

Children Beyond Childhood in a Rural Community of India

Priyadarshini Purohit, Sanya Khanna

Abstract: Child labour is a significant issue in rural India, where lack of education, social norms, and poverty push children into premature work, depriving them of their rights and opportunities. For many young people, adolescence is marked not by opportunity but by challenges such as poverty, limited access to education, and the burden of premature responsibilities. Although for many children, the transition from infancy to adolescence is often shadowed by financial difficulties and early responsibility, it should be a period of learning, growth, and opportunity. While numerous provisions of the law and international treaties protect children's rights, millions of children still work in dangerous jobs that take away their fundamental rights to education, health care, and a good upbringing. This study examines the impact of child labour on the physical, mental, and educational well-being of children, using Bagru, Rajasthan, as a case study. Findings highlight safe working conditions, limited access to education, and poor healthcare. Effective policy interventions, improved educational infrastructure, and community support are essential to breaking this cycle and ensuring children's rights are upheld. At the same time, awareness projects should be established in conjunction with community-driven initiatives to create a lasting impact. A multi-pronged approach is necessary to protect children and secure their future.

Keywords: Child labour, Education, Child Rights, Rural India, Policy Interventions

Abbreviations:

CRC: Convention on the Rights of the Child

FLSA: Fair Labour Standards Act

NGOs: Non-Governmental Organizations

CMAM: Community-Based Management of Acute Malnutrition

FR: Fundamental Rights

DPSP: Directive Principles of State Policy

I. INTRODUCTION

"For many young people, adolescence is marked not by opportunity, but by challenges such as poverty, limited access to education, and the burden of premature responsibilities." Adolescence is a pivotal time in every young person's life; fast physical growth, emotional changes, and the evolution of social roles characterize it [1]. During this time, people undergo significant changes, including how they perceive themselves, their level of independence, and

their understanding of the world. However, this change does not affect everyone in the same way; it has different effects on each person. Individuals who lack a good education or are forced to work at a young age often struggle during adolescence. These problems have a significant impact on their emotional well-being, their ability to form friendships, and their earning potential [2].

Children who have family and friends who support them are less likely to experience difficulties at work. In contrast, those who come from low-income families or lack access to support are more likely to seek employment, which can compromise their health and educational outcomes. Teenagers from low-income families may need to work to help their families financially because they need the income. When families face financial difficulties, their children often must work to earn money to support themselves. They also tend to work in places with few social safety nets. This is why many children drop out of school and start working in hazardous jobs, which limits their long-term potential. Since financial issues are more important than personal growth, the transition from childhood to adolescence is often overlooked. A 2024 UNICEF report estimated that between 1.8 million (0.7% of children aged 5–17) and 3.3 million (1.3% of children) were engaged in child labour, depending on the definition used [3]. Teenagers are more likely to work as children if they live in single-parent or low-income homes, where financial struggles are everyday. If they do not receive enough support, they may assume adult responsibilities, such as earning money to cover the family's expenses. Teenagers can become stuck in a cycle where they are unable to attend school because they need to work, which limits their prospects and keeps them impoverished. Teenagers may feel pushed or expected to work instead of going to school in places where child labour is common or socially acceptable. In some impoverished or rural areas, there may be a scarcity of role models who have excelled academically, and children may not aspire to attend college as they mature. Children are also more likely to start working early if their town lacks sufficient resources, such as youth centres or programs, to support them in school. On the other hand, a helpful community can offer alternatives to work, like safe places to learn, get help, and have fun. Children can develop essential skills, build social networks, and establish a solid foundation for future success through school and extracurricular activities. Because of this, young children are more likely to become child labourers when they cannot get these chances, either because of money problems or social pressures. A significant reason why children work is that they lack access to quality education. Teenagers in impoverished areas may attend schools with too many students or not enough resources, and teachers who are not adequately trained, which

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lowers the quality of their education. Children may not want to stay in school when it is difficult to get to or when there is insufficient funding available. This is especially true if they can secure work immediately and earn a higher income. Many young people drop out of school and start working before they are ready because they do not value education. Activities outside of school can help keep teens safe by providing them with organised, positive ways to spend their time and energy. Teenage programs, such as sports, arts, and volunteer work, keep them busy and help them gain skills, confidence, and friends, which makes them less likely to want to work or be pushed into it. However, teens may be more likely to work as children if they do not have access to or cannot afford extracurricular activities. This is especially true if child labour is common in their neighbourhood. Teenagers are more likely to envision a future beyond working as children if they can access a good education and participate in enjoyable activities outside of school. Obtaining an education equips them with the skills necessary for better-paying jobs and helps them escape poverty [4]. Scholarships, job training, or flexible school hours for working students can help those who are about to drop out and provide them with an alternative to child labour, while still meeting their developmental needs. To prevent children from working, they must have access to educational opportunities and activities outside of school that keep them engaged and active. Policies such as free school meals, secure transportation, and vocational training can all help make education more accessible and valuable. These laws may alleviate the social and financial pressures that compel families to engage in child labour. The Census of India (2011) estimates that 10.1 million children aged 5–14 years were working [5]. Research by Ray (2000) suggests that poverty and a lack of parental knowledge are the primary contributing factors [6]. The same idea has been explored in Roy, Sumita & Akter (2017) [7]. Data from the National Sample Survey (2009–2010) primarily supports the fact that child labour is more common in rural areas with limited alternative livelihood options [8].

"Human rights are a guiding light that shows the way to equality, freedom, and dignity". Every individual has inherent dignity and worth. We acknowledge and respect human rights as a means of recognizing the intrinsic value of every individual. Since human rights are essential for both the present and the future, it is equally crucial that children learn about them. Children's rights are violated, and hence, their chances of success are diminished by factors such as being forced to work, being barred from attending school, and receiving insufficient medical care. Even though there are international and national laws against it, many children are abused and neglected because the laws are not enforced well enough, there are not enough resources, and there are social stresses on them. For this reason, it is essential to understand the unique problems that teenagers face and find ways to make sure that their rights are better protected. This paper aims to investigate the factors that affect children's progression beyond childhood, focusing on the impact of child labour, educational barriers, and socioeconomic pressures on adolescent development. The objectives of this research are:

A. To find out how child labour affects children's rights and

their ability to grow as individuals.

B. How does child labour affect the physical and psychological development of children?

II. DEFINING CHILD AND CHILDHOOD

Children are pure, full of commitment, and the future of human societies. Historically, the concept of childhood as a distinct stage of life is relatively recent. In pre-industrial societies, children were often seen as young adults with the same responsibilities as their parents. This was particularly true in farming or craft-based families (UNICEF, 2024). As factories and schools evolved, however, people began to view childhood as a unique period of growth that required care, guidance, and protection. This change was crucial for the development of modern ideas about childhood. Today, we see children as weak people who need safe places to grow mentally, emotionally, and physically. International agreements, such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), have a significant impact on how the law perceives children.

The CRC defines a child as anyone younger than 18 years old. This concept provides everyone with a starting point for advocating for the rights and safety of children worldwide. However, each country has its notion of what this means, with varying ideas about what it means to be an adult, the minimum age for employment, and when one can give consent. In contrast, Childhood is the period in a person's life from birth until they become an adult. During childhood, individuals progress through various stages of growth, including early childhood, middle childhood, and later childhood. It's a time for learning, playing, growing, and making friends. This is also the time when basic skills, habits, and values are formed. Childhood is also culturally created, which means that different societies have very different ideas about what it means to be mature, responsible, and educated. Childhood is often viewed as a safe time in many cultures, when children are free from worry and can explore, learn, and grow in a supportive environment. For example, in some countries, children as young as 14 can work under certain circumstances. In contrast, in others, the age limit is higher to demonstrate a commitment to keeping children in school for a longer period. These legal differences highlight the importance of setting in defining childhood, but they also reveal areas where problems can impact children's health. Not only are laws that describe childhood set in stone, but society also shapes how people think about it, so how different groups perceive childhood can vary significantly. In collectivist countries, children may be expected to take on more responsibilities at a younger age, such as helping with household chores or even managing the family business. These events are distinct from those in individualistic cultures, where childhood is often prolonged and freedom is gradually acquired. For example, in many African and Asian countries, children are usually raised by their extended family and even their neighbours. This illustrates the importance of community support. Western cultures, on the other hand, tend to place greater value on nuclear families, personal growth, and individual achievement. However, each country interprets and applies this



standard in its way, resulting in varying legal definitions of what constitutes a child and the rights that accompany being a child. One of the most debated and different age limits in the world is the minimum age for work.

Many countries have job age limits to prevent children from being forced to work for low wages, but the exact rules vary depending on the country's economy and customs. In the United States, the Fair Labour Standards Act (FLSA) says that the youngest person who can work is 14 years old for non-dangerous jobs. Minors under 16 are also limited in the number of hours they can work. Before age 18, you can't do dangerous work. There are some exceptions, though. For example, children as young as 12 can work in fields with their parents' permission, which highlights the importance of farming to rural economies. Children in Germany aren't allowed to work until they turn 15, but they can engage in light work, such as delivering newspapers, starting at the age of 13. Because Germany has a robust social support system, it has strict regulations that prevent young workers from being exploited. The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act of India says that kids younger than 14 can't work in dangerous jobs. However, kids aged 14 to 18 (referred to as "adolescents") can work in jobs that aren't considered hazardous. India has a significant number of child labourers, primarily in agriculture and the informal sector. This is because of cultural and economic reasons. The Statute of the Child and Adolescent in Brazil says that the youngest person who can work is 16 years old for regular jobs and 14 years old for training. But until you turn 18, you can't work in dangerous situations. Brazil's laws demonstrate that the country seeks to strike a balance between economic needs and the protection of children's rights. Strong welfare systems, law protections, and a social focus on long-term education can change the age limits for working, getting married, and being responsible for crimes in many developed countries. Strict labour rules in places like the U.S. and Germany are meant to stop exploitation and encourage kids to stay in school until they are teens. Developing Countries: In developing countries, economic, social, and cultural factors significantly influence how childhood is legally defined. Due to their tight labour markets, countries like India and Brazil permit teenagers to work in non-hazardous jobs. Child labour is more arduous to solve when there are few social welfare choices and children are poor. Childhood is a socially constructed concept, meaning that different cultures have varying notions about what it entails and how it is experienced. Some cultures see children as interdependent family or community members with specific roles, while others stress the importance of fostering each child's individuality and freedom.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international programs are significant for fighting for children's rights and making sure that all children have access to education, health care, safety, and the things they need for a healthy childhood.

The Organizations Save the Children and UNICEF make efforts to protect, and improve children's lives and promote welfare. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) is a prominent international organisation that aims to safeguard children. UNICEF was founded in 1946, and it is an agency of the United Nations. It has worked in over 190 countries to protect children from exploitation and provide them with

access to education, healthcare, safe drinking water, and adequate nutrition. UNICEF also works closely with national governments to make and implement laws that protect children. In countries with low incomes, where access to education remains a struggle, the United Nations Children's Fund is committed to expanding educational opportunities in every possible corner. UNICEF is working to eliminate the issues related to child marriage, child abuse, and sanitation facilities.

UNICEF also actively works on issues related to children's health. Children can avoid diseases such as polio, measles, and diphtheria through vaccinations provided by the Immunisation Program, which are sometimes conducted in remote and underdeveloped locations. It also provides children with essential nutrients, promotes breastfeeding, and educates communities about the importance of a balanced diet. Its Community-Based Management of Acute Malnutrition (CMAM) program trains medical professionals on how to identify and treat hungry children, thereby reducing the fatality rate.

III. CHILD RIGHTS

"Child rights" refers to the rights to ensure each child's complete development and welfare. Child labour, or the exploitation of children for work that compromises their development, health, and education, is still a problem on a global scale. Children lose their youth and face the risk of social, psychological, and physical harm. Every child has an inherent right and freedom to enjoy certain freedoms and rights simply because they are children. These rights aim to give every child the resources they need to live safely. The health factors that determine a child's well-being encompass mental, physical, and social aspects. Child rights include life, health, education, and nourishment. The children will have the opportunity to receive a primary education, and they must also have access to medical care facilities and clean water. Since child exploitation and abuse are forms of violence, we must put an end to them. Nelson Mandela remarked, "The strongest indicator of a society's soul is how it treats its children". Reflecting on this statement, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) established a framework for everyone to uphold the inherent rights of children. According to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted in 1989, every child deserves a safe, healthy, and nurturing environment in which to grow, regardless of their nationality, colour, or circumstances. Despite the universal recognition of the CRC, ensuring that every child has these rights remains a challenge. This is a result of disparities in income, customs, and complex political circumstances. Child rights are frequently divided into four main groups: participation, protection, development, and survival. First, the essential need for life and health is emphasised by the right to survive. Every kid is entitled to a suitable level of living, which includes shelter, healthcare, wholesome food, and clean water. The CRC aims to establish a foundation for children's physical and mental development by addressing these needs [9].

Weak Legal and Institutional Frameworks: In countries with unstable legal systems, even fundamental child protection



legislation may be challenging to implement. Corruption, a lack of resources, and bureaucratic inefficiency frequently jeopardise child welfare initiatives. Marcus Aurelius reportedly said, "The soul becomes dyed with the colour of its thoughts," implying that society's goals influence its ideals. In many instances, prioritising child welfare requires a substantial shift in government priorities and budget allocation.

Cultural and Traditional Practices: "Tradition is not the worship of ashes, but the preservation of fire," wrote Gustav Mahler. However, certain cultural traditions, such as child marriage or corporal punishment, can be incompatible with CRC values. While cultural traditions are important, they must evolve to prioritise children's well-being, retaining their cultural identity while not encroaching on children's rights. Children are particularly susceptible in war-torn areas. Refugee children are frequently separated, exploited, and traumatized, with inadequate access to school and healthcare. As former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan famously said, "There is no more sacred trust than the one the world has with children." No duty is more vital than ensuring that their rights are upheld." Maintaining children's rights in conflict zones requires international cooperation, humanitarian assistance, and specialised protective systems.

As Victor Hugo famously noted, "There is nothing more powerful than an idea whose time has come." The moment for universal child rights has arrived; it is our shared responsibility to protect these values so that every child may lead a life of dignity, freedom, and happiness. Child rights are universally applicable regardless of gender, race, caste, or social status. They are essential for safeguarding them from harm and enabling them to reach their full potential. After independence, many constitutional rules and legislative enactments were enacted and amended to mitigate the severity of child labour problems. The Indian Constitution empowers the legislature with special laws to protect children's rights. The legislation was critical in combating dangerous child labour. The Indian Constitution includes provisions for children, which the state is obligated to uphold and protect. The Fundamental Rights (FR), Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP), and Fundamental Duties in the Indian Constitution ensure the protection, education, and well-being of children. Article 14 guarantees equality for children, safeguarding them from discrimination, while Article 15(3) allows the state to create child-specific laws. Article 21 ensures no one is deprived of life or freedom except by law, with the Supreme Court interpreting "life" to include dignity and protection from abuse. Article 21A mandates free and compulsory education for children aged six to fourteen, with employers responsible for educating child labourers where work is permitted. Article 23 prohibits human trafficking, begging, and bonded labour. In contrast, Article 24 prohibits the employment of children under 14 in hazardous industries, underscoring the need for proactive measures to enhance their quality of life. Under the DPSP, Article 39(e) protects children from exploitation due to economic necessity, and Article 39(f) ensures equal opportunities for development in an environment of freedom, dignity, and equality. Article 45 directs the state to provide care and education for children up to the age of six. Furthermore, Article 51A(e) under Fundamental Duties holds

parents responsible for ensuring their children receive education. These laws and provisions are essential for the well-being of the children in India. Giving them access to education and protecting them from exploitation can lead children to a healthy and dignified life. The well-being of children is crucial, as it plays a significant role in their development and future contributions to society. Hence, upholding all these rights is a prerequisite to nurturing their physical, moral, and social development.

IV. IMPACT OF CHILD LABOUR ON CHILD RIGHTS: CASE STUDY

Child labour is still a big problem for children's rights around the world, especially in places where children have to work early because they can't afford school or get to school on time. One in every ten children is a victim of child labour [10]. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) clearly states that children have the right to be protected from work that could harm their health, education, or development. However, these rights are often stripped away in India and many other parts of the world. Rajasthan is known for its rich history and cultural heritage, yet it has a significant problem with child labour. It ranks among the top 3 states for child labour [11]. This is especially true in fields like mining, farming, and traditional crafts. This case study looks at the lives of children who work in Rajasthan. It examines how their jobs impact their physical, mental, and intellectual development, as well as the social and economic factors that lead children to work in this area. Many of the CRC's rights are fundamentally violated by child labour. These include the right to education, the right to be safe from dangerous work, and the right to play and grow. Children who are pushed to work often lack access to a safe place to live and the opportunity to learn and play with other kids, which are essential for their overall development. Children can be put in dangerous situations at work that require a lot of work, which can be bad for their health and well-being. For example, children who work in stone mines in Rajasthan are exposed to silica dust, which can cause respiratory problems. Children who work on farms often have to work long hours in adverse weather conditions. These kinds of places not only hurt their health, but they also take away the fun and freedom that make youth what it is. Additionally, child labour affects the progress of children's schooling. Children who work often don't attend school, so they miss out on the opportunity to acquire skills that could help them escape poverty. The fact that these kids don't go to school keeps them stuck in low-paying, exploitative work for generations. Children's rights violations affect not only the children involved but also society, since children who are not taught or protected are less likely to grow up to be useful, responsible adults.

Many social and economic factors in Rajasthan make it hard for families to protect their children's rights, which leads to a lot of child labour. Children from marginalised groups, such as low-caste Hindus, members of tribal communities, or religious minorities, are often forced into labour [12]. Poverty is still one of the main reasons why kids work. Many families in rural Rajasthan rely on seasonal, low-paying jobs in crafts, gardening, or mining,



which provide them with limited financial security. When adult

family members are sick or out of work, children often have to help with household finances so that everyone can stay afloat. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that many parts of Rajasthan lack access to quality schools. Schools in rural areas often lack sufficient resources, such as adequate teachers or well-maintained facilities, and a significant number of students drop out [13]. Without easy access to fun and engaging learning options, children are more likely to drop out of school and enter the workforce. Many times, parents think that work is a better choice than an education that may not pay off immediately or reliably. This is especially true in places where poverty, passed down from generation to generation, has led to low standards and few goals, with education seen as a luxury rather than a necessity.

Things like culture also come into play. In some places, there is a long-standing practice of allowing children to work alongside adults and learn trades from a young age. In the past, these customs were designed to teach skills in a safe, family-centred environment. However, due to today's economic pressures, they have evolved into exploitative practices. In the gemstone business, for example, family-run companies that were once small are now larger and use child labour to meet demand and keep costs down.

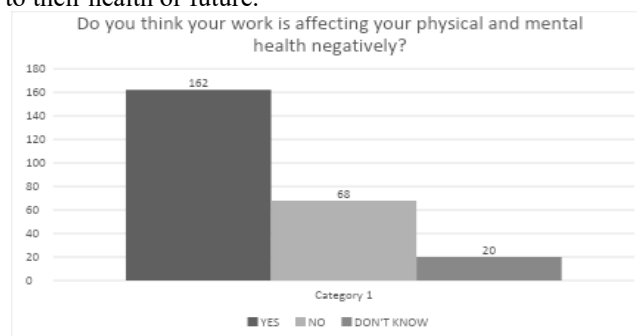
The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) establishes guidelines for safeguarding children's rights to healthcare, education, and a safe, caring environment. These rights are directly violated by the fact that children who work in the hand-block printing business often have to deal with dangerous working conditions and miss out on the chance to have a carefree childhood. Hand block printing is physically demanding because it requires standing for extended periods, repeating the same tasks repeatedly, and exposure to chemicals used in dyes and inks. This kind of work is not only detrimental to their physical well-being, but it's also taxing on their mental health, which can hinder their overall health and development.

This research aims to fill a knowledge vacuum by investigating the economic and social variables that lead to the exploitation of children in Bagru, Jaipur, and the harm it does to their physical and mental health. Policymakers can utilize the results to better understand the causes of child work and how to protect children from its harmful effects. Pervasive poverty, limited educational opportunities, and inadequate healthcare services are common in rural communities of India like Bagru. Due to these difficulties, families often rely on their children's income to cover basic needs. Musculoskeletal illnesses from long hours on the job, respiratory troubles from toxic substances, and malnutrition from poor diets are some of the consequences of child labour that this study investigates.

It will take a comprehensive strategy to end the use of child labour. To put an end to child exploitation and guarantee children can live long, healthy lives, it is vital to implement thorough measures that improve healthcare and education, in addition to strong legal frameworks. Protecting and promoting the rights and development of children in vulnerable areas requires an understanding of and action regarding the socio-economic factors that contribute to child labour.

Bagru, a town renowned for its magnificent hand-block printing—a skill that has been ingrained in the fabric of

society for millennia—is situated at the geographic centre of Rajasthan. About 32 kilometres from Jaipur, Bagru's vibrant designs and natural dyes have garnered praise from around the world for their reflection of a rich cultural heritage. But underlying this rainbow of hues is a harsh reality: child labour is an endemic problem. We analyse the socioeconomic landscape to better understand the factors that drive children—often as young as eight—into labour in the hand-block printing sector. Though Bagru's textiles are much sought after worldwide, the town has witnessed no improvement in infrastructure, economic growth, or living standards. Families struggling with poverty and restricted access to healthcare and education depend on their children's income to cover basic requirements, so this stagnation keeps a cycle alive. Although artistically significant, the hand-block printing technique is labour-intensive and exposes young people to different health risks. Extended working hours might cause musculoskeletal problems; continual dying and chemical exposure raise respiratory hazards. Furthermore, the demanding nature of the task sometimes leads to malnutrition, as youngsters miss out on adequate food and rest. We have used a well-crafted questionnaire aimed at youngsters involved in the hand-block printing industry to compile thorough data. This instrument evaluated their health, working conditions, educational level, and mental state. To ensure a reasonable understanding of the child labour dynamics in Bagru, a sample size of 250 children was selected. Dealing with child labour in Bagru calls for a long-term action plan. Critical first steps in ending this loop include improving healthcare services, upgrading educational facilities, and implementing robust legal systems. By focusing on these areas, we aim to develop targeted interventions that not only reduce the prevalence of child labour but also enhance the overall well-being of children in engagement. This paper emphasizes the need to see child rights through the prism of society's views and behavior. We clarify the current situation of children's rights and the potential of socio-political projects to effect significant change by highlighting the real obstacles within society and exploring means of overcoming them. In essence, Bagru's hand-block printing business serves as a focal point for examining the intricate relationship between cultural heritage and child labour, while also providing evidence of India's rich artisanal traditions. Through this study, we aim to contribute to shaping policies that safeguard children's rights and create conditions that enable them to flourish, free from compromise to their health or future.



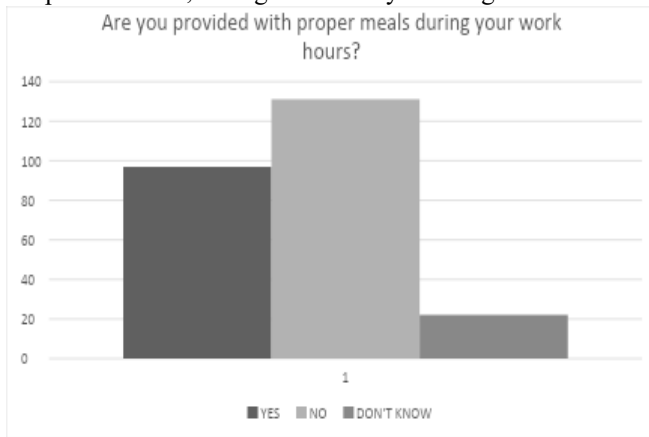
[Fig.1: 162 Out of 250 Individuals Surveyed Hurt Their Health]

Source: The chart was created According to the author, based on the survey conducted.



Children Beyond Childhood in a Rural Community of India

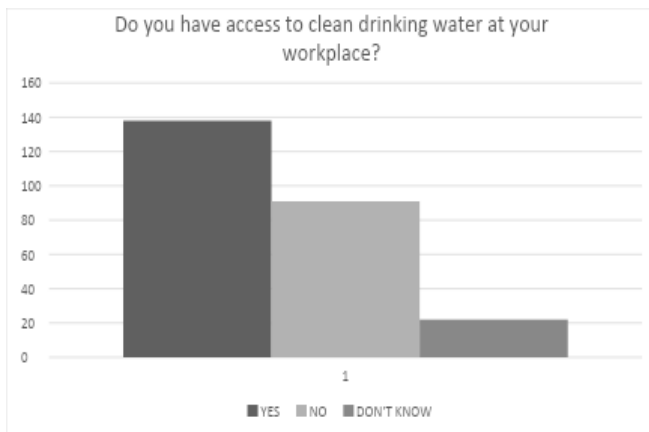
A majority (64.8%) of the children feel that their work negatively affects their health, while 8.0% are uncertain. The others believe it is part of their family history; hence, they cooperate with it, seeing their family working there.



[Fig. 2: 97 out of 250 Individuals Surveyed Are Provided with Meals at Their Workplace]

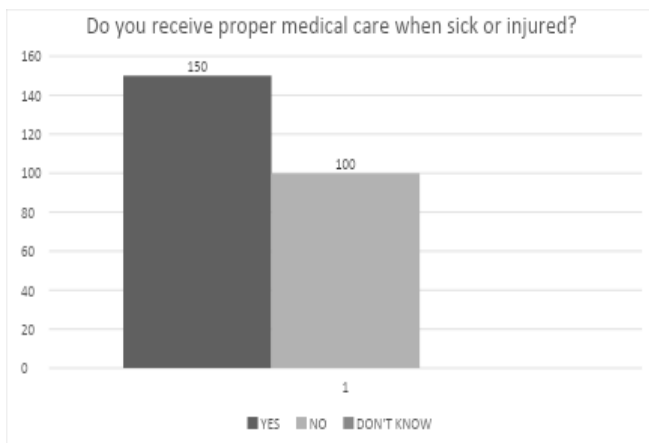
Source: The chart is created by the author based on the survey conducted.

About 52.4% of the children do not receive proper meals during work hours, while 8.0% are unsure.



[Fig. 3: 138 out of 250 Individuals Surveyed Are Provided with Clean Drinking Water at the Workplace]

Source: The chart is created by the author based on the survey conducted.

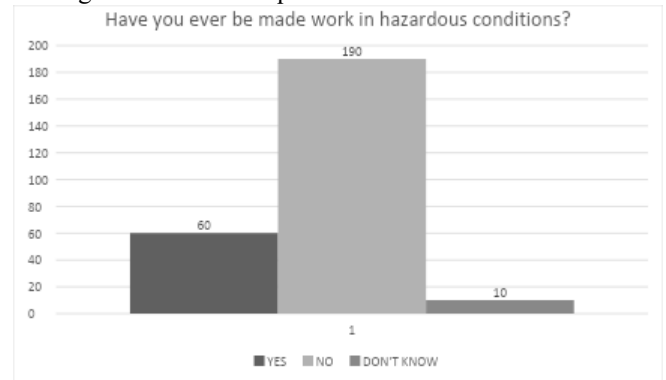


[Fig.4: 150 out of 250 Children Receive Adequate Medical Care When Sick or Injured]

Source: The chart is created by the author based on the survey conducted.

survey conducted.

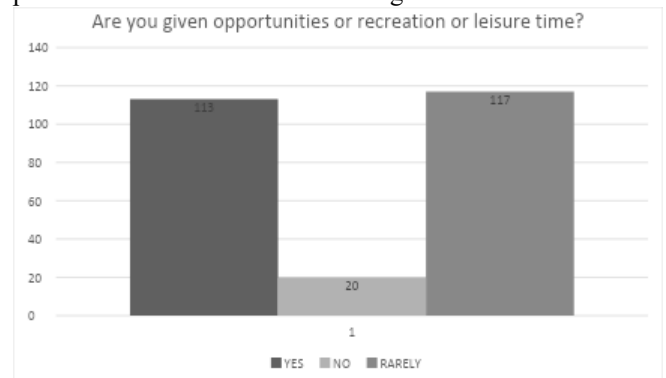
Only 150 children received proper medical care when ill, leaving 100 without adequate medical attention.



[Fig.5: 60 out of 250 Individuals Surveyed Work in Hazardous Conditions]

Source: The chart is created by the author based on the survey conducted.

Sixty children reported that they had been working in hazardous conditions without any safety equipment. It highlights the injury and risk associated with their workplace. The 25 children suffered physical abuse at their workplace. It states the grim reality of their workplace conditions. The hazardous working conditions in the factories can also lead to poor mental health and stress among children.



[Fig.6: 113 out of 250 Individuals Surveyed Get the Opportunity for Leisure Time at Work, while 117 Children Get the Chance Rarely]

Source: The chart is created by the author based on the survey conducted.

The survey results show that out of 250 individuals, 113 (45.2%) answered 'yes', indicating they have access to leisure time, 20 (8%) answered 'no', meaning they do not receive any leisure time, and 117 (46.8%) answered 'rarely', signifying they receive limited recreation opportunities. This suggests that while some individuals have access to leisure time at work, a significant portion only experiences it rarely, highlighting a potential concern regarding the availability of recreational opportunities in specific environments.

V. CONCLUSION

Child labour is still one of India's most serious human rights violations, particularly in rural areas where children are forced to work owing to poverty, a lack of education, and cultural



traditions. Millions of children still work in dangerous jobs, therefore depriving them of their fundamental right to education, health, and a decent upbringing, despite many constitutional clauses and international treaties supporting children's rights. Although for many Indian youngsters, the transition from infancy to adolescence is often clouded by financial hardships and early responsibilities, it should be a period of learning, progress, and opportunity. Through Articles 14, 15(3), 21, 21A, 23, and 24, the Indian Constitution ensures the equality, protection, and education of children. Furthermore, underlined by Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) Articles 39(e), 39(f), and 45 is the state's obligation to protect children from exploitation. Although these legal clauses exist on paper, their actual application remains erratic. Weak law enforcement, social acceptance of child labour, and economic hardship all help to deny many children—especially in rural and economically poor areas—their rights. One major contributing cause of child labour is poverty. Many times, families trying to cover their necessities depend on their children to help with housekeeping or income generation. Under these circumstances, children are forced to labour in hazardous environments, such as manufacturing, mining, and agriculture, which negatively impacts their education. Furthermore, discouraging students from completing their education is often due to a lack of appropriate infrastructure for education, including insufficient teachers, learning materials, and safe transportation. This sets a vicious loop whereby ignorance results in ongoing poverty and forces the next generations into the same exploitative conditions. Ignorance about children's rights is another significant factor. Growing access to education is one of the most effective ways to prevent children from working, as it equips them with the skills and knowledge they need for better job opportunities in the future. Families should be encouraged to prioritise education over child labour by strengthening the application of this law, enhancing school facilities and teacher training, and guaranteeing financial incentives such as scholarships and free school meals (UNICEF, 2024). Children from underprivileged backgrounds—especially those from migrant families or part-time working families—can benefit even more from flexible learning initiatives, including mobile education units and nighttime schools. Apart from education, addressing the problem largely depends on strengthening child labour laws and their practical implementation. Particularly in industries where child labour is common—such as agriculture, mining, and domestic work—regular workplace inspections can assist in finding and saving children engaging in dangerous work [14]. One way to discourage companies that mistreat children and guarantee rigorous legal action against offenders is by raising fines for them. Moreover, rescued child workers need appropriate rehabilitation covering psychological assistance, vocational training, and reintegration into regular education. Additionally, successful in tackling local child labour have been community involvement and grassroots-level measures. While community-driven projects can provide support systems that reduce the economic incentive for child labour, awareness campaigns help change societal views [15]. India can make significant progress toward eradicating child labour and ensuring a brighter future for its children by combining

legislative actions, educational opportunities, and community-driven initiatives. Particularly in rural areas, many communities see child labour as a need rather than a transgression. Further exacerbating this problem are cultural customs that expect young children to help their families. Education is less enticing for children and their families to prioritize over immediate income from labor when it is easily accessible as the quality of education typically falls short of the needed criteria. Apart from financial limitations, significant gender differences exist. Girls are disproportionately impacted as, from an early age, they are expected to perform housework and take care of others. Along with limiting their access to education, this increases their vulnerability—including early marriage and exploitation—using early marriage. Inadequate monitoring, corruption, and low resources for enforcement authorities help child labour to flourish, even with different government and non-governmental measures. Long-term reform requires a more concerted effort involving government agencies, civil society, and local communities, even while NGOs like UNICEF and Save the Children have been immensely helpful in promoting child rights and running rehabilitation programs [16]. India must prioritize school reforms, provide financial assistance to impoverished families, and impose stricter penalties for child labor law violations to combat child labor effectively. Moreover, increasing knowledge of the negative consequences of child labour and supporting skill development initiatives can provide substitute livelihoods, thereby lessening dependence on child labour. India can guarantee a future where every child has a chance to flourish, learn, and grow, free from the burden of work, through a comprehensive, multi-stakeholder strategy.

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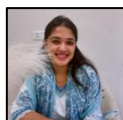
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