



Problems of Child Ragpickers

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Abstract

The existence of child labour in our society broadly indicates social inequity and at the same time, the administrative apathy, of the times we live in. Child labour, and in particular, "child ragpicking" deprives the child of its life. It transcends the barriers of religion, gender, caste and type of family. However, education, structure of family and poverty of the total family do play an important role in the life of child ragpickers. Ragpicking when undertaken as job, by the children, pushes them to the brink of anti-social behavior and illness.

Keywords: Ragpicking, getting meals twice a day.

Introduction

The existence of child labour in our society is a barbarous practice. It is barbarous because it is illogical, inhuman and stands against all ethics. In the past, the practice of child labour existed as proportionate to the social development. But, lack of human awareness strongly perpetuated and compartmentalized categories, did not allow people at large and social system in particular to pay any attention to the deprived people in general and child labour in particular¹.

The phenomenon of child labour, in different occupations, establishments, particularly in unorganized labour, dates back to the history of human civilization itself. The problem of child labour in the under developed and developing countries is quite high and even abnormal. In our country problem of child labour has assumed an alarming position. The incidence of child labour is the direct result of poverty and the socio-cultural fabric of the society. Independence, fundamental rights and other welfare provisions embodied in the constitution have no meaning to them. Despite enactment of various laws expressing deep concerns over this issue by social activists and academicians, the magnitude of the problem has not been set aside. It rather went on increasing².

Child labour is a gigantic problem as it involves around 250 million children across the globe, may be even more. Children, as young as five years are compelled to either eke out for their own survival or supplement family income to meet both the ends³. The exploitive practice of child labour has come to be recognized as a major socio-economic problem⁴.

A child labourer is differentiated from an adult worker on the basis of age. Usually a child worker is someone below the age of 14 or 15 years, who is involved in any productive activity, whether paid or unpaid, and with the family or outside. Parents

put their children to work at a very early age, sometimes when they are only 6-7 years old⁵.

India's booming urbanization brings along with it, the problem of waste management. As more and more people are migrating towards the cities, the amount of waste is increasing at a high pace. Thus, waste management is likely to become a critical issue in the coming years. Ragpickers play an important but usually unrecognized role in the waste management system of Indian cities. They collect garbage in search of recyclable items that can be sold to scrap merchants (paper, plastic, tin, etc.). This activity requires no skills. However it is a source of income for a growing number of urban poor⁶.

Rag picking is one of the inferior economic activities in the urban informal sector, largely undertaken by children belonging to weaker sections of the society for their survival and for supplementing their family income and is the profession mostly dominated by children aging 6 to 15 years who do not have any other skill and thus by way of refuse collection contribute to household income or own survival. These are mainly children of slum dwellers and poor people. Some of them are abandoned or runaway children. The continuous exposure to the common garbage and the hospital waste has led to various diseases. Many of them smoke beedi and cigarettes and some are also addicted to drugs and indulge in prostitution and homosexuality, robbery and gambling. All this has affected their lives in several ways and shortened their life spans considerably⁷.

The earlier study, conducted by Ashoka explains the exploitation and working condition of street children. Street children usually get arrested by the police because of their stay on pavements and involvement in gambling in public places. These children mainly have their activities, whether social or anti-social, in crowded areas. Their chances of coming in to contact with the police are frequent. Street children are also subject to harassment and eviction by the municipal authorities

because of their unauthorized occupation of city roads and vacant places. Drug abuse among street children is rampant. Young children normally consume cheap intoxicants such as solvents, alcohol, tobacco and ganja. Abuse of solvents is widely reported, glue sniffing is common as it is a cheap substitute for food. Street children usually undergo deep psychological trauma due to lack of parental love, diseases related malnutrition, sex abuse by peers and older people and violence in several forms. He reveals that, the street children for the survival are involved in collecting rags, scavenging on rubbish dumps, shoe shining etc, for their very survival⁸.

Kamat in his article "Rag pickers of India" reveals child Rag pickers health related problems. Rag pickers are subjected to chemical poisons and infections. Because of malnutrition they suffer from retarded growth and anemia. The rag pickers are very susceptible to diseases like tuberculosis and cancer due to their exposure to hazardous materials and addicted to chewing and smoking tobacco. Soon they become addicted to alcohols and then they switch to hard liquors. They even do not refrain from taking the drugs. They have free sex with street walkers and hence become victims of AIDS⁹.

Rai mentions that the parents and other family members fast lose the control nay even the moral authority, over the child labour that soon begins to imitate his adult fellow workers, mistaking them to be their ideals. The illiterate child, having freed himself from the family ties, becomes susceptible to all sorts of evil influences which may turn him into a heavy smoker, a drug-addict, a gambler, a smuggling operator, a film addict, a thief, a pick pocket, or even a hard criminal. Such children are often seen to be in the habit of using filthy and abusive language¹⁰.

Misra explains about anti-social activities of child workers. Economic freedom at an early age, particularly among boys encourages them to develop bad habits. The attraction towards an urban life style results in extravagant expenditure. Sometimes these extravagant expenditures lead to delinquent activities¹¹.

The present study is carried out in the slum areas of Bijapur, a drought prone District in Karnataka state. It is an exploratory study. The study explores the problems of child ragpickers in the slum areas of Bijapur city.

Hypothesis: There is significant relationship between structure of family and hunger (getting meals twice a day).

Research Methodology

Concept: The term rag picker currently refers to people who collect rags or recyclable materials that can be sold for money. Rag picking entails sorting, collecting and selling of waste materials that can be found at dumpsites, river banks, street corners, or in residential areas. The waste materials, primarily

consists of plastics, bottles, cardboard, tin, aluminum, iron, brass, and copper. Plastic, tin and aluminum products are highly sought after while paper goods rank low on the list. As the market for recyclable materials has increased, many street children have turned to rag picking as a means for their survival.

Objective: The main objective of the study is to assess the problems of child ragpickers.

Method of Data Collection and Analysis: For the present study, Bijapur, a drought prone city in Karnataka was selected. According to statistics available at the Labour Department, there are 1252 child labours in Bijapur District. Among them approximately 626 are child rag pickers, residing in Bijapur city itself. Among them 40 percent of (i.e., 250) child rag pickers are selected as sample, on the basis of random sampling method for the present study. There are 40 slums in Bijapur city, of them 12 slums were considered for data collection. The field research was conducted in different slums of Bijapur city.

The present study is basically empirical in nature. The secondary sources like books, journals, government manuals, websites and published and unpublished works related to the subject were also used. The primary data is collected with the help of structured questionnaire along with interview method.

In the present study qualitative information is obtained during the interviews, using a pre-coded questionnaire. Quantities information obtained from the structured interview schedule was edited carefully. The data were processed by SPSS package. Analysis of quantitative information consisted of producing simple frequency. In order test the hypothesis statistical technique of Chi-square is calculated. The data related to profile is presented in the form of percentage.

Results and Discussion

Table -1 (a) reveals that 70.4 percent of child rag pickers are getting meals twice a day and it is sad to note that 29.6 percent of them are not able to get two square meals a day. They are so poor that they have to beg for food.

Table -1(b) depicts the picture of week long starvation of child rag pickers. It is depressing to note that 29.6 percent of child ragpickers undergo the trauma of hunger for week long period. Such pathetic situation makes them suffer from malnutrition, stunted growth, weakness and ill health. However, 70.4 percent of child rag pickers are getting food twice a day.

Staying hungry is very common among child rag pickers for various reasons. Children of the street, who have no home or parents, are left to fend for themselves with none to care. These children usually spend all their earnings on the same day, thus having no means of survival for other days when earnings are insufficient.

Table-1 (a,b,c)
Hunger among Child Ragpickers

Sl.No.	Hunger Among Child Ragpickers	No. of Respondents	Percentage
a	Getting Meals Twice a Day	-	-
1	Yes	176	70.4
2	No	74	29.6
	N	250	100.0
b	Spending Without Food in the Last Week	-	-
1	Yes	74	29.6
2	No	176	70.4
	N	250	100.0
c	Number of Days Spend without Food	-	-
1	NA	176	70.4
2	1-day	47	18.8
3	2-day	27	10.8
	N	250	100.0

Source: Field Data

Table-1(c) shows that 18.8 percent of child rag pickers admitted of having stayed hungry for a whole day in a week, and that 10.8 percent of child rag pickers having stayed hungry for two days in a week.

Table -2
Gender and Getting Meals Twice a Day

Gender	Getting Meals Twice a Day		Total
	Yes	No	-
Male	69 (76.7%)	21 (23.3%)	90 (100.0%)
Female	107 (66.9%)	53 (33.1%)	160 (100.0%)
Total	176 (70.4%)	74 (29.6%)	250 (100.0%)

Source: Field Data,

$\chi^2 = 2.650(b)$, $df = 1$, $P = .104$, $\chi^2_t = 3.841$, therefore $\chi^2_c < \chi^2_t$, Not significant value at 0.05 level

Poverty is represented in terms of deprivation of food. In India 23.7 percent (Global Hunger Index 2008) people are deprived of at least two meals per day. Hence an attempt is made to assess the availability of meals on basis of gender, religion, education, caste, type of family, structure of family and income. Table-2 presents the association between gender and getting meals twice a day. The Chi-square test reveals that there is no significant variation between males and females with regards to getting meals twice a day. Although the percentage analysis shows slight difference in getting meals twice a day between males and females, it is not statistically significant. Hence, it may be inferred that gender is not playing important role in getting meals twice a day. Gender discrimination is not found in case of food in the present study.

The chi-square value of table-3 reveals that there is no significant association between religion and getting meals twice a day. It means there is no significant variation between

different religious groups in getting twice a day. In these families poverty is rampantly found irrespective of religion. Earlier, the sociologists like Max Weber, Karl Marks etc. have found significant relationship between religion and economy in general and poverty in particular. However it is not the case with the present study.

Table-3
Religion and Getting Meals Twice a Day

Religion	Getting Meals Twice a Day		Total
	Yes	No	-
Hindu	149 (70.6%)	62 (29.4%)	211 (100.0%)
Muslim	21 (67.7%)	10 (32.3%)	31 (100.0%)
Christian	6 (75.0%)	2 (25.0%)	8 (100.0%)
Total	176 (70.4%)	74 (29.6%)	250 (100.0%)

Source: Field Data

$\chi^2_c = .191$, $df = 2$, $P = .909$, $\chi^2_t = 5.991$, therefore $\chi^2_c < \chi^2_t$ value, Not significant value at 0.05 level

Table -4
Caste and Getting Meals Twice a Day

Caste	Getting Meals Twice a Day		Total
	Yes	No	-
SC	115 (74.7%)	39 (25.3%)	154 (100.0%)
ST	36 (60.0%)	24 (40.0%)	60 (100.0%)
OBC	25 (69.4%)	11 (30.6%)	36 (100.0%)
Total	176 (70.4%)	74 (29.6%)	250 (100.0%)

Source: Field Data

$\chi^2_c = 4.481$, $df = 2$, $P = .106$, $\chi^2_t = 5.991$, Therefore $\chi^2_c < \chi^2_t$, Not significant value at 0.05 level

Caste is the basis of Indian social system. It is a very complex phenomenon which defines the social structure and organization. The influence of caste is all pervasive and primarily based on social inequality. It is closely related with economic condition in terms of poverty. Hence an attempt is made to find out the impact of castes on getting meals twice a day which explains the hunger of respondents. Table-4 gives an account of association between caste and hunger. The chi-square value shows that there is no association between Schedule Castes (SC), Schedule Tribes (ST) and Other Backward Classes (OBC) in terms of hunger. This depicts the utter poverty conditions of the respondents' family. Although economy is related with caste, however, in the present study we note that child ragpickers' caste is not determining the hunger but it is the poverty alone.

Table - 5
Level of Education and Getting Meals Twice a Day

Level of Education	Getting Meals Twice a Day		Total
	Yes	No	
Illiteracy	64 (56.1%)	50 (43.9%)	114 (100.0%)
1-5th class	54 (83.1%)	11 (16.9%)	65 (100.0%)
6-7th class	35 (76.1%)	11 (23.9%)	46 (100.0%)
8-10th class	23 (92.0%)	2 (8.0%)	25 (100.0%)
Total	176 (70.4%)	74 (29.6%)	250 (100.0%)

Source: Field Data
 $\chi^2c = 22.448(a)$, $df=3$, $P=0.000$, $\chi^2t=7.815$ Therefore $\chi^2c > \chi^2t$, Significant value at .001 level

Table-5 presents the association between education of the respondents and hunger which is explained in terms of getting meals twice a day. The data reveals that there is significant variation between levels of education with regards to hunger. Considerable variation is found between illiterates and educated up to 8th to 10th class with regards to getting meals twice a day. It is nearly half of illiterates (43.9%) are not getting meals twice a day. It shows prevalence of striking poverty among illiterate children. 8th to 10th categories have lesser number of hungers. It is because the first two categories consist of many school drops out children.

Table - 6
Type of Family and Getting Meals Twice a Day

Type of Family	Getting Meals Twice a Day		Total
	Yes	No	
Elementary family	126 (72.8%)	47 (27.2%)	173 (100.0%)
Non-Elementary Family	50 (64.9%)	27 (35.1%)	77 (100.0%)
Total	176 (70.4%)	74 (29.6%)	250 (100.0%)

Source: Field Data
 $\chi^2c = 1.595(b)$, $df=1$, $P=.207$, $\chi^2t=3.841$, therefore $\chi^2c < \chi^2t$, Not significant value at 0.05 level

The chi-square value in table-6 reveals that there is no significant association between type of family and getting meals twice a day. Although the percentage analysis of data reveals the slight (8.0%) difference between elementary and non-elementary families with reference to getting meals twice a day, it is statistically not significant. It means the type of family has no bearing on hunger as seen in the present study.

Table-7
Structure of Family and Getting Meals Twice a Day

Structure of Family	Getting Meals Twice a Day		Total
	Yes	No	
Both alive (Intact family)	145 (76.7%)	44 (23.3%)	189 (100.0%)
One alive (Single parent)	25 (48.1%)	27 (51.9%)	52 (100.0%)
Both Dead	6 (66.7%)	3 (33.3%)	9 (100.0%)
Total	176 (70.4%)	74 (29.6%)	250 (100.0%)

Source: Field Data
 $\chi^2c = 16.117(a)$, $df=2$, $P=0.000$, $\chi^2t=5.991$, therefore $\chi^2c > \chi^2t$, Significant value at 0 .001 level.

Table-7 gives details of association between structure of family and getting meals twice a day. The chi-square test analysis reveals that there is variation in getting meals twice a day among different structure of families. The data reveals that children living in intact family are more food secure, than those living in single parent and no parent families where both parents are dead. This shows that child ragpickers' single parent and without parents are not even in a state of getting meals at least twice a day.

The hypothesis "there is significant relationship between structure of family and hunger (getting meals twice a day)" is proved on the basis of above analysis.

Income plays important role in providing basic facilities to individuals in society. Though all the respondents belong to lower economic group there is slight difference in the income of family. It is assumed that higher income provides the essential food security. Table-8 shows significant association between income of family and getting meals twice a day, as it is evident from chi-square test. The table reveals striking variation between various income groups with regards to food security. The food security increases along with increase in income level. Hence income plays a determining role in getting meals twice a day.

Table-9(a) depicts the details of smoking habit of child ragpickers. 14.8 percent of child ragpickers have admitted to smoking. Majority of child ragpickers express that they do not smoke. Among such children, most of them are girls.

Table -9(b) depicts the details of other bad habits of child ragpickers developed. It is sad to note that majority of child ragpickers (82 percent) are having the bad habits of chewing gutka, tobacco or pan. Only 18 percent do not have any bad habits mentioned above.

Table-9(c) depicts that 11.2 percent of child ragpickers are consuming alcohol. Age and sex are direct factor in the incidence of alcohol intake. It should be noted that phenomenon of 'peer pressure', which could incite some children to drink or smoke if their peer do the same. 88.8

percent of child ragpickers have reported that they are not consuming alcohol.

Table - 10 (a) shows that majority of child rag pickers live a free life style. They do not have to adhere to any rules and schedules. They can work when they feel like. Because of this, child rag pickers are highly likely to be involved in anti-social activities. Want for money, food and entertainment pushes them to involve in anti-social activities. These activities commonly include theft, gambling, pick pocketing etc. Table 10 shows the details of anti-social activities of child rag pickers. In all 42 percent of child ragpickers involve in anti-social activities. Among them 29.6 percent involved in gambling, 9.2 percent are involved in theft and 3.2 percent of child rag pickers resort to pick pocketing.

Table-08
Total Family Income and Getting Meals Twice a Day

Total Family Income	Getting Meals Twice a Day		Total
	Yes	No	
Below 11000 Rs	20 (42.5%)	27 (57.4%)	47 (100.0%)
11000 to 20000 Rs	38 (56.7%)	29 (43.2%)	67 (100.0%)
20001 to 30000 Rs	86 (83.4%)	17 (16.5%)	103 (100.0%)
30001 to 40000 Rs	22 (95.7%)	1 (4.3%)	23 (100.0%)
40001 to 50000 Rs	10 (100.0%)	0 (.0%)	10 (100.0%)
Total	176 (70.4%)	74 (29.6%)	250 (100.0%)

Source: Field Data
 $\chi^2_c = 44.303$, $df=4$, $P=.000$, $\chi^2_t=9.488$, therefore $\chi^2_c > \chi^2_t$ value, Significant value at .001 level,

Table-9 (a,b,c)
Bad Habits of Child Ragpickers

Sl.No.	Bad Habits of Child Ragpickers	No. of Respondents	Percentage
A	Smoking Habit	-	-
1	Yes	37	14.8
2	No	213	85.2
	N	250	100.0
B	Other bad habits of child ragpickers	-	-
1	NA.	45	18.0
2	Pan	19	7.6
3	Tobacco	28	11.2
4	Gutaka	158	63.2
	N	250	100.0
C	Alcoholic Habit	-	-
1	Yes	28	11.2
2	No	222	88.8
	N	250	100.0

Source: Field Data

Table-10 (a,b)
Anti-social Activities of Child Ragpickers

Sl. No.	Anti-Social Activities of Child Ragpickers	No. of Respondents	Percentage
A	Involvement in Anti-social Activities	-	-
1	NA.	145	58.0
2	Pick Pocketing	8	3.2
3	Gambling	74	29.6
	Theft	23	9.2
	N	250	100.0
B	Persons Afraid of	-	-
1	Police	46	18.4
2	Adult/ Young Boys	20	8.0
3	Drunkards	104	41.6
4	Strangers (Outsiders)	80	32.0
	N	250	100.0

Source: Field Data

Table -10 (b) shows that majority of child rag pickers are afraid about strangers (outsiders) because they feel that the strangers will catch them and admit to remand homes or police stations. 41.6 percent of child rag pickers, mainly girls, reported that they are scared of drunkards, because their father is also drunkard and many times beat them in their home. Remaining 18.4 percent of child rag pickers reported that they are afraid of police because of arrest, 8 percent of child rag pickers scared of young/adult boys.

Conclusion

The present study has attempted to explore the problems and personal behavior of child ragpickers in the slum areas of Bijapur city. The study concludes that they often face the situation of not having money to feed them selves. Quite a few percent of child rag pickers do not get meals twice a day. They develop bad habits of smoking, chewing pan, tobacco and gutaka and are also likely to be exposed to alcohol. They are more prone to anti-social activities such as pick pocketing, gambling, theft etc. However they are afraid of police because of arrest and scared of young/adult boys. Child rag pickers, mainly girls, reported that they are scared of drunkards, because their father is also drunkard and many times beat them in their home. Child rag pickers are afraid about strangers (outsiders) because they feel that the strangers will catch them and admit to remand homes or police stations.

In this study, attempt is made to assess the availability of meals on the basis of sex, religion, education, caste, type of family, structure of family and total family income. The chi-square test reveal that sex, religion, caste and type of family are not playing important role in getting meals twice a day. The chi-square tests also reveal significant association between level of education, structure of family and total income of the family.

The study concludes that child ragpicking has several negative consequences for the lives of children. The environment they operate in teaches them violence, abuse and maltreatment, which may drive them to indulge in delinquent behaviour

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