

# CHILD LABOUR IN LOW CLASS HOTELS AND RESTAURANTS

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## SUMMARY

A study was conducted in which 30 children ranging from 9 years to 17 years were studied, these children were working in low social class hotels and restaurants in the city. The aim of the study was to assess the social and emotional status and the working condition of these children. The data was collected by interview and personal observation of the authors. The data collected, suggested that these children were working in poor conditions with low wages. Their working hours were long with no leisure. There was no health or educational facilities. These children were growing up in an environment which was detrimental to physical and mental health of these individuals. Majority were forced to work due to poverty and were either the sole earner of their family or unemployed parents.

## INTRODUCTION

Child labour has been present since long. A child is exploited because he is a "slave" easy to handle and not much to pay for his efforts and work. This in most instances end up in worse forms of child exploitation. Child labour denies the child of his basic right of childhood delights and life. Our effort was to shed some light on this problem and bring awareness amongst the medical community.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

These children were interviewed with their consent and with the permission of their employers where it was thought to be necessary. The interview was conducted with the help of a questionnaire. Some of the data was furnished by the personal observation of the authors. The data was classified on the basis of age, wages, working hours, facilities available and different aspect of the socio-economic status of these children.

## RESULTS

All the working children were boys. Total number was 30. Their age ranged from 9 to 17 years. 5 (16.6%) were between 9 to 12 years of age and 25(83.3%) were between the ages of 12 to 17 years.

28(93.3%) had joined the job because of poverty and were either the sole earner for their family or helping their father to earn their family livelihood. Majority were sent to the job by their parents themselves. 2 boys (6.66%) had come to working on their own will, and did not keep any link with their families for personal reasons.

The family structure of these children showed that majority 26(86.66%) came from large families where average number of sibs per family were seven.

The parents of 27(90%) children were totally illiterate and lived below poverty line. 22(73.33%) had lost their fathers, who had either died, left their families, or were drug addicts. 18(60%) children had their homes in commutable distance from the

place of work, they were allowed to go home at night. 12(40%) were spending their nights at the place of work or paying for a sleeping place in nearby sarai (Inn). Majority were sleeping on the floor with inadequate bedding in all seasons. Where, the authors were allowed to see the facilities it was observed that the sleeping areas were unhygienic and dirty and not appropriate for children to sleep. There was no toilet or bathing facilities for the majority and on average boys bathed once in a month.

Older boys (age range 12 to 17 years) were working longer hours (10 to 13 hours daily), than those between 9 to 12 years of age who worked for 8 to 10 hours per day. The job was mainly physical and manual, involving different tasks like serving food, cleaning and washing, going to the market, carrying food to customers in different places. The nature of the job and especially its long working hours were stressful for these children.

20(66.6%) did not like their job but were obliged to stay due to socioeconomic and family pressure. 10(33.3%) did not complain but opted for better living 25(83.3%) believed that they should be working otherwise their family would suffer, and they did not feel any shame in working for a wage. Majority felt that this was little better than to beg on the streets.

The wages drawn were again slightly more for the older boys than the younger ones. The money earned including tips ranked from Rs. 300 to 1000 per months. 5(16.6%) were not paid any salary but worked for food for themselves and some food to carry home at night. All the boys were giving their salary to their parents. No recreational, educational or health facilities were available to these children. Majority 27(90%) were given Friday off.

3(10%) had been physically abused some time during the job and 2(6.6%) ridiculed. 25(83.3%) did not wish to be educated and thought education was useless.

5(16.6%) wanted to go to school. 13(43.3%) had been to school during some part of their lives, out of these 9 disliked schools and teachers.

A formal medical assessment was not carried out but majority of these children appeared healthy.

## DISCUSSION

United Nations recognizes a child as a person under 18, unless national laws recognize the age of maturity earlier.<sup>1</sup> The state is obliged to provide the child with adequate care when parents or those charged with that responsibility fails to do so.<sup>2</sup>

Child Labour or child bondage is enforced when (A) child is pledged in part payment of a debt. (B) Child recruited to work in plantations. (C) Children lured away from their families, kidnapped or confined in sweat shops or brothels. (D) Children compelled to work in conditions of exploitation eg domestic servants.

These children are slaves and slavery persists.<sup>3</sup> Exploitation of children, be it in forced child labour, child prostitution, child pornography, be it in factories sweat shops, brothels, private houses or elsewhere is one of the worst forms of forced labour. It must be fought energetically and punished severely.<sup>4</sup> It is apparent that child labour has existed from centuries and difficult to eradicate, one may put it down to poverty, world recession, human meanness or a slave who is easy to control and black mailed.

As this study shows that children were obliged to work because of poverty, they were either the sole bread earner of their family or help fathers to earn livelihood. Majority of the studies conducted in the developing world shows poverty as the main reason of childhood labour.<sup>5</sup> Child labour is not limited to the poor countries of the world but also is a part of the rich countries<sup>6</sup> where youths are employed in jobs which are hazardous and prohibited for their age.<sup>7</sup>

The trend to employ children world wide is mainly because they are easier to handle and work for much less pay than adults.<sup>8</sup> In poor countries these children are most of the times sole bread earner for their families and a point could be made justifying their employment but it has been observed the decent earning by children pave ways to bondage or slavery, exploitation, child prostitution, impairment of mental and physical development, beggary and denial of these children from their basic right of play and education. Different studies have also revealed that children employed in jobs which are fit for adults, suffer from ill health and majority are malnourished which in turn has adverse effect on the mental development of these children<sup>9</sup>

There has been laws and provisions for child labour which have remained very difficult to implement world wide especially in third world countries.<sup>10</sup> In our set up there can be no doubt that child labour should be condemned and laws enforced to stop this practice. However, we should have our own laws based on international laws but pertaining to our society.<sup>11</sup> As this study and number of other studies<sup>12</sup> have shown that in poverty stricken countries these children are working to survive, if this mean of income is taken away from them, they perhaps would turn up in the streets for beggary and, worse prostitution as the state has no means to look after their welfare. Children cannot voice their concern and it remains on the rest of the society to protect their rights. Unfortunately the legal setup and law enforcing agencies in poor countries are not mature enough to deal with this problem and ensure there children with their basic rights. Thus the problem remains and its magnitude on the increase. It is a difficult subject and a complicated and sensitive issue. However individual effort to at least

provide a decent living to these children remains the only solution.

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