
SOCIAL WORK RESPONSE AND REMEDIAL MEASURES TO SOLVE THE PROBLEMS OF WORKING CHILDREN IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR

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Abstract

The abject poverty of parents and economic utility of children motivate the employers to exploit the child labourers in many ways. Not only the harmful effects of industrial work, but also the exploitation and abuse of them destroy the very personality of the working children. Hazardous work, extreme exploitation and abuse are responsible for various psycho-social problems of the working children. Social Work response and intervention to solve the problems of the working children may be sought in implementing the programmes, providing educational assistance, health services, counseling and recreational services. This research paper is based upon a survey research of 500 working children and their families in Agra city. The researcher discusses the response and intervention strategies and suggests some remedial measures to solve various psycho-social problems of the working children in the informal sector.

Key Words :Working Children; Social Work; Remedial Measures; Informal Sector.

INTRODUCTION

Child labour in poorer societies enjoys a great amount of economic value. The economic utility of working children motivates the employers to exploit them in numerous ways. Working children are not only exploited in work situations but they are also exploited in family environment. There are some studies which reflect upon the harmful effects of industrial work on children. However, not only work but exploitation and abuse too destroy the very personality of children. Hazardous work, extreme exploitation and abuse are responsible for psycho-social problems of working children.

Social Work response to the problems of working children, their exploitation and abuse may be analysed at different levels. Social work intervention can be sought in implementing programs, providing educational assistance, health services, spiritual formation, counseling and recreational activities. A social worker can also prove to be of great importance in networking activities. With social work intervention, various projects including centre-based, community-based and income generating projects may be evolved and implemented effectively. Community organisation and volunteers can play an important role in reaching the working children and in providing them with better access to basic services.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Khandekar and Naik (1972) observed that since the early years are meant to equip oneself with knowledge, techniques and skills for one's different adult roles in the society, having to take a job at a young age to earn a living, is bound to affect the very process of growing up.

Blumberg (1974) said that adult with alcoholic problems, depression or anxiety tend to abuse their children frequently. He further explained that alcoholism, depression or anxiety are the reactions to the

stress of family, loss of employment, excessive financial debt of chronic infuriaty. There is the intriguing possibility that personal characteristics may actually be the result of the same factors that lead to family violence itself.

Morice (1980) pointed out that home visits by social workers to motivate parents to send their children to school, remind a mother that registrations have started in the school, try and help a child get adequate medical help if sick, if he has been absent, and help provide financial assistance are some of the roles which a social worker can perform.

Nangia (1987) studied the responses of parents of child workers regarding the reasons for sending their children to work. He found that 60.17 percent parents send their children to work in early childhood due to economic compulsions as the workers supplement the family income.

Vlasoff (1991) concluded that the sensitivity to children's maintenance costs was more than perception of their utility. For this reason he cast doubt upon the supposed connection between the utility of children and large family size.

Hirway (1997) mentioned that child labour system in third world countries is partially due to inadequate educational system and certain socio-cultural constraints of the poor. The educational system in developing countries frequently lacks the infrastructure for providing compulsory primary education to all the children and there are serious problems with the quality education. Many a times in the eyes of the poor, the cost of education is higher than the returns.

METHODOLOGY

This research article is based upon a survey research of 500 working children and their families in Agra city of U.P. state of India. During the course of the study, the researcher found out various problems of the working children and the response and intervention strategies by social work profession. This paper also discusses some suggestions and remedial measures to solve the problems of the working children in the informal sector.

SOCIAL WORK RESPONSE TO THE PROBLEMS OF WORKING CHILDREN

Social work response to the problem of child abuse must be analysed and discussed at different levels. Insurmountable as it may appear, economic deprivation is the harsh reality that the children face. Most of other individual and family factors are also responsible for the growing presence of children at work places. There may be two important view-points for finding and evolving a strategy for social work intervention, one of which is that poverty is solely responsible for the problem of child labour and structural reasons dictate the presence of poverty. Another view point can be that within the constraint of resources appropriate intervention must be sought at the level of individual, family and community to use the resources and opportunities for marginalised families. This will prevent them from pushing more children to work in such exploitative occupations. Just as widespread poverty is symptomatic of the un-equitable distribution of resources, the continuing dependence of the economy on external influences, and policies which work to the disadvantage of the poor majority, so is the increased presence of children at work places indicative of basic structural problems.

Non-governmental organisations, religious institutions and community groups have to be involved in advocacy campaigns focusing on the plight of working children, generation of public awareness and mobilizing the larger community. The social work intervention can be sought in implementing programs providing educational assistance, health services, spiritual formation, counseling and recreational activities to working children. A social worker can also prove to be of great importance in networking activities. With social work intervention following projects can be evolved and implemented effectively.

Center-Based Projects :

The centre-based projects can be carried out by institutions providing for the urgent needs of children such as food, shelter, clothing and sometimes a helping hand. In these centres, children may be provided with medical care, counseling, educational and other facilities.

Community-Based Projects :

Community-based approaches to the care and protections of working children have gradually emerged and have proved to be fruitful. Among these are included the avenues for education, provision of income-generating projects for working children and their families and the use of community organizations and volunteers at the community.

Income-Generating Projects :

Any solution which ignores the grinding poverty and need for income generation, for the families of these working children will be a fiasco. Aimed at supplementing the income of poor families which send their children to work in these projects can be started by providing small loans to finance family-size enterprise.

Community Organization:

Community organization and volunteers can play an important role in reaching the working children and in providing them with better access to basic services. Preventive in approach, these organizations and volunteers can integrate training on family life, home management and clarification as values among parents and children.

Social Work intervention can be sought to develop innovative and relevant program strategies which take into account the relatives working children are confronted with. Formulation of policies and strategies which seek to transform structures that dehumanize the children and address the root causes of their problems can effectively be done by involving social work practitioners by large number of organisations and groups which are involved in rendering help to working children. There are differences in perceiving the nature of the problem and in setting project thrusts gives rise to problems in inter-agency collaboration and convergence of services. Thus, strategies need to be constantly reviewed and refined to come up with an integrated approach in responding not only to the immediate needs of individual children, but also and more importantly, to the basic causes of the problem of child workers.

SUGGESTIONS FOR REMEDIAL MEASURES

The problem of child labour both in organised and un-organised sectors is alarming. Millions of children are at work in various occupations and number is increasing with every passing day. Only prohibitive measures to suppress the practice will not yield desired results. Improvement in the economic conditions, organisation of better conditions of work, use of community based approaches, strengthening of social services network, a meaningful and vocation-oriented education, recreational facilities etc. together can prove to be fruitful in checking the menace of child labour since the problem is multi-dimensional, its solution cannot be found in isolation, some of the remedial measures can be as follows :

1. A non-formal system of education of an "earn and learn" scheme.
2. Minimum working hours to be fixed according to the nature of work and age of children employed.
3. Work-cum-training pattern of employment.
4. Safety measures to protect children from work hazards, accidents etc.
5. Surveillance and identification of 'at-risk' working children in the community can ensure the coverage of children at work. This surveillance should be carried out by primary health workers, with the help of community groups such as youth and women organizations.
6. Employers of children should join the community in its efforts to provide health care to those who are working in their establishments.
7. Backward districts in terms of overall development and improvement in the economic conditions of the marginal farmers and landless labourers in these districts should be identified. This will not only improve the situation of child workers in rural areas but also reduce the magnitude of child workers in urban areas.

8. An Integrated child development approach should be adopted for children entering into the labour force.
9. There is a great need to educate the employers as well as the public about the legal provisions made to protect the interests of children.
10. The existing laws relating to prohibition and regulation of employment of children should be consolidated into a single comprehensive code.
11. The existing law enforcement machinery should be strengthened at all levels.
12. Participation of community at all levels of programme formulation and implementation must be ensured.

Not only is the child labourer hopelessly underpaid and brutally exploited physically and morally, but is entirely deprived of all opportunities for education. In India, nearly the whole mass of unorganised industrial labour is illiterate, a state of affairs which is unknown in any other country of industrial importance. It is almost impossible to over-estimate the consequences of this disability in wages, in health, in productivity, in organisation and in several other directions. In this age of technocracy and highly mechanised industry, skilled labour and proper educational training are essential for efficiency. The high standard of working efficiency is attributable to the superior scientific and educational training of the worker. But in India this sound far-sighted policy is either not understood or deliberately ignored. The employer of unorganised sector is not concerned with the child or with national efficiency and vitality or with higher standard and quality of his products. For him human values have no worth, he refuses to recognise the principle that we can increase the efficiency of our workers not by making the child work during his most precious, formative and developmental period when instruction can most gainfully be imparted, but by keeping him out of the factories and giving him adequate opportunities for vocational training and schooling. It is the task of the Government to eradicate not merely the evils of child labour but child labour itself since it is economically unsound, psychologically disastrous, and physically as well as morally dangerous and harmful. The evil of premature labour and premature exploitation must be wiped out of India if the country is to survive as a strong, healthy, powerful nation. It does not require deep study to realise that child labour deprives children of educational opportunities, minimises their chances for vocational training, stunts their physical growth, hampers their intellectual development, and by forcing them into the army of unskilled labourers or blind-alley jobs condemn them to low wages all their lives, At the same time, it reacts adversely on adult labour since it reduces wages, increases adult unemployment and under-cuts adult labour. Moreover, the energy and vitality which should help the child attain his adulthood are used up in childhood, thus debarring the possibility of virile manhood. These facts are only too obvious and need no elaboration. In fact, India is only too painfully aware of the pathologic condition of her society, India has been made to feed and to grow fat on empty political chants such as "The children of to-day are the citizens of tomorrow. "The child is the father of the man," and "To-day's children are the nation-builders of to-morrow" etc. But what kind of citizens and nation builders are we going to produce out of this wreckage of the human body and mind in its early childhood? What is the outlook for the future? Can we even dare speak of the Rights of the Child when we do not even give the child the chance to live or to grow, but sap his very life-blood in his childhood? With such a gloomy and hideous picture of child labour and child exploitation in India can we hope to escape the consequences? Is it not time we grew up a little and discredited all the monstrous rhetorical fustian about the "Citizen of to-morrow" and got down to business to try and build a new from the wreckage of the sacred rights of the child? How shall we do it?

First of all, it is necessary to realise that the problem of child labour is not a problem in or by itself but is a part of the larger problem of child-welfare which is itself part of the still larger problem of social welfare. If our ultimate aim is the elimination of child labour, we would have to go deeper still into the economic problem of the elimination of poverty and starvation, Child labour is due to economic necessity. The family when it is unable to maintain itself above the starvation level, makes its children work for wage outside the home. On the other hand, the wily industrialist, always on the look-out for cheap labour, is only too ready to employ the child, while the public share the responsibility for child

labour in that it does not directly promote child labour, it has been, and still is, apathetic to the evil effects of employment of children. Since the parents of the child labourers are ignorant, illiterate and extremely poor or too over-burdened with debts even to dream of such a thing as the Rights of the Child, and can only think in terms of the child's earning capacity, however small, to supplement the family income, and since the employer is completely immune to all human values except where they concern their own personal profits, there seems to be no other course open than that of compulsion by legislation. It should then be the duty of the Government to use this legal compulsion to free the child from labour and provide him with educational and recreational facilities for the full enjoyment of the rights of childhood. The child should be the first concern of the State, and as such, should be given the greatest protection against detrimental influences of all kinds. The child needs opportunity for growth, not only physical, mental but social and spiritual through all the activities and experiences that rightly belong to childhood. Therefore, it is not enough to take the child out of the factory or out of employment and throw him back into the streets. Together with the elimination of child labour there should be legislation for compulsory, free, universal education and vocational as well as physical training and guidance and a programme of all-sided development of the child. If the Government takes up the movement to prevent child labour seriously, the programme should include the provision of a large number of schools, play-grounds, recreational facilities, insistence on compulsory attendance in schools and above all, eradication of poverty and unemployment of adults. As the problem of child labour is part of the larger problem of social welfare, broad policies of educational and economic reform dealing with adult as well as child welfare must be considered. The community and the public at large should demand such a reorganisation of social and industrial processes as would render child labour unnecessary and unprofitable.

The fundamental problem seems to be the problem of increasing the family income. If the majority of Indian families were not compelled to live at the poverty and starvation level, child labour would not be necessary. The most effective way, observed Paul Douglas, in which society can protect children is in providing their parents with sufficient income so that they can be brought up properly. It is a folly to expect wage-earners with unduly low income, to feed, clothe and rear their children in any adequate fashion. Give a family average intelligence and sufficient money and it will not only be able to take care of its children but it will gradually learn to do so. . . It is the most cruel form of unconscious hypocrisy for businessmen to pay insufficient wages to those of their employees, who are fathers of families, and then by contributing to child welfare agencies to feel that they have done their duty. The child caring agencies, for all their efforts, cannot remove more than a small fraction of the injury which the children suffer from poverty in their homes. The most pressing obligation is for industry to put its system of wage payment upon an adequate basis and, until this is done, social reform will swim against the tide.

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