



## Causes of Child Labour in Rural Punjab

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### ABSTRACT

Child labour refers to the exploitation of children through work that deprives them of their childhood, education and basic rights. It is a global issue, often driven by poverty, lack of access to education, and economic inequality. The study was conducted using primary data collected from 120 respondents (60 farm and 60 off farm) to analyse factors responsible for the child labour. The findings showed that personal factors *i.e.* economic needs and drunken father were the dominating factors responsible for child labour. Irregular income of the family and family debt forced the children to earn at earlier age. Besides these, migration, which is more common among farm respondents and large family size were contributing factor for increasing child labour. Thus, the study suggested that government should provide avenues of vocational training to provide better employment opportunities to unemployed parents and encourage them to send their wards to school for education.

**Key Words:** Child labour, Economic, Personal, Social factors

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### INTRODUCTION

Child labour is a matter of great concern because it has serious consequences and implication for children, parents, families and society at large. Poverty is said to be the main reason for child labour. children join work because they are poor. But in reality, child labour increases poverty rather than reducing it, as it consigns successive generations to its vicious cycle (Singh, 2022; Barman 2014). Child labour is basically cheap and each working child take the place of an adult worker, accentuates adult unemployment and lower the wage structure. The ratio of adult employment to child employment decreases as the child employment rate increases. Beyond employment and income, child labour has a negative impact on children's health. Their education is severely hampered, and it undermines their ability to grow and develop from the ground up. It results in loss of education, mental retardation, physical exhaustion, and deprivation of avenues for support and pleasures, which are crucial for a child's normal growth (Hoque, 2021).

The failure of the educational system has

made child labour more prevalent in India. Even though free and compulsory education is offered, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act of 2009 states that 50 percent of age school-age children between 6 and 14 years are engaged in work participation. India has one of the highest rates of illiteracy. Even in the state like Punjab, where almost every village has a school, the number of illiterates has risen to 76.48 lakh in 2022 as compared to 63.80 lakh in 2001 (Audi *et al*, 2022). Even for the survival of the family, the modest wages earned by adult male labourers are insufficient, compelling the female family members and children to labour. Thus, millions of innocent children are subjected to heartbreakingly severe hardship and exploitation. They have completely lost the fun and thrill of a typical childhood ((Anker, 2000; Maya, 2021).

Run away children occasionally move alone to urban areas. These emotionally neglected children flee from their homes due to a hostile home environment, abusive parenting, a dislike of education, parental abandonment, or the allure of city life (Mishra 2000). Due to low pay and adaptability, business owners prefer to hire

children, while they claim that this is done out of compassion to help the children's families earn more money. Children often fill the roles of adults in the workforce, though at wages that are half or even lower. It results in joblessness among the key personnel. According to Agarwal and Pathak (2015), an adult worker's bargaining strength is diminished by the abundance of children in India who are willing to offer themselves for employment, with lower pay.

Child labour exists in different forms, including hazardous and non-hazardous jobs, agricultural and non-agricultural work, modern and traditional industry jobs, formal and informal economy occupations, full- and part-time work, wage earners and unpaid family workers. The number and direction of the economic effects of various forms of child labour might vary greatly, making this information crucial. Thus, the present study had been undertaken with specific objective of identifying the factors responsible for child labour in rural Punjab.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The study was conducted in rural areas of Punjab by using multiple stage random sampling technique. At first, two districts i.e. Ludhiana and Moga were selected from 23 district of Punjab. In the second stage, two blocks from each selected district were selected randomly for the purpose of the study. Similarly at the third stage, two villages from each block were taken randomly for the purpose of present investigation. Thus, four blocks and eight villages were selected from Punjab. At last 120 child labourers were selected, 15 from each village from farm and off farm category. Response from parents, major care taker and acquaintance was also recorded wherever possible to authenticate the responses of child labour. Off farm child labour included domestic labour, labour in cycle/scooter repair shop and village shops (tea stall, dhaba, grocery and vendors etc.). Using comprehensive interpretation and Table construction, a methodical data analysis was carried out with the help of code designing. Data from the schedules were analysed using frequency and percentages and Z-test.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The paper analyzed the socio-economic characteristics of selected child laborers to identify the root cause of child labour and also examine the economic, personal and social factors responsible for child labour.

### **Socio-economic Characteristics**

The data (Table1) showed that males constitute a larger proportion of the off-farm sector (58.3%) compared to the farm sector (46.6 %). Conversely, females were more represented in the farm sector (53.3%) than in the off-farm sector (41.7 %). Overall, males make up 52.5 percent of the total sample, while females account for 47.5 per cent. Most of the respondents (38.5 %) were from the age group of 10-12 yrs. The farm respondents showed a higher proportion of 10 to 12 yr-old (33.3%) compared to off-farm child labour was (20.00%) This suggests that as children grow older, they were increasingly involved in farm activities. It was observed that 20 percent of respondents belonged to the 8 years age group and from off farm sector. The comparison between farm and off farm indicated that half of the off-farm respondents were under the age group of 8-10 years as compared to 26.7 percent farm respondents. Also 40 percent farm respondents were from 12-14 years age group as compared to 10 percent in off farm sector.

The data showed the distribution of respondents according to their education. There was clear differences in education between child labours who worked in the off farms sectors and those who worked in farm sector. Compared to farm respondents (26.7%), the percentage of illiterate respondents was higher among off-farm respondents (33.3%). Thirty per cent of child labours were illiterate pointing towards serious social a problem for both groups. While the number of respondents with a primary education falling between the first and fifth standards was low (13.33%). More than half of respondents were educated upto middle from which 60.00per cent were from farm sector and 53.4per cent from off farm.

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**Table 1. Distribution of respondents according to their socio-economic characteristics.**

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Farm (n=60)</b>	<b>Off farm (n=60)</b>	<b>Total (N=120)</b>
Male	28(46.6)	35(58.3)	63(52.5)
Female	32(53.3)	25(41.7)	57(47.5)
<b>Age (years)</b>			
Below 8	-	12(20.00)	12(10.00)
8-10	16(26.7)	30(50.00)	46(38.34)
10-12	20(33.3)	12(20.00)	32(26.67)
12-14	24(40.00)	6(10.00)	30(25.00)
<b>Caste</b>			
Scheduled Castes (SCs)	38(63.34)	40(66.67)	78(65.00)
Other Backward Castes (OBCs)	22(36.67)	20(33.34)	42(35.00)
<b>Education</b>			
Illiterate	16(26.70)	20(33.3)	36(30.00)
Primary	8(13.33)	8(13.33)	16(13.33)
Middle	36(60.00)	32(53.40)	68(56.67)
<b>Religion</b>			
Hindu	12(20.00)	11(18.30)	23(19.16)
Sikh	40(66.67)	44(77.30)	84(70.00)
Muslim	8(13.33)	5(8.30)	12(10.00)
<b>Native place</b>			
Punjab	35(58.33)	46(76.67)	81(67.50)
Uttar Pradesh	10(16.67)	5(8.33)	15(12.50)
Bihar	15(25.00)	9(15.00)	24(20.00)

The data (Table 1) showed the distribution of respondents across different castes. It was found that 65percent off farm child labourers belonged to the scheduled castes and 35.00 percent belonged to other backward castes. Caste wise not much difference was found among farm and off farm categories. Further, 77.30 percent of respondents from the off-farm sector and 66.67 percent from the agriculture sector were identified as Sikhs. Further, 19.16 percent of the sampled respondent were Hindus. In the farm sector there were 20 percent Hindus and 18.30 percent in off farm sector. It was also found that 67.50 percent were from Punjab state, from which three fourth (76.67 %) off-farm labours. Further, 20.00 percent of the respondents from Bihar followed by 12.50 were from UP state.

### Factors responsible for the child labour

Various factors responsible for child labour are categorized under personal ,economic

and social factor. Children have to do work due to personal factor such as broken family, economic need, drunken father and orphanage etc. A large number of social factor were responsible for child labour such as large family size, poverty, migration etc. and economic factor compelled the child to do labour such as to supplement family income ,family debt , irregular income etc.

### Personal Factors

The data (Table 2) showed the personal factors responsible for child labour. All respondents (100%) consistently reported economic need as the cause of child labour. Another affected factors for child labour was drunken father reported by majority of the respondents i.e 81.67 percent farm and 83.34 off farm respondents .Peer influences was seen among 65.84 percent also additional factor responsible for the child labour as respondents started doing labour under influences of friends or

**Table 2. Distribution of respondents according to their personal factors responsible for child labour.**  
Multiple responses

Personal factor	Farm (n=60)	Off farm (n=60)	Total (N=120)	Z-Value
Broken family	3(5.00)	1(1.67)	4(3.34)	1.07 NS
Economic need	60(100.00)	60(100.00)	120(100.00)	-
Drunken Father	49(81.67)	50(83.34)	99(82.5)	-0.24 NS
Run away from home	1(1.67)	-	1	-
Orphan	-	2(33.34)	2(2.5)	-
Lack of education	48(80.00)	22(20.00)	70(58.34)	4.81*
Peer influences	37(61.67)	42(70.00)	79(65.84)	-0.96 NS
Limited recreational opportunity	49(81.67)	35(58.34)	84(70.00)	2.78*

Note- Figures in the parentheses indicate percentage

\*Significant at 5% level of significance

**Table 3. Distribution of respondents according to their economic factors.**

Economic Factor	Farm (n=60)	Off farm (n=60)	Total (N=120)	Z- value
To supplement family Income	40(66.67)	25(41.67)	65(54.17)	2.74*
No other earning member in family	24(40.00)	27(45.00)	51(42.5)	-0.55 NS
Unemployment	40(66.67)	37(61.67)	77(64.17)	0.57 NS
Irregular Income of Family	47(78.34)	40(66.67)	87(72.5)	1.43 NS
Family Debt	37(61.67)	30(50.00)	67(55.84)	1.28 NS
Limited job opportunity	33(55.00)	40(66.67)	74(61.67)	1.30 NS
Poverty	60(100.00)	60(100.00)	120(100.00)	-

Multiple responses

\*Significant at 5% level of significance

attraction towards earning money. Significantly, a difference was seen in the component of lack of education, as more respondents on farms (80.00%) than off farms (20.00%) cited it as a contributing factor. This yielded a statistically significant Z-value of 4.81. Additionally, respondents who lived on farms (81.67%) report having less recreational possibilities than respondents who did not lived on farms (58.34%). This difference was significant, as indicated by the Z-value of 2.78 at 5 percent level of significant.

### Economic Factors

The economic factors contributing to child labour highlighted several significant trends. Notably, the need to supplement family income was significantly more common among farm respondents (66.67%) compared to off-farm respondents (41.67%), with a Z-value of 2.74 indicating statistical significance. In terms of

family structure, 40 percent of farm workers and 45 percent of off-farm workers indicated that there were no other earning members in the family showing no significant difference (Z-value -0.55 NS). Unemployment was reported similarly by both groups, with 66.67 percent of farm workers and 61.67 percent of off-farm workers, resulting in a total of 64.17 percent. Regarding the irregular income of the family, 78.34 percent of farm workers reported this issue, compared to 66.67 percent of off-farm workers, total 72.5 percent. Family debt affected 61.67 percent of farm workers and 50% of off-farm workers, with a total of 55.84 percent, poverty was universally reported, affecting all respondents (100%) from both farm and off-farm categories.

### Social Factors

There were notable variations observed among social factors responsible for child labour. It was found that family disputes was the main



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**Table 4. Distribution of respondents according to their social factors.**

Social factors	Farm (n=60)	Off farm (n=60)	Total (N=120)	Z- value
Large family size	18(30.00)	26(43.34)	44(36.64)	-1.51 NS
Family dispute	40(66.67)	52(86.67)	92(76.67)	2.59*
Chronic illness in family	10(16.64)	14(23.34)	24(20.00)	-0.91 NS
Lack of awareness	24(40.00)	37(61.67)	61(67.5)	2.37*
Family occupations	20(33.34)	19(31.67)	39(32.5)	0.19 NS
Migration	25(41.67)	15(25.00)	40(33.34)	1.94**
Orphanage	3(5.00)	2(3.34)	5(4.17)	0.45 NS

Note- Figures in the parentheses indicate percentages

\*Significant at 5% level of significance

\*\*Significant at 10% level of significance

problem with a Z-value of 2.59 showing statistical significance. This was significantly more common among off-farm respondents (86.67%) per cent than among farm respondents (66.67 %). Furthermore, the lack of awareness regarding educational and welfare policies and programme etc. was higher among respondents who were not off farm category (61.67%) than among farm respondents (40.00%), as indicated by a Z-value of 2.37, which is also significant. Another significant difference was observed in migration in which is more common among respondents who live on farms (41.67%) than off-farm (25.00%). This difference was found significant with Z-value of 1.94, indicating this trend is growing larger family size is another dominate factors contributing towards increasing child labour, reported by 36.64 per cent total respondents. However, no significant differences was observed regarding social factors in both the categories.

### CONCLUSION

In India, child labour has become a major issue. Many children are forced to work at young ages to support their families due to many factors such as unemployment, a large number of family members, poverty and lack of parental education. It affected the psychological and physical growth of child and also minimize the opportunity for getting better education. The findings of this research emphasize the critical issue of child labor

in rural Punjab, revealing its deep roots in socio-economic challenges, including poverty, illiteracy, family debt, and limited access to educational opportunities. The study highlights that children are compelled to work due to both economic necessity and systemic gaps in family and societal support. These factors not only deprive children of their right to education and a normal childhood but also perpetuate cycles of poverty and inequality. Thus the study suggested some recommendations to minimize or eradicate the problem child labour:

- Parents should be made aware regarding importance of education and be motivated to send their children to schools.
- Government and NGOs should provide institutional support for orphans and run-away children.
- Migrant parents should also be encouraged to enroll their children in schools.
- Village Panchayat should have dispute redressal mechanism to promptly intervene in the cases of the physical or sexual abuse of child labour.
- NGOs should arrange awareness generation camps to make child labour aware of their rights.

- PHCs should be well equipped to attend to health emergencies of child labour.
- Government should provide avenues of vocational training to provide better employment opportunities to child labour.
- Besides free and compulsory education, government should provide some financial aid at primary education level to curb the menace of child labour.
- Improvement in the working as well as living conditions of child labor through government intervention is urgently needed.

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