

COVID-19, Economic Shocks and Child Labour: Examining the Socioeconomic Determinants of Children's Labour Participation

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Abstract-

The problem of child work, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, has reached its worst point, leading to a surge in low-cost labour in the face of child trafficking and domestic exploitation. Particularly in many nations, the COVID-19 epidemic caused a complex dilemma that hindered access to school and increased child labour. According to the 2011 census report, there are 10.1 million working children in India between the ages of 5 and 14. The COVID-19 epidemic is currently having a major impact on the social, economic, and professional spheres. According to the research, 386 million children lived in extreme poverty in 2019, while 42–66 million children were recognised as being in poverty. Sadly, children from low-income households suffer greatly, which may lead them to engage in child work. It has been observed that there is a 0.7% increase in child labour for every 1% increase in poverty. The challenges of child labour and education during and after the COVID-19 pandemic are the main subject of this research. In order to prevent short-term shocks from having long-term effects on children's education, well-being, and future economic opportunities, the study emphasises the significance of income-support measures, employment protection, accessible education, social protection, and targeted interventions for economically vulnerable households.

Keywords- epidemic, domestic exploitation, dilemma, poverty, vulnerable

1. Introduction-

A child is the future of a state/mankind that needs protection from all socio-physical menaces for a child's proper growth. Children are therefore a priceless asset to our society, they are entitled to the development of their potential and dignity. They have the right to play with friends, eat, wear clean clothes, and grow up in a safe setting. Since child employment has harmed children the most in the current circumstances, the topic of child labour and its effects on developing economies during COVID-19 is important to discuss. The pandemic has affected people all throughout the world but Children suffer more as a result of the pandemic since many families lose loved ones and have less options for employment. Due to COVID-19, there would be an excess of child labour in South Asian nations like Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Pakistan.

When the World Health Organization (WHO) announced the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, governments everywhere responded in ways never seen before to stop the virus's spread. Governments responded to the WHO by enacting lockdown measures to varied degrees. Due to a dramatic decline in

nearly all economic activity, these actions unavoidably caused a shock to the global economy. Children's mental, physical, and nutritional health has been severely impacted by the pandemic. For the longest period, schools had been closing and ceasing to serve midday meals, which had a detrimental effect on children's health. Even with the introduction of online and distant learning, the dropout rate will continue to rise since low-income parents are unable to fund their children's education. UNICEF reports that over 1.5 billion children are not attending school as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Any work that is detrimental and exploitative to children during their formative years, detrimental to their growth and health, and causes them to drop out of school is considered child labour. The majority of child labour worldwide is reported to occur in lower socioeconomic nations. The number of child labourers had dropped to less than 100 million a few years ago, but the Covid-19 pandemic has ruined that goal. Globally, the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on society and the economy. The most recent reports state that 160 million children worldwide—nearly one in ten of all children—are involved in child labour.

COVID-19 and Economic Shocks

The biggest global economic crisis in over a century was brought on by the COVID-19 epidemic, which sent shockwaves across the entire economy. Inequality both inside and across nations sharply increased as a result of the crisis. In emerging nations, where income losses brought on by the epidemic exposed and exacerbated certain preexisting economic vulnerabilities, the economic effects of the pandemic were particularly severe. It became evident as the pandemic developed in 2020 that many businesses and households were unprepared to endure an economic shock of that magnitude and duration.

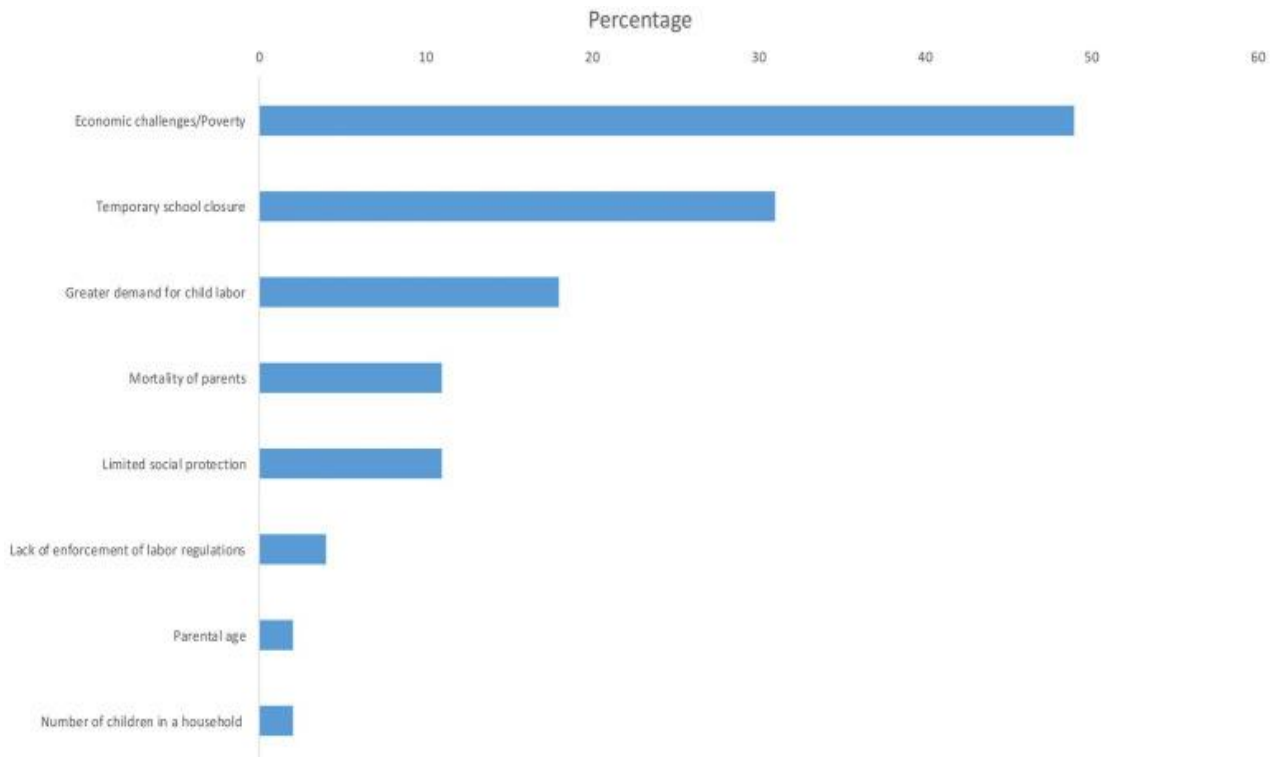
Global poverty and inequality were significantly impacted by the crisis. For the first time in a generation, poverty rose globally, and inequality both within and between nations sharply expanded as a result of disproportionate income losses among underprivileged groups. According to survey data, workers with only an elementary education experienced increased temporary unemployment in 70% of all nations in 2020. Young people, women, independent contractors, and casual workers with less formal education also experienced greater income losses. Because they were more likely to work in industries more impacted by lockdown and social distancing measures, women were disproportionately impacted by income and job losses.

COVID-19 and the Rise/Risk of Child Labour

Whenever a pandemic comes, it harms the vulnerable section the most, similarly COVID-19 caused the most harm to children, who are the most exploited one of the society and the impact was such that many developing countries have gone back several decades in their efforts to reduce child labour, due to this pandemic.

Risk factors associated with child labour during the COVID-19 pandemic:

A number of COVID-19-related variables were shown to be risk factors for child labour. Economic difficulties (49%), temporary school closures (31%), increased demand for child labour (18%), parent mortality (11%), and a lack of social support (11%) are the main risk variables found in the analysed research. Other factors include the number of children in a home (2%), parental age (2%), and the absence of enforcement of labour standards (4%) as shown in Figure (1)



Source- Journal: frontiers in public health

According to the examined literature, the main reason for the increase in child labour is the COVID-19 pandemic's economic effects. Furthermore, a number of primary research discovered that youngsters were forced to begin working in order to support their family due to poverty. According to a global survey, children from households that had lost more than half of their income were 1.3 times more likely than children from households that had not experienced a comparable loss of income to report being engaged in paid employment, or child labour. According to an Indian Research, about half of the youngsters were forced into child labour as a result of their families financial hardship brought on by the pandemic. Additionally, the pandemic's increased food poverty led to a rise in child labour.

A return to global progress in ending child labour is evident



Source- ILO and UNICEF

Between 2020 and 2024, the total number of children engaged in child labour decreased by over 22 million, while the number of children engaged in hazardous work decreased by an additional 25 million. Given the increase in the number of children engaged in child work throughout the previous four years, from 2016 to 2020, this development is quite encouraging. The number of children engaged in child employment has decreased to over 100 million since 2000 thanks to the decline in the last four years. During the same time period, the number of children between the ages of five and seventeen increased globally, which coincided with the decline.

2016 Global Estimate of Child & Forced Labor

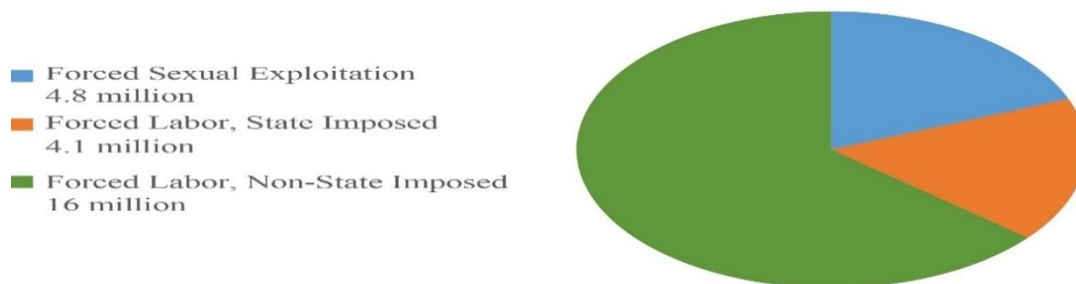
152 Million Children are Engaged in Child Labor

73 Million Children are Engaged in Hazardous Labor

Child Labor By Sector 5-17 Years



25 Million People are Engaged in Forced Labor



Sources
International Labor Organization & Walk Free Foundation (2017)
Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking
Bureau of International Labor Affairs
United States, Department of Labor

71%: Agriculture sector

17%: Employed as service staff and domestic helpers

12%: Industry sector and mines

The majority of World's Child Labour and their place of employment by ILO

According to an ILO study depicted in the accompanying graphic, 12% of juvenile labourers worldwide are engaged in dangerous and hazardous jobs in the mining or industrial sectors. However, a significant portion of child labour is used in the agricultural sector, which includes rice fields and cotton plantations. The remaining 17% work as domestic helpers, service personnel, and other workers.

Socioeconomic Determinants of Child Labour

The most significant and well-known supply-side factor influencing child labour is poverty. At both the micro and macro levels, poverty is a significant supply side influence. Numerous social issues plague society, and poverty is the root cause of all social evils. When we give it some thought, we find that the problem of child labour is caused by a variety of factors rather than just one. Gender inequality, poverty, adult illiteracy, large families, lack of education, low parental income, generational illiteracy, lack of motivation, lack of peer motivation, lack of appropriate guidance and future planning, lack of monitoring and evaluation of child protection, non-governmental organisations, etc. are some of these factors.

Policy Responses and child Protection

The analysed papers identified a number of strategies to prevent child labour during the COVID-19 epidemic. The most vulnerable youngsters must be identified and reached in order to reinforce these efforts. A multisectoral strategy to eradicating child labour across several sectors, including education, social protection, corporate practices, and child protection by governments, civil society, donors, and corporations, is required due to the complexity of the problem.

One essential component of the COVID-19 response was social protection. Governments were able to efficiently channel emergency and urgent support through the structures already in place. Considering the current financial limitations and several responsibilities, the reaction was praiseworthy. In addition to highlighting the challenges faced by the two billion informal economy workers and their families, women, carers, migrants, and others, the epidemic also exposed significant flaws in the social protection system. The critical role that social protection has played in an unprecedented global policy response, however, has been a significant advance.

Our non-governmental organisations are crucial in the fight against child labour and child bonded work. The reason for this is that while our government machinery has limitations in many areas, these non-governmental organisations (NGOs) like save the children, salaam baalak trust, world vision india, SOS children's village etc, have a stronger network and a more efficient work style because they are working at the root level. Additionally, because they are committed to solving these social issues, they have more opportunities to comprehend the issues and potential solutions. While our government had authority, it also had some moral constraints that occasionally presented challenges when handling such delicate and time-consuming issues. When we examine the items and activities carried out by some of these NGOs, this becomes evident.

The ILO's policy framework to respond to COVID-19:

Based on global norms, the International Labour Organization (ILO) has developed four policy pillars to address the COVID-19 pandemic. First, boost jobs and the economy. Second, encourage businesses, employment, and earnings. Third, safeguard employees at work. Fourth, look to social discourse for answers. The ILO urges governments, employers, and labour organisations to collaborate on effective measures to address the crisis's social, economic, and health aspects. Certain policy initiatives, like social protection, should be included in the advancement of policies in each of the four pillars.

UNICEF's agenda for action on COVID-19:

To keep a health crisis from turning into a child-rights disaster, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) advocates for international cooperation.

It promotes taking action to:

- Maintain children's health and nutrition
- Provide water, sanitation, and hygiene to children who are at risk.
- Continue teaching kids
- Assist families in meeting their requirements and providing for their children.
- Keep kids safe from abuse, exploitation, and violence
- Protect children who are refugees, migrants, and those impacted by conflict

2. Conclusion and Recommendations

Child labour is a problem that requires special attention since it has detrimental effects on public health. To address child labour challenges, a multidisciplinary approach is required. Certain cultural ideas justify this practice and promote child labour as a way for kids to develop their skills and character. Among the main reasons of child labour are socioeconomic inequality, inadequate governance, and poor execution of international accords. An attempt was made to assess the severity of the issue. In the meanwhile, this study has attempted to determine how the pandemic has affected financial crises.

- Given that COVID-19 has impacted these families ability to generate revenue, it is advised that the government offer some parental support in the form of material goods, both non-food and cash.
- Additionally, it is recommended that children be given options for ongoing education, particularly those who are likely to drop out of school and become child labourers. In order to prevent child labour, it is also advised to closely monitor children who are at danger of dropping out and involve them. In order to address the issues of food security, child protection, and child anti-trafficking, the government should collaborate with all the major stakeholders in the institutions.
- Since food security, child protection, and child anti-trafficking are major issues that children face, the government should work with all the important institutions to address these issues.
- Youth employment should be facilitated by the creation of job opportunities. In order to prevent child labour, those who are about to reach legal working age should be included in the targeted population.

The COVID-19 epidemic was a major factor in the reversal of global progress against child work, showing that when safety nets fail, economic shocks immediately turn children into household survival buffers. Institutional remedies must prioritise social safety, educational opportunities, and respectable adult employment over punitive measures alone in order to permanently overcome these setbacks. Our level of effort should now be such that we can even reach the last child in our society who is suffering from this inhumane behaviour in order to provide him with the bare minimum of what he needs to survive. We must promise not to use poverty as an excuse for this cruelty because it cannot be the only cause. We will undoubtedly witness favourable outcomes the day we shift our fixed mindset because the level of effort put out by governmental and non-governmental machinery is always the same. There is a certain amount

of irresponsibility in our way of thinking. Even if there has been a significant rise in child employment over the past 20 years, this could be the best opportunity to stop this social scourge at its source. There is no reason why we cannot protect our country's future from the web of child labour if we work together at all levels at the appropriate moment.

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