lately, there is a big turnaround visible in the situation as there is a decline in the absolute number of child labour in India as per census 2011 and when the same is compared to the number of child labour as per pervious periods' census outcomes. Though the economic literature is full of studies relating to the issue of child labour, there is real dearth of studies that look at state wise trend in child labour force. The current study also ascertains that poverty caused & perpetuated by unemployment is one of the prime reasons for the issue of child labour in India. The study also shows how the MSMEs can play a role in creating and providing employment opportunities in the economy which may aid in alleviating poverty and thereby putting forward some positive checks on the issue of child labour.*

Keywords: *Child Labor, Employment Elasticity, MSMEs*

I. INTRODUCTION

Childhood is the most important time period for a person's all round development as it creates the foundation for future individuals. So goes the saying that Children are like raw pieces of soil and whatever shape is given to them by their surroundings or the society at large, they take it during their childhood itself. However, even before that all the children in the society do not get equal opportunity to develop their personality through formal education and other kind of experiences which a normal child enjoys. In tiny shoulders they have to bear the responsibility of their families, financially, which literally steals their childhood and they become child-adults. It is aptly described, as 'child labour is a symptom and not a problem' of something bigger amiss in the society or the economy. Despite the countless policies and programmes launched against the issue, the resultant dent caused in the numbers is very meager. This study is a further addition to existing knowledge on child labour, with special focus on cross-state comparison of the issue in India.

II. Recent trends in Child labour counts: Across the Globe and India in particular

The recent statistics as available with the International Labor Organization (ILO) on child labour presents a hopeful picture. The child labor numbers is found to be decreasing in many parts of the world. Only in Sub-Saharan Africa, the number of economically active children has increased. Asia and the pacific regions, despite the decrease in child labour numbers is still the highest in the world. The higher number, among other reasons, is also due to presence of most populous nations in the region, viz. India and China.

In India, the picture has been impressive. Analysis of successive census data shows that the ratio of child labour to total population in the country has decreased from 1.37 per cent in 1991 to 0.36 per cent in 2011 and same is true for states as well.

III. Literature Review

It is pertinent to mention here that fortunately there are no specific studies that give a vivid account of the state wise incidence of child labour and how MSMEs can help in alleviating the phenomenon. However, below we give an account of existing related literature in order to ascertain the scope of research already done in the areas of Child Labour

Subhashini Subbaraman in her PhD Dissertation titled *Essays on Child Labour, its Relation with Competitiveness of Labour Intensive Exports, its Determinants and Education in India* has observed that in a

multi country analysis estimating performance of labour intensive exports was performed and the results revealed that child labour negatively influenced the labour intensive exports share to GDP.

A report by International Labour Organisation titled '**WORLD REPORT ON CHILD LABOUR - Economic vulnerability, social protection and the fight against child labour**' finds that between 2000 and 2008 the number of child labourers worldwide fell by some 30 million. Notwithstanding this progress, at the end of that period there were still over 215 million child labourers, and over half of them were doing hazardous work. Moreover, the overall downward trend masked rising numbers of children in economic activity in sub-Saharan Africa from 2004 to 2008 (ILO, 2010d)..

Another paper by International Labour Organisation (ILO) titled '**Eliminating Child Labour Guides for Employers - Guide One Introduction to the issue of child labour**' finds that Child labour is normally concentrated in the informal economy, in the rural sector and in other industries hidden from public view. Children who are engaged in child labour, either because they are below the legal work age or because they work in hazardous, illegal or degrading conditions, are unable to develop to their full potential. Employers and employers' organizations can play a role in the global fight against child labour.

Faraaz Siddiqi and Harry Anthony Patrinos in their paper titled **Child Labor: Issues, Causes and Interventions** have concluded that Child labor is a pervasive problem throughout the world, especially in developing countries. Africa and Asia together account for over 90 percent of total child employment. Child labor is especially prevalent in rural areas where the capacity to enforce minimum age requirements for schooling and work is lacking. Children work for a variety of reasons, the most important being poverty and the induced pressure upon them to escape from this plight. Though children are not well paid, they still serve as major contributors to family income in developing countries. Schooling problems also contribute to child labor, whether it is the inaccessibility of schools or the lack of quality education which spurs parents to enter their children in more profitable pursuits. Traditional factors such as rigid cultural and social roles in certain countries further limit educational attainment and increase child labor.

IV. State wise analysis of different scenarios of Child labor

The scenario of child labor in India varies from state to state. In states like Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Bihar and Gujarat, the issue of child labor is an important point of debate for the social watchers as it has assumed unbearable proportions. But the silver lining is that in these states also the phenomenon of child labor is reducing gradually. Below we give the details of states with highest and lowest number of child labor and the ratio of child labor to total population in these states.

Table 1: States with highest and lowest number of child labor and the ratio of child labor to total population						
	1991	2001	2011	1991	2001	2011
States / UTs with highest number of child labor			Ratio of Child labor to total population in these states			
Uttar Pradesh	1410086	1927997	896301	1.0	1.2	0.4
Maharashtra	1068427	764075	496916	1.4	0.8	0.4
Bihar	942245	1117500	451590	1.5	1.3	0.4
Andhra Pradesh	1661940	1363339	404851	2.5	1.8	0.5
Madhya Pradesh	1352563	1065259	286310	2.0	1.8	0.4
States / UTs with lowest number of child labor			Ratio of Child labor to total population in these states			
Lakshadweep	34	27	28	0.1	0.0	0.0
Daman & Diu	941	729	774	0.9	0.5	0.3
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	1265	1960	999	0.5	0.6	0.3
Dadra and Nagar Haveli	4416	4274	1054	3.2	1.9	0.3
Puducherry	2680	1904	1421	0.3	0.2	0.1

Source: Census database of different years.

As per census 2011, India had around 43.5 lakh of child labor in 2011 down from slightly more than one crore in 1971. It is pertinent to mention here that 2011 census presented a different picture when compared to the statistics on child labor presented by the previous census reports. From 1971 onwards every census statistics presented a child labor force of more than 10 million or one crore. It is only in census 2011, one can observe that the child labor force has been reported below 5 million. This is a significant outcome of myriad

polices and efforts of equal number of Government and Non-Government organizations directed at fighting the menace of child labor, tooth and nail. It is pertinent to mention here that there is no significant change in census methodology during the period under consideration.

Table 2: State wise ratio of child labor to total child labor			
State / UTs	1991	2001	2011
States / UTs with highest concentration of child labor			
Uttar Pradesh	12.27	15.22	20.59
Maharashtra	9.29	6.03	11.41
Bihar	8.20	8.82	10.37
Andhra Pradesh	14.46	10.76	9.30
Madhya Pradesh	11.77	8.41	6.58
States / UTs with lowest concentration of child labor			
Lakshadweep	0.0003	0.0002	0.0006
Daman & Diu	0.01	0.01	0.02
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	0.01	0.02	0.02
Dadra and Nagar Haveli	0.04	0.03	0.02
Puducherry	0.02	0.02	0.03

As per the information presented above, Uttar Pradesh leads the chart having the maximum number of Child laborers in India, followed by Maharashtra and Bihar in that order. In these three states the ratio of child labor to total child labor in the country is also the highest.

The bottom three states in terms of number of child laborers in India are Sikkim, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. It is observed that populous states are having the most number of child laborers and the least populous state have contributed less to the ranks of child laborers. In terms of the ratio of child labor to total child labor in the country, all the UTs except Delhi fair well.

In relative terms Uttar Pradesh alone accounts for 20.6% followed by Maharashtra (11.4%), Bihar (10.4%), Andhra Pradesh (9.3%), Madhya Pradesh (6.6%), Gujarat & Rajasthan (5.8%), Karnataka (5.7%) and West Bengal (5.4%). Over the years there have been changes in the relative share of states in the country's total child labor force. For example, the share of U.P. in the country's total child labor force has gone up from 12.3% as per census 1991 to 15.2% in census 2001 and to 20.6% in census 2011. It is pertinent to mention here that the state is the most populous state in the country. The share of Maharashtra in total child labor force had gone down from 9.3% as per census 1991 to 6.0% in census 2001 before rising again to 11.4% as per census 2011. The state of Bihar has witnessed its share in total child labor force rising from 8.2% in census 1991 to 8.8% as per census 2001 and finally to 10.4% in census 2011.

Child Labor as a ratio of total population and grading of states

In order to study the gravity of the issue of child labor in different states we have referred to the ratio of child labor in a state to the total population of that state. Using this measure we have also been able to produce a comparative picture.

The ratio of child labor to total population has been steadily declining from 1991 when it was 1.37 per cent, an alarming portion by any measure. As per Census 2001, it declined to 1.24 per cent and further to 0.36 per cent in 2011. Even the NSSO (66th round of survey) on child labor in Major Indian States, 2009-10, gives the total number of child labor in the country at 49,83,871 while census 2011 gives the number of child labor in the country at 43,48,249 and thereby providing credibility to the later. Looking at both the estimates and also taking into account the declining trend in child labor in the country, the data seems to be reliable and consistent in its estimates.

In this study we have identified all the states and the union territories of the Indian union into four categories grading them as A, B+, B- and C categories. The criteria used are given hereunder:

Sr. No.	Grade	Indicating
1.	A	The state / UT is consistently below the national average of Child labor as a ratio of total population for the last 3 census periods i.e. 1991, 2001, & 2011.
2.	B+	The state / UT is has a child labor to population ratio below the national average as per the latest census i.e. 2011. However, in either of the preceding two census periods or in both the census periods they were above the national average.
3.	B-	The state / UT has a child labor to population ratio above the national average as per the latest census.
4.	C	The state / UT has a child labor to population ratio above the national average for all the reference census periods.

Based on the definitions mentioned above grade wise list of states / UTs are given hereunder:

Sr. No.	Grade	Total number of states / UT	State	UT
1.	A	12	Haryana, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Uttarakhand, West Bengal	A & N Islands, Chandigarh, Daman & Diu, Delhi, Lakshadweep, Puducherry
2.	B+	8	Assam, Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Jharkhand, Mizoram, Odisha	Dadra and Nagar Haveli
3.	B-	6	Goa, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Manipur, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh,	-----
4.	C	9	Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Rajasthan, Sikkim	-----

Surprisingly, it is observed that the traditionally well off states such as Maharashtra, Gujarat, Punjab, Andhra Pradesh etc. have not been able to ward off the problem of child labor in a manner that is warranted. On the other hand states like Odisha, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Jammu & Kashmir, Assam, Himachal Pradesh, etc which are also poorer of the poorest states in the country have been able to do better and boast of lower child labor to total population ratios. In this context we observe that the phenomena of migration of people from less well off states to better off states have accentuated the problem of child labor in the later. The developed states provide better employment opportunities thereby creating the pull factors for the people of states where employment opportunities and so as other opportunities are less.

Southern states like Tamil Nadu & Kerala and industrially developed state of Haryana have been able to make good progress and their ratio of child labor to total population in the country has been steadily declining and also has been below the national average for the last three census periods. All the centrally administered union territories have showcased better performance in this regard, having their ratio of child labor to total population decreasing on a continuous basis.

V. Employment potentiality of MSMEs and the issue of child labor

Generally, it is believed that poverty coupled with unemployment, which are often tied in a twin's relationship, are the basic causes of all the socio-economic problems in a society. An unemployed person who is also poor can't afford to send his/her wards for formal education and instead grave for opportunities to send them for casual labor for a nominal earning. This laid the foundation of child labor. The casual child labor without formal education remains unaware of the virtues of formal education and ill-effects of child labor. When they grow up and become adults, with these paucities in their own experiences, they do not hesitate to send their own wards for labor at the same age when they themselves first joined the ranks of the child labor. And the problem continues.

The problem of child labor is caused by a multiple of factors and thus requires multi-pronged strategies. Besides raising awareness about the problematic nature of the issue of child labor, other strategies could be spread of education, raising the social status of women, providing gainful employment opportunities, development of country's industrial base which can generate adequate employment opportunities. Now, when the issue of industrial development comes into picture the role played by MSMEs in this sphere in the past and also even today is pertinent to be mentioned.

VI. Conclusions

The above analysis shows that while the number of child labor has been decreasing for the country as a whole and also in the states, in relative terms the share of child labor some states in total is increasing which is a cause of concern. Major of these states are Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu. It is also observed that in some of the developed states such as Maharashtra and Gujarat, the problem of rising child labor is more to do with the issue of migration of labor class people from less developed states such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Odisha. However, the basic causes behind child labour are poverty caused and perpetuated by unemployment. With the MSMEs in the country are yet to realize their full potential and being labour intensive in nature the study proposes that development of the MSME sector can go a long way in providing adequate employment opportunities and thereby aiding in solving the issue of child labour.

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