EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF GIRL WORKERS AT MAHESHTALA MUNICIPALITY IN SOUTH 24 PARGANAS, WEST BENGAL

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Abstract

Child labour is a severe problem, and its magnitude is concerning both nationally and internationally. Child labour is a far more complicated issue than it first appears to be. In nations with low and intermediate incomes, the proportion of children engaged in child employment is highest. A girl being forced into child labour is a serious issue in developing countries like India. In addition to being the victims of gender inequality, the girls are also denied access to essential human rights like education and nutrition. Girls under the age of fourteen are forced into the workforce. These young girls are susceptible to mental, physical, and even sexual abuse because they are child workers. The district of South 24 Parganas of West Bengal has the highest rate of child labourer among girls. The **objective** of this paper is to present an in-depth analysis of the condition of girl child labourers of NCLP Schools at Maheshtala municipality in South 24 Parganas district, West Bengal. To solve the issue, a thorough investigation in a real-world setting is necessary. Thus, a **case study approach** has been used as **research methodology**. Self-constructed questionnaires, unstructured interviews, document surveys, and observation of real teaching-learning situations have been used as research tools to collect data. **Participants** are the girl workers who are enrolled in the five NCLP special training schools of Maheshtala municipality. **The depressing circumstances of the girl child labourers have been revealed** by the researchers, who attempted to locate areas of concern in real settings.

Key words: Girl worker, Educational status, NCLP

1. Introduction

Employment that deprives children of their youth, potential, and dignity and is harmful to their physical and mental development is commonly referred to as **child labour (ILO 2017, p.17).** By engaging in child labour, children are deprived of the education and skills they need to have good employment prospects as adults. Girls are more susceptible to deprivation and exploitation. With 550092 child labourers between the ages of 5 and 14, West Bengal is placed sixth out of all the states; 340163 of these are males and 209929 are girls. Overall, there are 23315 girl child labourers in the district of South 24 Parganasin West Bengal (data.gov.in). The state of girl child labourers in the South 24 Parganas district is the main subject of the current study. The **National Child Labour Project (NCLP) Scheme** was introduced by the government in 1988 with the goal of rehabilitating working children. The Government of India's primary effort is to rehabilitate child labour. The Scheme intends to apply a progressive strategy with a primary focus on the rehabilitation of minors employed in hazardous works and procedures. **Jajoria, Jatav and Mishra (2024)** analysed trends, patterns and socioeconomic determinants of child and adolescent labour in India. This study summarises the main areas of focus that should be given priority and identifies the main socioeconomic vulnerabilities that children in rural and urban India face. The most at risk are the children living in households belonging to Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes. The researchers concluded that different access to resources, including education, social standing, and gender, influences children's decision to enter the workforce. **Thi, Zimmerman and Ranganathan (2023)** examined the

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relationship between exposure factors, such as child labour, hazardous child labour (HZCL), and hazardous work, and outcome factors, such as psychosocial functioning difficulty and school dropout, in children ages 5 to 17. To investigate the relationship, the researchers performed both bivariate and multivariable analyses. Children who are not enrolled in school seem to have stronger associations between hazardous work and difficulties with psychosocial functioning.

2. Major Objective

The main objective of this study is to depict an in-depth analysis of the condition of girl child labourers of NCLP Schools at Maheshtala municipality in South 24 Parganas, West Bengal.

3. Methodology

In order to perform a thorough investigation in a real-life context, the researchers have decided to follow the **case study approach** to look at the complete scenario of the girl workers enrolled in NCLP Schools at Maheshtala municipality in South 24 Parganas. The researchers have followed **Single (Instrumental) case study design** in which a specific case is studied to gain insight into a broader issue or phenomenon **(Stake, 2002).** In this type of qualitative research, one bounded case is used to state something else, such as to illustrate the issue, build a theory, redraw generalizations, or refine a theoretical construct.
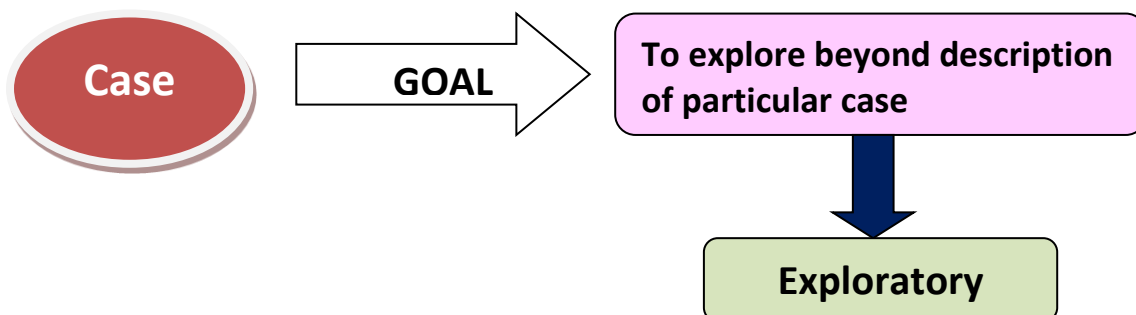
Here the single case is – Educational status of girl workers at Maheshtala municipality in South 24 Parganas and the major respondents/ participants of the study are the girl worker-students enrolled in NCLP Schools at Maheshtala municipality. In this context, the girl workers are the main units of analysis (Yin,2014).

Area of Research

The study area is Maheshtala of South-24 Parganas district. Five NCLP schools are located in Maheshtala named –

- Usha NCLP centre
- Agnibina Sangha NCLP centre
- Blue Star Club NCLP centre
- Yuba Shakti Athletic Club NCLP centre
- Akra City Club NCLP centre

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Selection of the Participants

Data have been collected from 2 girl students from each of selected NCLP schools. The participants from each centre have been randomly chosen.

Collection of Data

The researchers have used self-constructed questionnaires (both close-ended and open-ended), interviews, and observation of real situations to collect qualitative data. Recent records, including written and verbal documents, official records and numerical data have been analysed by the researchers to come at the conclusion.

Participant Descriptions

Anonymity has been maintained in the description of participants for ethical reasons. Instead of revealing the participants' true identities, pseudonyms have been used.

4. Analysis, Interpretation & Results

Following the **collection, identification, and reduction of the qualitative data**, it has been categorised into themes using both **deductive and inductive coding**. **Content analysis** has been used to analyze texts and documents; **thematic and narrative analysis** was used to analyze responses from respondents (main units of analysis) using both **closed-ended and open-ended questions**; and **framework analysis** was also used to analyse documents collected (Berg, 2017).

Analysis & Interpretation of Participant Response

- ### *Usha NCLP Centre*

Unit of Analysis 1: *Swati Jadhav*

Swati Jadhav is a ten years old girl. She is the youngest child of the family, having two elder sisters. She belongs to the Scheduled Caste community. They do not have their own house. Her father is a car driver and her mother works as a maid servant. When she was seven years old, she started helping her mother. Though she was admitted to school, she could not attend school regularly. She started earning money and she used to give her earnings to her mother. She even gets punished if she does anything wrong. She has to participate in different household chores with her elder sisters like cleaning, washing and cooking to support her parents. Even her elder sisters are irregular in attending school.

Unit of Analysis 2: *Rumi Khatua*

Rumi Khatua is a eleven years old girl. She is the eldest child of the family, having two younger sisters. She also belongs to the Scheduled Caste community. They live in a rented house. Her father is a daily wage earner and her mother works as a maid servant. When she was seven years old, she started helping her mother. Her name is enrolled in school but she is very irregular. She was compelled to earn money and she used to give the money to her mother. She has to do a lot of daily work to help her parents. She is admitted to school but is very irregular.

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Interpretation

Poverty is the root cause that forced these girls to join the work force with her parents. They are unable to give their attention to education due to lack of time and motivation. The irregularity of receiving stipend forces them to resist herself from attending school. At such an early age, they have to start earning and try to support her parents. But they have told the researchers that they do not like to do the work. But they like to attend school and want to continue their studies. As they cannot devote much time to the studies their performances are poor. The stipend they used to receive from the NCLP school is irregular.

- ### *Agnibina Sangha NCLP Centre*

Unit of Analysis 3: *Sanjila Khatun*

Sanjila Khatun is a thirteen years old girl. She is the resident of the sub-urban locality of Maheshtala. She is the eldest child of the family, having two sisters and one brother. She belongs to Muslim community. She lived with her parents in a rented house. Her father works in a shop and her mother is a *zari* worker. When she was six years old, she started helping her mother. She helps her mother so that her mother can take more orders. They earn daily. She used to earn an average of 1000 rupees per month. Her mother forced her to do the work on a regular basis.

Unit of Analysis 4: *Nilima Khatun*

Nilima Khatun is a girl of twelve years. Her residence is in the Maheshtala sub-urban area. She has one sister, two brothers. She is the second child of the family. She belongs to minority community. They do not have their own house. Her mother is also a Zari worker, while her father works in a local garage. She began assisting her mother at the age of six. She assists her mum so she can take on additional responsibilities. They are the daily wage earners.

Interpretation

Both are very irregular in attending school. They are unable to devote much time to her education. Their aim in life is to be independent women when they grow older. Both the girls are unable to pursue regular education because of their family condition. As they are daily wage earners, they are forced to give their time to work instead of study. Their parents are also in helpless condition for making their children engaged in the work.

- ### *Blue Star Club NCLP Centre*

Unit of Analysis 5: *Tamanna Sarkar*

Tamanna Sarkar is a fourteen years old girl. She is the only daughter of the family, having two brothers. She belongs to the Muslim community. They do not have their own house. Her father is a tailor. She helps her father with his work. She can sew with great perfection. Her mother does the household chores. Her younger brothers go to school. She works hard with her parents so that her brothers can continue their education. Her parents are in helpless condition as they must fight hard to earn their livelihood.

Unit of Analysis 6: *Ayesha Khatun*

The age of Ayesha Khatun is thirteen years. She has two sisters. She is the eldest daughter. She is a member of the Muslim community. They do not have their own house. Her father is no

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more. Her mother is a tailor. She assists her mother in her job. She is quite skilled at sewing. Moreover, she has to do her household duties. Her younger siblings attend school. She has to support her mother to earn their livelihood. Since they have to struggle to make a living, the absence of her father has made the situation deplorable for her.

Interpretation

Poverty forced these girls to join the workforce to support the family. They are irregular in school and they are on the verge of drop-out. Tamanna's parents give priority to the sons instead of their only daughter. As a result, she is irregular in school and forced to earn money from an early age. The irregularity of the stipend makes it hard for both of them to continue their education. They do like to do work and want to come to school regularly. They have to carry the burden of her family on her tiny shoulders.

- ### *Yuba Shakti Athletic Club NCLP centre*

Unit of Analysis 7: *Jhuma Das*

Jhuma Das is a thirteen years old girl. She lives with her parents in the village. She is the eldest daughter of the family having three sisters. Her parents are illiterate and engaged in agriculture. Her parents do not take care of their children. Being the eldest daughter she has to take care of her younger sisters because her mother has to support her father in the field. Moreover she has to take part in different agricultural activities mainly in the time of reaping.

Unit of Analysis 8: Case of *Soma Biswas*

Soma Biswas is a girl of fourteen years of age. In the village, she resides with her parents. She is the elder daughter having a brother. Her parents work in agricultural field and lack formal education. The parents are unable to take care of the children. As the elder daughter, she must look for her younger brother because her mother must work to support her father. She also has to engage in various agricultural tasks, primarily during the harvesting season.

Interpretation

Belonging to the agriculture-based families, the girls of this school are unable to attend school regularly. In the cultivating season they have to join her parents in the field. Moreover, as their mothers go to the field, they have the extra burden of the regular household works like cooking meals for the family, washing clothes and cleaning the house. They cannot devote time to continue her studies. She is eager to go to school but she is unable to go. The situation of their family has forced her to withdraw from study. They have to take daily responsibilities for the entire household. They are deprived of their childhood. They is gradually dropping out of primary school.

- ### *Akra City Club NCLP Centre*

Unit of Analysis 9: *Salma Parveen*

Salma Parveen is a thirteen years old girl of the sub-urban regions of Maheshtala. She has an elder brother and a younger sister. Her father passed away in a road accident as he was a truck

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driver. Her grandmother, who is very old, lives with them. Her mother has to work hard to earn money to sustain the family. She works as a caregiver for the children of other families. Her elder brother also works in a tea-shop. Salma has to do all the household work including cooking meals.

Unit of Analysis 10: Case of *Mitali Mondal*

The age of *Mitali Mondal* is eleven years. She has two younger sisters. She is the eldest daughter of the family. She belongs to the Scheduled Caste community. Their residence is rented. Her mother works as a caregiver to other children, while her father works in a mill. She has to look after all the household chores, as her mother is out for duty. Despite being enrolled in school, she exhibits severe irregularities. She has a lot of work to do every day to support her parents.

Interpretation

Salma has to live her life in a deplorable condition due to her father's demise. At such a tender age she has to support her family. She is deprived of her childhood as well as education. She cannot devote enough time to study. Her wish remains unfulfilled because of the situation of the family. She was admitted to at the age of nine. She cannot attend school on a regular basis. But she likes to go to school. She has friends in school. She misses her friends badly. She wants to pursue higher education. The condition of Mitali is quite contradictory. She is forced to support her family in absence of her parents. Education is not a priority for her parents.

4. Findings

Families that are struggling financially because of low wages, lack of work possibilities, unemployment choose child labour as an alternative to augment their scarce income. The need for cheap labour in a number of industries, including as industry, domestic work, and agriculture, contributes to the persistence of child labour. Since these girls are deprived their childhood and forced to enter the workforce, they belonged to the marginalised element of society. One of the main causes of child labour is poverty, which is linked to a number of factors such as low literacy, a lack of employment options, and the financial burden placed on families. Child labour and poverty are linked in an unbreakable cycle that cannot be broken without addressing every one of them. Lack of parental encouragement is another factor contributing to the dropout rate of girls who work. Unable to be mainstreamed, girl child labourers went back to work.

5. Recommendation and Conclusion

As the study shows, a typical financial coping mechanism in families with low incomes is child labour, particularly in low- and middle-income nations where many children are employed in different kinds of work. The practice of child labour inhibits children from getting the education and skills they need to have decent job opportunities as adults. Inequality, a lack of educational possibilities, a delayed demographic shift, conventions, and cultural expectations are some of the reasons why child labour is still prevalent in our society. Children's form and degree of labour is influenced by a number of factors, including age, gender, caste, ethnicity, and socioeconomic situation. Children are still employed in agriculture and the unorganised industry.

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The researchers **recommend** that one of the most important ways for ending child labour is to give priority to easily accessible, high-quality education. **Funding** for these special schools should be guaranteed on a regular basis. Locally, parents, workers, employers, and the community should organise **awareness programmes** about RTE'2009, the negative impacts of child labour, health facilities, and other essential services. It should be mandatory for a competent authority to **monitor** schools. To help child labourers and their parents make a better livelihood, **vocational skill development trainings** should be arranged. Girl workers must be **rehabilitated through professional skill training**. The authority should guarantee the products' marketing and offer **financial facilities**. Emphasis should be placed on the **future entrepreneurship of girl child labourers**. Moreover the creation of **"Learner-friendly Inclusive Environments"** for children in villages and slums between the ages of five to fourteen must be prioritized to end the evils of child labour.

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