

Dimensions of Girl Child Labour as Domestic Help: An Analytical Study

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Abstract:

There are various dimensions that can be attributed to the girl child as domestic help. They are poverty stricken large families, low wages of the adults, unemployment, underemployment, migration, illiteracy and ignorance of parent's education, traditional attitudes, physical security, and cheap availability as domestic help, helping hand for the mother, secure employment and definite income. Apart from these dimensions we have also other variables behind the girl child labour as domestic help which are responsible for the existence of this abominable practice-misplaced priority, casual attitude towards education of girls, absence of social norms against girl child labour. Some other dimensions can specifically be attributed to the girl child labour as domestic help such as participation intensity and type of activities, relationship between child labour education and future earnings and the risk of a girl child's health and well-being.

"People crushed by law have no hopes but from power. If laws are their enemies, they will be enemies to law; and those who have much to hope and nothing to lose will always be dangerous, more or less." Edmund Burke

Introduction:

The Constitutional mandate is very clear from its various Articles. Article 14 and 16 enshrines the basic principles of equality and inhibition against discrimination. Article 39(e) requires the State to secure that health and strength of workers, men and women and children of tender age are not abused and that citizens are not forced by economic necessity to enter avocations unsuited to their age and strength. Article 14 obligates the State within the limits of its economic capacity and development; make effective provisions for securing the right to work, to education and to provide assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement and in other cases of undeserved want. Article 43(3) requires the State to endeavor to secure amongst other things full enjoyment of leisure and social and cultural opportunities.

Having discussed the Constitutional mandate the reality remains that even after 60 years of independence, child labour still exists with its various dimensions. All the instruments aim to bring these unfortunate children in the main stream by giving them same opportunities as had by other children are yet to become a reality and meaningful.

Even after various welfare schemes and legislative enactments, prohibiting employment of children, the problem still remains and without any effective solutions. This is the situation of child labour in the organized sector where the child is allowed to by law in certain working conditions, restricted working hours, a minimum wage and bonus. But about the unorganized sector of the child labour especially the girl child labour that is between the age group of 10-18 years of age and working as domestic help.

No doubt, elimination of the evil of child labour is a part of our commitment to the world community, but what we can do by depriving these unfortunate girls of their honest means of livelihood without having made any arrangements for them and their family's survival, rehabilitation and measures to improve their lives. Abrupt banning of girl child labour as domestic help will do no good to the image of the country. Complete eradication would call for more nuanced view of the contribution of the girl child to both family livelihood and income.

Objectives:

1. To identify the various dimensions of girl child labour as domestic help.
2. To analyze the dimensions identified of the girl child labour as domestic help.

Girl Child and Poverty Stricken Large Families:

Poverty stricken large families have low income which cannot afford two meals a day leave aside nourished food having nutritive value. They also think that more children mean extra income. Poverty stricken family is faced with bewildering questions as to whether they should send their children to school or work for increased income is essential for the survival of their family. Here the girl child goes very early for the domestic help while the boy child may be preferred to work in a factory.

The inadequate income of the parents is an interrelated dimension with unemployment, underemployment and low wages. The parents of the child desire a suitable life for their children but the harsh reality is they fail to arrange even the bare necessities for their children. Under these circumstances children are forced to search jobs in factories, hotels or anywhere they find and the parents allow them to work. In this way the girl child of the family easily drifts into the household work, either alone or with her mother as domestic help.

Parental Attitudes, Traditional Perception and Customs:

Being illiterate the parents are drawn by certain traditional perceptions and customs. They think work is a valuable art of growing and not allowing their child to work will drive her and family to worst condition and more dangerous work. The mother's traditional attitude about the girl child is that while helping economically her family she has the opportunity of acquiring skills in various type of work. This also paves way to self-reliance and self-sufficiency in this contemporary society. She also prepares herself as responsible to shoulder her future responsibilities after marriage. Similarly working with educated and cultured families she could learn about ethical principles such as adaptability, accepting responsibility, how to live and good house-keeping.

The perception that the employer is simply an extended "family" and his house a protected environment for the girl child, the increasing need for the women for the household to have a "replacement" at home and the illusion that domestic service gives the girl child an opportunity for practical education are the pull factors. The work of domestic help is usually considered as a part of girl's apprenticeship to adulthood. When a boy is born, it means insurance and when a daughter is born, she is an expense. Her place in the house is as good as a servant and she has limited opportunities.

Girl Child Labour as Domestic Help and Migration:

Migration as a dimension easily encourages the girl child in the work as domestic help. Natural disaster, armed conflict or simple economic opportunities in rural areas may push families to migrate to seek their livelihood elsewhere, either in their own country or even cross borders. Migration increases child's vulnerability. Migration separates children from their families as usual support, they may not speak the local language, and they may be from different ethnic group or nationality, exposing them to discriminate, denying them their identity which shall decrease their access to service. Hence it is proof of their economic helplessness and consequent apathy of the girl child who is an easy victim to work in houses as domestic helps and has no option, either to work on her own or with the mother at home as well as at the work place. They may be also called upon to fill gaps left in the labour market or to undertake household tasks that were previously the responsibility of the mother.

Girl Child Labour and Sustainable Development:

Sustainable development depends on educated, healthy and empowered children, since they are the only hope for the future. Lack of sensitization and creating public opinion regarding the families of girl child labour is a hindrance for sustainable development. Lack of special attention to vulnerability of girl child, exploitation of girl child will not help attain sustainable development. The practice of girl child labour is a critical chain that spreads illiteracy, suppression, spurs over population, intensifies discrimination and perpetuates poverty. The problem must be comprehensively addressed as an essential step towards equitable and sustainable development.

Increase in girl child labour as domestic help is linked to evidence that traditional thinking of families give way for only to boys when making decisions on education. Lack of enforcement of labour restrictions and consistence in anti-child labour legislations are reasons for upsurge and pervasiveness of the girl child labour and a step backward for sustainable development. Decay of public infrastructure and an increase in unemployment both in rural and urban areas are responsible factors for low sustainable development.

Girl Child Labour as Domestic Help and Social Security:

According to ILO, social protection covers not only security but also non-statutory schemes. It extends to income security, healthy, safety at work and environment, conditions of work and family issues, pension and retirement. In its very broadest sense, social protection can be taken to mean all the public actions taken in response to levels of vulnerability, risk and deprivation which are deemed socially unacceptable with in a given polity or society. Society protection aims to address current deprivation and vulnerability of poor people as well as the need of the currently non-poor for the security in the face of shocks and events beyond their control.

The girl child labour as domestic help are the part of informal economy and not covered by public provisions of social security. Being the art of informal sector employment and large unorganized sector it becomes difficult for them to unite because of their scattered nature of work place. It is a practical difficulty and also the distrust in the job provider which leads to their unwillingness or inability to pay any contribution which would benefit for their health care or other financial needs. The migrant nature of their families is also a hindrance to reach any social protection system and welfare because of loss of official identities.

Suggestive Conclusion

After identifying and evaluating the various dimensions of the girl child labour as domestic help it is strongly felt that efforts should be made to develop coherent and compressive approach to minimize girl child labour as domestic help. The mainstreaming of girl child labour as domestic help must be a concern for national policy and development framework. Opportunities for the development of knowledge tools, education, strengthening the capacities and resource mobilization should be made available. The issue of girl child labour as domestic help should be tackled not only at the social level but it must be a political commitment. It shall be advisable to initiate the process of community sensitization of girl child labour as domestic help. There is need to design and development an intervention plan to address the issue based on the various research and study in this field. The country vowing for a girl child labour Free State and a decent work agenda shall achieve sustainable development.

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