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*Corresponding Author:

Sadaf Nasir
Room No. 32, Sarojini Naidu Hall,
AMU, Aligarh, 202002
Contact no.: 09760144066
Email Id: sadaf.amu@gmail.com

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Hazardous Working Conditions of Child Labour in Lac Bangle Industry of Laad Bazaar (Hyderabad)

Sadaf Nasir* and Mohammad Swalehin

Research Scholar, Department of Sociology and Social Work,
Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh

INTRODUCTION:

Across the globe, to a lesser or greater degree, visible or invisible, admittedly or otherwise, child labour exists (Sekar and Mohammad, 2001: 1). Even today it is not confined to the Third World Countries. It is more or less prevalent everywhere in the world, the difference, if any is only of degree or kind. It is saddening to note that India is the largest employer of child labour in the world and has earned a dubious distinction of exploiting this human resource.

Every child has the right to grow up in a safe and nurturing environment with protection and guidance from their guardians. Whether in cities or in villages, at home or in schools, a child is always a child and deserves a childhood free from exploitation and abuse (www.unicef.org/india/child-protection-1726.htm). These children are unfortunate to forego their childhood and enter the workforce at an early age. Instead of being in school or at play, the young workers find themselves locked in drudgery. It is shocking that despite over five decades of Indian independence, child labour is still a harsh reality contrary to all proclamations in the Indian constitution (ILO, 1993: 17).

It is a famous proverb that "Health is Wealth". No one will be ready to exchange his or her health with infinite amount of wealth. The ILO definition of the worst forms of child labour includes work that is likely to jeopardise health and safety. The present paper aims to provide the plausible explanation of the impact of hazardous working conditions in lac bangles making process on children's health. In these industries, children work in hot, humid, in contaminated places with no ventilation. Constant exposure to flame, melting lac and dust damages their lungs and vision, which is a sign of widespread poverty and illiteracy. As a result these children are being exploited by the people who achieve their selfish ends.

A "Child" according to Article 24 of the Constitution of India and the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act of 1986 is a person below the age of fourteen years. The commonly accepted definition of a child in India is a person between 0 and 14 years of age (Sekar, 2003: 2). "Child labour" is, generally speaking, work for children that harms them or exploits them in some way (physically, mentally, morally, or by blocking access to education) (www.childlaborphotoproject.org/childlabor.html).

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN WORK AND LABOUR:

Work is a natural process: work ensures survival and to cease to work is to cease to live (George, 1990: 16). Work becomes labour when the individual's capacity to produce a surplus beyond the value of her means of existence is capitalised by the employers (George, 1990: 18).

The distinction between work and labour is to be found in a critical overview of the climate in which these processes operate and the quality of the relationships in operation. Historically, socio-political, scientific and technological developments have led to a radical transformation of work into labour (Mishra and Mishra, 2004: 15).

Not all work is bad for children. Some social scientists point out that some kinds of work may be completely unobjectionable except for one thing about the work that makes it exploitative (www.childlaborphotoproject.org/childlabor.html). Child labour is not child work. Child work can be beneficial and can enhance a child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development without interfering with schooling, recreation and rest. Helping parents in their household activities and business after school in their free time also contributes positively to the development of the child. When such work is truly part of the socialization process and a means of transmitting skills from parents to child, it is not child labour. Through such work children can increase their status as family members and citizens and gain confidence and self-esteem (www.hum-coolie.com/on-child-labour.htm).

According to UNICEF, It is very important to distinguish between work that is beneficial and work that is intolerable-and to recognize that much child work falls into the grey area between these two extremes therefore it believes that child labour is exploitative if it involves: full time work at too early an age; too many hours spent working; work that exerts undue physical, social or psychological stress; work and life on the streets in bad conditions; inadequate pay; too much responsibility; work that hamper access to education; work that undermines children's dignity and self-esteem, such as slavery or bonded labour and sexual exploitation; and work that is detrimental to full social and psychological development (Quoted in Shandilya and Khan, 2003: 10).

Child labour, however, is the opposite of child work. Child labour hampers the normal physical, intellectual, emotional, and moral development of a child. Children who are in the growing process can permanently distort or disable their bodies when they carry heavy loads or are forced to adopt unnatural positions at work for long hours. Children are less resistant to diseases and suffer more readily from chemical hazards and radiation than adults. UNICEFF classifies the hazards of child labour into three categories, namely (1) physical; (2) cognitive; (3) emotional, social and moral:

1. Physical Hazards

There are jobs that are hazardous in themselves and affect child immediately. They affect the overall health, coordination, strength, vision and hearing of children. Working in mines, quarries, construction sites, and carrying heavy loads are some of the activities that put children directly at risk physically.

2. Cognitive Hazards:

Education helps a child to develop cognitively, emotionally and socially, and needless to say, education is often gravely reduced by child labour. Cognitive development includes literacy, numeracy and the acquisition of knowledge necessary to normal life. Work may take so much of a child's time that it becomes impossible for them to attend school; even if they do attend, they may be too tired to be attentive and follow the lessons.

3. Emotional, Social and Moral Hazards:

There are jobs that may be jeopardizing a child's psychological and social growth more than physical growth. For example, a domestic job can involve relatively 'light' work. However, long hours of work, and the physical, psychological and sexual abuse to which the child domestic labourers are exposed make the work hazardous. According to a UNICEF survey, about 90 percent of employers of domestic workers in India preferred children of 12 to 15 years of age. This is mostly because they can be easily dominated and obliged to work for long hours and can be paid less than what would have to be paid to an adult worker. Moral hazards generally refer dangers arising for children in activities in which they are used for illegal activities, such as trafficking of drugs, the sex trade, and for the production of pornographic materials (www.hum-coolie.com/on-child-labour.htm).

MAGNITUDE OF CHILD LABOUR IN INDIA:

Asia records the highest concentration of child labour with 44.6 million children in the 10-14 age groups. Africa follows with 23.6 million child workers. Three countries in south Asia namely, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan record the largest numbers of child labourers in the world. India ranks first in the number of child labourers in the world (Sooryamoorthy, 1998: 1). As per the Census 2001, there are 12.66 million economically active children in the age group of 5-14 years in India.

Table 1: Different Estimates on the Magnitude of Child Labour in India

Data Sources	Year	Magnitude of child labour in India (in millions)
The National Census	1971	10.74
	1981	13.60
	1991	11.29
	2001	12.66
National Labour Organization	1975	15.10
National Sample Survey Organization	1996	23.17
	1987-8	17.60
	1993-4	13.13
Planning Commission	1999-2000	10.23
	1983	17.36
ORG Baroda	1983	44.00
The Commission on Labour Standards	1998	25.00

(Source: Quoted in John and Narayanan, 2006: 180).

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Child labour in India has increased from 10.74 million in 1971 to 13.60 million in 1981. It has slightly declined in 1981 to 11.29 million. However, it has increased to 12.66 million in 2001. Out of the 12.66 million children engaged in labour, approximately 5.78 million were identified as “main workers” who worked more than six calendar months per year. The other 6.88 million children were identified as “marginal workers” who worked less than six months per year (www.hihseed.org/pdf/FactSheet.pdf). Different estimates and magnitude of according to Indian Census have been shown in Table 1. Surveys and estimates on child labour by government and non-government organizations provide different figures: varying from 10.23 million to 44 million. Table 1 shows the magnitude of child labour in India, according to the Census as well as NSSO figures. It shows a declining trend since 1987-8. However, these figures cannot be a gross underestimation, given that official estimates define child labour in a very narrow manner and tend to exclude a large number of child workers performing work of a non-remunerative nature (John and Narayanan, 2006: 181).

CHILD LABOUR IN LAC BANGLES INDUSTRY OF LAAD BAZAAR (HYDERABAD):

Laad Bazaar is located in Hyderabad right next to the historic Charminar. Situated on one of the four main roads that shoot out from the Charminar, it is sited in a very old area of Hyderabad, the capital of Andhra Pradesh (<http://www.hyderabad.org.uk/excursions/laad-Bazaar.html>). Laad Bazaar is said to have been founded by Ladi Begum, the wife of Mir Mehboob Khan, the wife of Mir Mehboob Khan, the sixth Nizam of Hyderabad. In those days, it used to be a street where the concubines of the *Nizam* lived. The tiny upper storey apartments still seem to hide the romance of their past grandeur, behind their typical little wooden shutters. These apartments are at present being used as *karkhanas* (workshops).

Lac bangles are to be found in the Laad Bazaar, behind the Charminar, the 15th century landmark of the state capital, where there nestle many small shops. In the labyrinthine streets, families live in adjacent white-washed houses. Some have lived here ever since they left their homes in rural Andhra Pradesh decades ago and they still carry on their various craft traditions, including the making of bangles. The lac bangles are made at home and supplied to the shop so each shop has its own supply chain. All the family members make bangles, both men and women. The peak season for bangle sales is during the festivals Id, Diwali and so on. Right now, though, the production may be up to 300 bangles per day, but the sale is far less. But the sales won't ever be drastically low because of the two communities that loyally patronise the lac bangle market. For Marwaris, red and green lac bangles are a must for a *suhaagan*. And as for Muslims, well, they just love to wear them (<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/35728167.cms>).

Ironically, while artisans are reluctant to have their children learn the craft, child labour does persist in this industry. Children from neighbouring slums are engaged as trainees and paid only commuting fare (Sivakumar, 2007). Children sit on burlap mats, decorated the lac bangles with tiny glass beads. In their midst is a brazier. Hundreds of tiny, shining beads in many colours spill out across a griddle. Each child holds a pair of tweezers in her hands. She picks up one bead at a time and presses it firmly down onto the bangle with a swift motion of the thumb. The process takes up to three-quarters of an hour. Dozens of bangles can be made in an afternoon and are then taken to the shops. The workers are largely illiterate and have no retirement or old-age benefits. When in need of money, the traders loan them an amount and deduct it every week from their wages. This is a typical example of the unorganised sector (Sivakumar, 2007).

Child workers are involved in all steps of the production of small bangles with simple designs. There are many incidences of children burning their hands in the furnace while shaping the bangles or embedding the stones. Both women and children complained that sitting in one place throughout the day gives them backache. Further the need to concentrate their vision on the furnaces and stones causes eye pain and other problems and can take a heavy toll on eyesight (Pande, 2008).

IMPACT OF HAZARDOUS WORKING CONDITION ON CHILDREN'S HEALTH IN LAC BANGLES INDUSTRY OF LAAD BAZAAR:

The relationships between child labour and health are complex. They can be direct and indirect, static and dynamic, positive and negative, causal and spurious. Children engaged in work are exposed to a variety of hazards (e.g. dangerous machinery, falling objects, pesticides, chemicals, abusive employers) that have the potential to seriously damage their health. In addition to such health risks, the sheer exhaustion induced by physical labour can be expected to place stress on the body and provoke illness. Unhygienic living and working conditions combined with malnutrition makes them vulnerable to communicable diseases as compared to their non-working counterparts. Children become thin, weak, depressed, and unhealthy and the unsafe and unhygienic working places along with poor nutrition reduce their longevity by half (www.karmayog.org/library/libartdis.asp?r=152andlibid=249).

In the absence of running water or toilet facilities gastrointestinal diseases flourish and it is difficult to break the oral-faecial cycle. Providing facilities cost to employers mean that they might as well employ adult labour. Child labour is anyway often casual and poorly paid. Severe malnutrition, anaemia, hard labour, fatigue and inadequate sleep make children more susceptible to accidents. Given that the work may cause an accident, the first concern of the employer should a difficulty arise, is to

conceal the circumstances to make as little as possible of it and to come to a direct understanding with the family. The age under which the working children are more prone to accidents than the acts in the same work-situation is not clearly investigated so far.

Children at work are exposed to toxic substances. Ankylosis, spondylitis, and permanent spinal deformity have been attributed to abnormal postures, which the working children have to adapt while working. It calls for some studies to prove any interrelationship between the posture whilst working, young age of the worker, and number of years of the worker, and number of years of work and bone deformities later in life.

EFFECTS ON PSYCHO-SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT:

Being child labour has a profound adverse influence on the children's psychological development due to deprivation of leisure, play and recreation, which are absolutely essential for healthy psychological growth. It was found through the medical practitioners of the study area that the children who have restricted social interaction, long hours of daily work suffer the inevitable crippling affect on their emotional development. However, they suggested that there is a need for in-depth study on the psychological aspects of child labour, particularly of those children who work for a long hours, from a very early age. However the symptoms of back pain and pain in limbs amongst some of the children could be directly attributed to the posture of the children at work as well as to the long, continuous working period. Similarly the attributes of breathing difficulty and pain in chest could be related to the consistent and long-term exposure to dust in polishing units (Sekar, 200?).

The problem of child labour is deep seeded and deep rooted in our country including Lac Bangles Industry (Hyderabad) due to various reasons. Child labour is cause and consequence of exploitative system prevailing not only at the national level but also at the international level. There are several causes for continuation of child labour in India including Lac Bangles Industry (Hyderabad). But main causes are poor economic condition, traditional authority of father, inaccessible education system, forced bondage, general Indian attitude toward child labour, high fertility rate, lack of status of the child in the society, low level of adult and child literacy, lack of social security and cheapness of human labour. And at the same time the lack of vigilance of the society to see that all the laws enacted for betterment of the children are really enforced properly is not less responsible for continuation of child labour in India including Lac Bangles Industry (Hyderabad).

In the end we can say that prevalence of child labour in any form is a curse and at the same time it is a socio-economic evil. It is a problem as serious as one can think. It may destroy the whole country and civilization. It may block the future development of the world as a whole.

Children employed in large numbers in factories which still is a continuing process in spite of certain legislative laws regarding their age, hours of work, etc. not only in lac bangle industry of Laad Bazaar but also in different industries of the country. The paper concludes by advocating that NGOs, along with other civil society institutions, are in the forefront in creating awareness about compulsory primary education is an important policy measure for ending child labour. Education is by far the most potent means of enhancing human development both in terms of economic well-being as well as health of an individual and his family. Thus deprivation from education also reflects on the likelihood of improvement in other sectors of human development.

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