Psychological Injury to Children at Work: A Review of the Literature

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ABSTRACT

Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986 talks about the hazardous units of the employability and prohibit the employers to employ children in them and regulate employability of children in the non-hazardous units. Law has laid emphasis on physical injury that affects the physiology of a child but the “psychological injury” is left as such. Psychological injury can have disastrous impact to shape the personality of a child. The paper reviewed types of non–hazardous occupations where children are involved at work, methods, Ericson’s developmental stages of children affected by child’s labour activities, assessing psychological effects, constitutional provisions; psychosocial analysis, and concluded that once a child gets employed he or she loses the freedom to spend his or her time by his own free will.

Keywords: Child Labour, Labour Markets, Psychological Injury, Psycho-Social, UNCRC

INTRODUCTION

Children are the soft tissues of a society, if nurtured well, they have all capacity to blossom into healthy and productive citizens of a country. They are considered as the future investment of a family, a society, a country and of course a global village. This investment required to be groomed with love and affection, leisure and play, education and vocational skills, healthy food and medical support, in their forming years of childhood. If they are not groomed with these basics attributes of life, they will grow as dwarf, limped, half grown, sick and delinquent adults.

Unfortunately in spite of being aware about these facts people who are responsible for them show their helplessness in fulfilling the basic rights of the Children. Parents, teachers, employers, intelligentsia, bureaucrats and politicians, everybody have reasons to quote. Numerous reasons are citied for this. Poverty, illiteracy, poor quality of education in government schools, unattractive style of teaching, lack of social security, broken homes, migratory population, abuse, second generational vicious circle of being born into a poor family, unemployment of adult labour, easily available supply side, inexpensive labour force, tenderness of children, nimble
finger concept, unquestionable attitude of children, unorganised labour force (un-unionised), and the list can continue.

**Children in Labour Markets**

The fact still remains that children continue to sweat into the heat of labour markets. We do see children as young as 6 years, are being employed in all kind of petty jobs. Jobs that fetch them full fill their basic needs. It may be food, clothes, sleepers, toffies, cold drink, cloths, or some petty money for their siblings and families. They are found in all across the country but we can find them as close to “The Temple of Democracy- Parliament house, or “The Symbol of Sacrifice- India Gate.” We may find them selling flowers, pen, pencils, mopers, books, mobilechargers, toys, earphones at the red lights or cleaning cars, washing utensils at road side dhabas, helping automobile mechanics, selling anything to everything which they could. A list of informal jobs where children are working have been listed in Table 1.

**Physical vs. Psychological Injury**

This is a list which is not considered as hazardous. Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986 talks about the hazardous units of the employability and prohibit the employers to employ children in them and regulate employability of children in the non-hazardous units. The discussion can go beyond the scope of this paper as to what has to be called as hazardous and non-hazardous. The point to be underlined is that in the law the emphasis is laid on physical injury that effects the personality of a child but the “Psychological Injury” is left as such. Psychological injury can have disastrous impact to shape the personality of a child. Poor self-image, low self-esteem, depression, a broken personality, aggression, bullying, a revengeful character. Social scientist are still struggling to measure this Psychological Injury. Any child which is debarred of his leisure and play is going to have the psychological injury. The impact on his psychological and social traits have further been explored in this paper by a dedicated literature review.

Workshop findings on informal sector conducted by Delhi’s Child Rights club in April 2003 from India’s Invisible & Footloose Labour: An Analysis of the Situation of Children and Woman in the Informal Sector: Butterflies.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

A literature search of the psycho-social impact of child labour has revealed various facets of the psychological angle of the problem across various nations. Google search was performed and various databases were searched using the following key words: child labour, child labor, child workers, child labour and health, child labour and health, working children, working children and health, psycho-socio impact of child labor. Research has been conducted through various online journals, libraries, reports, books, newspaper etc. An understanding was built on the definition of the concept, psychological aspects involved with the development of children, social impact they had on their personality due to work situations and the probable methods of relief.

**Definition of Child and Child Labour for the Purpose of the Study**

According to ILO definition, “The term “child labour” (ILO sources) is often defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development.”
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