Title:

Profile of child labourers in a rural area of West Bengal: A Cross sectional study.

Background:

Child labour in India is the practice where children are engaged in Economic activities. Poverty, lack of good school infrastructures and growth of informal economy are considered as the important causes of child labour in India. According to UNICEF India has the highest number of labourers in the world under 14 years of age.

Objective:

To describe the job pattern of Child labourers in a rural Block of West Bengal and to assess the socio-demographic characteristic of child labourers under study

Materials and Methods:

A Cross sectional Observational study was conducted in Paharhati Block in the district of Burdwan, West Bengal from December 2012 to February 2013 among children aged 5 to 14 years. Assuming 6.8% of the 5-14 years population engaged in child labour (9), the estimated study population would be about 2080. About 5% of this estimated study population i.e. 104 would be involved in the study. With design effect of 2, the number would be 208 and was selected through 30 cluster sampling and about 7 child labourers per cluster were gathered by 'Snowball' technique for data collection. predesigned pretested questionnaire used as study tool. Data was compiled and analyzed by SPSS 16.0 and presented in tables as proportions.

Results:

The study done on 210 participants revealed that Mean age of participants was 12 years. Male participants 72.4% and Female 27.6%.

Majority of participants belonged to Hindu community i.e 63.3% and 67.1% child labourers were from locality . 51.9% had primary education and rest were illiterate. 54.8% belonged to nuclear family and 63.3% from lower socioeconomic status. Mean duration of present working was 34 months and Mean duration of each shift was 8.23 hours mainly in afternoon session (66.7%) . 47.6% had addictions to different substances and 17.6% were engaged in regular Gambling. 40% participants were happy about their present situation of life and 60% were unhappy. 71% children belonged to illiterate mothers. Fathers were main earning member of family and 25.2% were farmers. 22.9% fathers were unemployed. Majority of children were engaged in agricultural works. Force by parents(47.65) was major cause of school dropout and poverty (43.85%) was main cause of working. Salary/wages were taken and spent by fathers in 58.6% cases and fathers mainly abused children(41%).

Conclusion:

 A good number of child labourers are in the hazardous and dangerous industries. Irrespective of the area educational level of the mothers, overcrowding in the family, poverty, presence of unemployed or addicted members in the family, religion etc. were noted with the problem working child. There is a need to protect the children, reduction in family size, and promote parental education and economic empowerment in order to reduce the urge on children to perform economic roles. Proper legislation , imposition of penalties can not only solve problems. Government, NGO s and common people should work jointly for permanent solution.