

Implications of Child Labour in Rural Punjab: A Sociological Study

Baljeet Kaur, Shalini Sharma and Gaganpreet Kaur

Department of Economics and Sociology, Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana, Punjab

Abstract

Child labour is a complex and contentious issue. Millions of children work in outrageous and exploitative conditions that are clearly dangerous to them which affected their physical and psychological health. A lot of attention has been paid to child labour from the Government, social scientists, voluntary organizations, etc. The present study investigates the implications of child labour in rural Punjab. Multistage random sampling technique was used to select the 120 working children (60 farm and 60 off-farm) from eight villages of Punjab. The most notable positive implication was perceived role of child labour in the eradication of extreme poverty, reported by 80 per cent of farm workers and 86.67 per cent of off-farm workers. Among negative implications, the cycle of poverty was acknowledged by all the respondents. The findings showed the perception of respondent related to social emotional securities. Poverty of family (ranked I) and dark future (ranked II) were the insecurities reported by respondents. Emotional maturity was observed among 43 per cent of respondents and another 51.34 per cent of respondents felt social insecurity related to their future, financial condition of family etc. That is why, the present study suggested that NGOs should arrange awareness generation camps to make child labour aware of their rights and free and compulsory education, government should provide some financial aid at primary education level to curb the menace of child labour.

Keywords: Child labour, Emotional level, Social security and poverty

JEL Classification: J 13 , I 12 , I 25, I 32

Introduction

Child labour remains a pressing global issue with serious consequences for children, families, and society at large. It is widely believed that poverty is the primary cause of child labour, as many children are compelled to work due to economic hardship. However, research suggests that child labour perpetuates poverty rather than alleviating it, as it traps successive generations in a cycle of deprivation (Subramani and Govindharaj, 2024).

The United Nations (UN) defines child labour as “any activity that can hinder a child’s education or endanger his or her moral, social, or mental development.” Not all forms of work performed by children qualify as child labour; only exploitative labour that adversely affects their well-being falls under this category. The term “working child” is sometimes used synonymously with “employed child,” but a working child refers to one who chooses to labour, either for pay or unpaid, instead of attending school. According to the Operations Research Group (ORG) in India, a working child is defined as any child between the ages of 5 and 15 engaged in remunerative work, whether paid or unpaid,

within or outside the family (Goyal, 2018). 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 per cent of school-age children between 6 and 14 years are engaged in work participation. India has one of the highest rates of illiteracy. In addition to having one of the worst rates of school dropouts rate in the world. 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 (Goyal, 2011; Mukherjee, 2012).

The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act of 1986, amended in 2016, was enacted to prohibit child labour in specific occupations and regulate working conditions in others. Similarly, the International Labour Organization (ILO) defines child labour as “children leading adult lives prematurely, working long hours for low wages in conditions harmful to their health, safety, and development, often separated from their families and denied educational opportunities necessary for a better future.” According to ILO estimates, the number of children engaged in child labour increased to 160 million worldwide in 2020, reflecting a rise

of 8.4 million in four years. This figure includes 63 million girls and 97 million boys, accounting for almost one in ten children globally. In India, there were approximately 10 million bonded child labourers, as reported by the Bonded Labour Liberation Front (Das, 2022). However, the Indian government classified bonded child work as a negligible issue in 2015, citing only 3,000 reported cases. In Tamil Nadu alone, 125,000 bonded labourers were identified in 2015 (Barman and Barman, 2014).

The Global Childhood Report, 2019 highlighted the broader impact of child labour, reporting 4.4 million child deaths annually, 49 million cases of stunted growth, 115 million out-of-school children, 94 million child labourers, and 11 million child marriages. According to the 2011 Census, India had 255 million economically active children between 5 and 14 years old. ILO data indicates that India has the highest number of child labourers in the 5-17 age group, with 13.9 per cent of rural children and 4.7 per cent of urban children engaged in labour. Sector-wise, 70 per cent of child labourers are employed in agriculture, 20 per cent in services, and 10 per cent in industry (Kaur and Byard, 2021).

Over the past decade, various policy initiatives have been implemented to combat child labour in India. These include the adoption of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the establishment of a Task Force on Child Labour, and the introduction of a National Child Labour Policy. Additionally, several legislative measures have been enacted, such as the Children (Pledging of Labour) Act of 1933, the Factories Act of 1948 (prohibiting employment before age 14), the Mines Act of 1952, the Transport Workers Act of 1961, the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act of 2000, and the Right to Education Act. The National Child Labour Project (NCLP) was launched in 1985 to rehabilitate child labourers in highly affected districts. While India has made progress in addressing child labour, significant challenges remain in achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8.7, which aims to eradicate child labour by 2025 (Kaur and Gulati, 2022). The ILO has proposed several policies to assist governments in this effort (Indian Government Press Announcement, November 13, 2017). Despite these policies, still child labour is not completely eradicated from India.

The present study was conducted with following objectives to find out the implications of child labour on children and their families and to analyse the emotional and social security among child labourers

Data Sources and Methodology

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 districts 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 stalls, *dhabas*, grocery and vendors etc.). Using comprehensive interpretation and Table construction, a methodical data analysis was carried out tables for the data collected were prepared with the help of code designing. Data from the schedules were compiled into different tables and analyzed on the basis of different statistical tools such as frequency, percentages and Z-test. Further Range Method had been applied to study the sense of social security/insecurity and emotional maturity. The primary data collected pertained to the year 2023-24.

1. Emotional Maturity Scale (EMS)

The views of respondents regarding emotional maturity were studied by using a modified form of emotional maturity scale given by Singh and Bhargava, 1971. The responses ranked from very much, much, undecided, probably and never by giving score of 5,4,3,2,1 respectively. The responses were tabulated according to different statements representing emotional maturity of the respondents.

2. Security-Insecurity Scale (SIS)

Security/Insecurity Scale (SIS) was used to examine the security/insecurity degree of child labourers. This scale has been given by Shah Beena, 1989. The investigation led to modifications to the scale. There were 12 statements on the scale. Children's answers were gathered using a three-point grading system: always, sometimes, and never.

Results and Discussion

Socio-economic characteristics of the respondents

The socio-economic characteristics of the respondents include the gender, age, caste, education, religion and native place from which they belong had been discussed as under.

Age

According to Table 1 most of the respondents (38.5 %) were from the age group of 8-10 years. The farm respondents showed a higher proportion of 10-12 year old (33.3%) compared to off-farm child labour was 20 per cent. This suggests that as children grow older, they were increasingly involved in farm activities. It was observed that one fifth 20 per cent of respondents were belonged to the 8 years age group were from off farm sector. The comparison between farm and off farm indicated that half of the off-farm respondents were in the age group of 8-10 years as compared to 26.7 per cent farm respondents. Whereas 40.00per cent farm respondents were from 12-14 years age group as compared to 10 per cent

of off farm sector.

Education

The data in Table 1 show the distribution of respondents according to their education. There were 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%). This difference was due to the fact that children did farm labour with their parents after school hours whereas there was low scope of schooling in off farm child labourers. Thirty per cent of child labours were illiterate pointing towards serious social 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 per cent were from farm sector and 53.4 per cent from off farm.

Caste

The data presented in the Table 1 show the distribution of respondents across different castes. It was found that 65 per cent off farm child labours belonged to the scheduled castes and rest 35 per cent belonged to other backward castes. Caste wise not much distinction was found among farm and off farm categories.

Religion

The Table 1 revealed that Sikhism was followed by 70 per cent of the sampled population and they make up the majority of respondents in both the agricultural and off-farm sectors. In particular, 77.3 per cent of respondents from the off-farm sector and 66.6 per cent from the agriculture sector were identified as Sikhs. Hinduism was followed by up 19.16 per cent of the sampled labours and their share in the farm sector was (20%) slightly higher than in the off-farm sector (18.3 %), Muslims represent 10 per cent of the sample as a whole, with a somewhat larger percentage in the farm sector (11.7%) than in the off-farm sector (8.3%).

Native place

It was found that 65 per cent were from Punjab state, from which three fourth (76%) were off-farm labours. Further it was found that respondent from the other state mostly worked in the farm sector, i.e. 18.3 per cent were from UP and 25 per cent were from Bihar.

Implications of child labour on self

The results regarding the implications of child labour on self indicate significant negative and positive effects, ranked by prevalence (Table 2). The most notable positive implication was perceived role of child labour in the eradication of extreme poverty, reported by 80 per cent of farm workers and 86.67 per cent of off-farm workers. Among negative implications, the cycle of poverty was acknowledged by 100 per cent of farm workers and 96.67 per cent of off-farm

workers. Physical health risks and injuries were reported by 71.67 per cent of farm workers compared to 50 per cent of off-farm workers, marking a significant difference. Social isolation was noted by 65 per cent of farm workers and 75 per cent of off-farm workers.

Further it was observed that educational deprivation affected 43.34 per cent of farm workers and 56.67 per cent of off-farm workers. Drug use was reported by 35 per cent of farm workers and 56.67 per cent of off-farm workers, leading to a total of 45.84 per cent with a significant difference (Z-value 2.38*). Both groups reported under nutrition at 50 per cent, while lack of support and guidance was identified by 66.67 per cent of farm workers and 58.34 per cent of off-farm workers. Lastly, permanent disabilities were noted by only 3.34 per cent of farm workers. These findings highlight the multifaceted impacts of child labour emphasizing both the economic necessity it serves and the significant risks associated with it.

Implications of child labour on family

Implications of child labour on families highlight both positive and negative effects (Table 3). All the farm workers reported that child labour contributes to family income, while 91.67 per cent of off-farm workers agreed, resulting in a total of 95.84 per cent with a statistically significant difference (Z-value 2.28*). Additionally, both groups acknowledged that child labour helps avert starvation and hunger (cent per cent of farm workers and 96.6 per cent of off-farm workers). Similarly, food availability was noted by 83.33 per cent of farm workers and 86.67 per cent of off-farm workers. Furthermore, safety from social ills was recognized by 80 per cent of farm workers and 75 per cent of off-farm workers.

On the negative side, 81.67 per cent of farm workers reported that child labour perpetuates a vicious circle of poverty, compared to 68.34 per cent of off-farm workers.

Social security

Table 4 shows the perception of respondent related to social security. It was observed that farm respondent always worried about the poverty of family ranked I with mean score 2.42. They also reported that their future would be in dark if this ranked 2 with Mean score 2.37. In off farm category, respondents stated that their parents did not pay attention to their problems ranked I with mean score 2.67. and reported the job available on the recommendation ranked II with mean score 2.35. Both groups reported a fear of failure impacting their future planning (2.07 for farms, Rank VI, 2.3 for off-farms Rank III). Additionally, farm respondents feel their future is bleak (mean score of 2.37, Rank II), while off-farm respondents scored 2.13 (Rank III). Concerns about job acquisition through recommendations are prevalent in both groups, with scores of 2.12 (Rank IV) for farms and 2.35 (Rank II) for off-farms.

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

Particulars	Farm (n=60)	Off farm (n=60)	Total (N=120)
Gender			
Male	28 (46.6)	35 (58.3)	63 (52.5)
Female	25 (41.7)	32 (53.3)	57 (47.5)
Age (years)			
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)
Caste			
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)
Education			
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 (53.4)	68 (56.67)
Religion			
Hindu	12 (20.00)	11 (18.3)	23 (19.16)
Sikh	40 (66.6)	44 (77.3)	84 (70.00)
Muslim	7 (11.7)	5 (8.3)	12 (10.00)
Native place			
Punjab	35 (58.33)	46 (76.67)	81 (65.84)
Uttar Pradesh	10 (16.67)	5 (8.33)	15 (12.50)
Bihar	15 (25.00)	9 (15.00)	34 (28.34)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicates per cent to respective total

Table 2: Distribution of respondents according to their implications on self**(Multiple response)**

Implications of child labour self	Farm (n=60)	Off farm (n=60)	Total (N=120)	Z-Value
Negative Implications				
Social Isolation	39 (65.00)	45 (75.00)	84 (70.00)	-1.19 NS
Physical health risk and injuries	43 (71.67)	30 (50.00)	73 (60.84)	2.43 *
Education deprivation	45 (43.34)	34 (56.67)	79 (65.84)	2.11 *
Cycle of poverty	60 (100.00)	58 (96.67)	118 (98.34)	1.46 NS
Drug use	21 (35.00)	34 (56.67)	55 (45.84)	2.38*
Permanent disabilities	2 (3.34)	-	2 (1.67)	-
Under nutrition	30 (50.00)	30 (50.00)	60 (50.00)	0.00 NS
Lack of support and guidance	40 (66.67)	35 (58.34)	75 (62.5)	0.94 NS
Positive Implications				
Eradication of extreme poverty	48 (80.00)	52 (86.67)	100 (83.34)	-0.97 NS

*Note: Figures in the parentheses indicate per cent to respective total***Significant at 5% level of significance***Table 3: Distribution of respondents according to implications of child labour on family****(Multiple response)**

Implications of child labour on family	Farm (n=60)	Off farm (n=60)	Total (N=120)	Z-Value
Positive Implications				
Contribute to income	60 (100.00)	55 (91.67)	115 (95.84)	2.28*
Avert starvation and hunger	60 (100.00)	58 (96.67)	118 (98.34)	1.42 NS
Food availability	50 (83.33)	52 (86.67)	102 (85.00)	-0.53 NS
Safety from social ills	48 (80.00)	45 (75.00)	93 (77.50)	0.66 NS
Negative Implications				
Vicious circle of poverty	49 (81.67)	41 (68.34)	90 (75.00)	1.68*
Emotional strain	40 (66.67)	33 (55.00)	73 (60.84)	1.30 NS

*Note: Figures in the parentheses indicate per cent to respective total***Significant at 5% level of significance*

Table 4: Distribution of respondents according to their perceptions about social security**(Multiple response)**

Statement	Farm		Off farm	
	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank
Without doing any wrong, I am always afraid of getting scolding from employer/parents	2.1	VIII	2.13	IV
I am always worried about the poverty of family	2.42	I	1.95	V
I feel that my parents do not pay attention towards my problems	2.13	V	2.67	I
I feel that my parents give less attention to me as compared to other siblings	1.93	XI	2.09	VI
I am hopeful that my friends will help me in any problem	1.98	X	1.8	VIII
Due to fear of failure, I do not make any future plans	2.07	VI	2.3	III
Doubt of failure in any task motivates me to leave that task incomplete	2.02	VII	2.02	VI
I feel that due to tough competition, I will never get success in life	2.22	III	2.13	IV
I feel my future is dark	2.37	II	2.13	III
I feel that nowadays job is available only by recommendations	2.12	IV	2.35	II
I have to swear many times to prove myself right	2.0	IX	1.92	VII
I feel that I do not have any special quality	1.92	XII	2.12	V

The security levels of child labours were also seen. Table 5 reveals that a significant majority, 51.67 per cent, are in the “Little Secure” category, indicating a high level of insecurity among these children. This group is split between farm and off-farm categories, with 50 per cent and 53.34 per cent respectively. The “Somewhat Secure” category includes 43.34 per cent of the children, equally distributed between farm and off-farm respondents. This suggests moderate security levels for a substantial portion of the children. Only 5 per cent of the total are categorized as “Secure,” highlighting a minimal presence of high security among these child labourers.

Emotional maturity

Table 6 presents the emotional maturity levels of the respondents. The mean scores and rankings were analysed to assess their emotional maturity. A total of 12 statements were posed to the respondents to evaluate this aspect. Among farm child labourers, the statement “Tolerance towards others’ negative remarks” received the highest mean score of 3.65, ranking I. This was followed by “Feeling lonely”, which had a mean score of 3.45, ranking II, and “Starting a quarrel when somebody disagrees with you”, with a mean score of 3.07, ranking III. Conversely, among off-farm respondents, the statement “Starting a quarrel when somebody disagrees

Table 5: Social Security level of the child labour

Level	Farm (n=60)	Off farm (n=60)	Total (n=120)
Little Secure (0-12)	30 (50.00)	32 (53.34)	62 (51.67)
Somewhat Secure (13-24)	26 (43.34)	26 (43.34)	52 (43.34)
Secure (25-36)	4 (6.67)	2 (3.33)	6 (5.00)

Note: Figures in parentheses are per cent to respective total

Table 6: Distribution of respondents on basis of emotional maturity**(Multiple response)**

Statement	Farm		Off farm	
	Mean score	Rank	Mean score	Rank
Feel anxiety	2.75	VIII	2.45	XI
Took help of others to complete the work	2.17	XI	2.90	X
Stubborn behavior	3.05	IV	3.18	IV
Lost in imagination and daydreaming	3.0	V	3.4	VI
Feel inferior when failed to achieve goal	2.93	VI	3.11	V
Usually tease others	2.2	XII	3.52	II
Start quarreling when somebody disagree with you	3.07	III	3.57	I
Self-centred	2.45	VII	3.08	VIII
Feel lonely	3.47	II	3.42	III
Suffering from fear	2.35	X	1.75	XII
Tolerance about the others' negative remarks	3.65	I	2.93	X
Hesitation to take help of others in work	2.60	VIII	3.33	VII

Table 7: Emotional Maturity level of the child labour

Level	Farm (n=60)	Farm (n=60)	Total (N=120)
Little Mature (0-20)	20 (33.34)	13 (21.67)	33 (27.5)
Somewhat Mature (20-40)	17 (28.34)	18 (30.00)	35 (29.17)
Mature (40-60)	23 (38.34)	29 (48.34)	52 (43.34)

Note: Figures in parentheses indicates per cent to respective total

with you” had the highest mean score of 3.45, ranking I. This was followed by “Usually teasing others”, with a mean score of 3.52, ranking II, and “Feeling lonely”, which had a mean score of 3.42, ranking III. The lowest mean score was observed for the statement “Took help from others to complete a task”, which had a mean score of 2.90, ranking X.

Range method was used to measure the emotional maturity levels. It was observed that 27.5 per cent were categorized as having “Little Mature” levels, indicating a lower emotional development. In contrast, 29.17 per cent were “Somewhat Mature,” showing moderate emotional growth. Significant proportions, 43.34 per cent, were classified as “Mature,” suggesting a higher level of emotional maturity. The comparison highlights that off- farm respondents was found matured with 48.34 percentages as against 38.34 per cent of farm respondents. One third of farm respondents (33.33%) were found to be little mature as compared to 21.67 per cent of farm respondents. This suggests variability

in emotional development among child conditions or experiences on the farms.

Conclusions and Policy Implications

Child labourers had faced emotional and social insecurities, with limited support systems and bleak perceptions of their future. Off-farm child labourers exhibit slightly better emotional maturity levels compared to farm workers. Despite contributing to family income, child labour perpetuates the cycle of poverty and exposes children to physical, educational, and psychological risks. The study concludes that a comprehensive social development model focusing on compulsory education, health, and skill development is essential. Improved management of government schools and parental awareness about education's importance are critical for reducing child labour and ensuring children's holistic development. The following suggestions emerged from the study are given below:

- There is need to introduce the vocational training which can help them to earn their livelihood without relying on child labour.
- Raise awareness regarding the negative implication of child labour on children and their families through social media usage, TV campaigning and organizing camps especially in rural areas.
- There is also dire need to raise awareness among poor families about the free and compulsory education policies and throw light on the importance of education in person's life through campaigning and with the help of NGOs.
- NGOs should arrange awareness generation camps to make child labour aware of their rights.

References

- Barman B and Barman N 2014. A study on child work population in India. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* **19**:1-5. DOI:10.9790/0837-19210105 .
- Das K S 2022. Child Labour and its Determinants in India. *Children and Youth Services Review*, **138**: 106523. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2022.106523>.
- Goyal M 2011. Migration and child labour in agriculture -A study of Punjab. *Agriculture Economic Research Review* **24**: 429-36. DOI:10.22004/AG.ECON.119393 .
- Goyal A 2018. A study on status of child labor in India. *International Journal of Management IT and Engineering* **8**: 2249-58. DOI : 10.36893.IJMIE.2018.V8I4.489-499.
- International Labour Organization 2024. Statistical profile on gender equality in Southern Asia. Geneva (Switzerland). <https://ilostat.ilo.org>.
- Kaur N and Byard RW 2021. Prevalence and potential consequences of child labour in India and the possible impact of COVID-19 – a contemporary overview. *Medicine, Science and the Law*. **61**:208-14. doi:10.1177/0025802421993364 .
- Kaur N and Gulati S 2022. Role of Non-Governmental Organizations to Tackle Child Labour in India: A Review. *Journal of Social Science* **73**:1-7. <https://doi.org/10.31901/24566756.2022/73.1-3.2297>
- Mukherjee D 2012 .Child workers in India: An overview of macro dimensions. *Journal of Developing Societies* **28**:1-29. Online at <https://mpira.ub.uni-muenchen.de/35049/>.
- Shah Beena 1989 .Security - Insecurity Scale (SIS) ankur psychological agency. *International Journal of Indian Psychology* **7**: 2348-96 . DOI: 10.25215/0704.112 <http://www.ijip.in>.
- Singh Yashvir and M. Bhargava 2006. Emotional Maturity Scale (EMS) national psychological corporation *International Journal of Indian Psychology* **10**:1497-1504 .DOI:10.25215/1001.153.
- Subramani T and Govindharaj Y 2024. Child Labour in India and Sustainable Development Goals – An Assessment. *International Journal of Early Childhood Special Education*. **16**:110-18. <https://doi.org/10.48047/INTJECSE/V16I1.12>.

Received: November 29, 2024 Accepted: February 08, 2025