

# Criminal neglect of child labor and its consequences .

## 1. Introduction .

Thesis Statement: Child labour has become a menace for society owing to its criminal negligence. It emanates from various impediments in the political, economic and social structure of the society. The culpable negligence of child bears grave consequences, demanding prompt mitigation.

## 2. Child labour: a neglected blight .

### 3. Causes of the criminal neglect of child labour

- a. Lack of political will to eradicate child labour
- b. Child labour provides a diversified source of income for poor households .
- c. Lack of access to educational facilities underpins the culture of child labor .
- d. Insufficient awareness and advocacy about the dangers of child labor .
- e. Lack of resources for enforcement of child labor laws .
- f. Economic benefits desired from cheap child labour .

## 4. Consequences of the neglect of child labor .

- a. Exposes children to severe health and psychological risks .

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- b. Reinforces poverty and economic inequality
- c. Impedes national economic progress and development.
- d. Undermines future workforce and skilled labor.
- e. Exposes children to human trafficking and sexual exploitation
- f. Increases illiteracy rates
- g. Rise in crime and extremism due to exploitation and disenfranchisement

## 5. Measures to mitigate the scourge of child labour.

- a. Strengthening legal frameworks and their enforcement.
- b. Providing free education for all.
- c. Social protection and economic support for poor households.
- d. Promoting economic boycott of capitalist grants that employ children
- e.

In a small, dimly lit factory on the outskirts of a bustling city, ten year old Ali works tirelessly, his tiny hands weaving intricate patterns into a carpet. The air is thick with dust, his fingers calloused, and his dreams long forgotten. Ali's laughter which should echo through schoolyards is replaced by the relentless hum of machines. Like countless others, he is trapped in a vicious cycle of child labor - stripped of education, health and a future. This harrowing reality exposes a great societal failure: the criminal neglect of child labour. Despite global commitments and laws, millions of children are forced into child labour. This criminal negligence emanates from various factors, the most profound being lack of political will on the part of policymakers to eradicate this menace. Apart from this, lack of access to educational facilities, poverty, insufficient resources for the implementation of child labor laws also add to the scourge of child labor. The effects ripple across generations, trapping families in poverty, affecting physical and psychological health of children and hampering economic growth of the state. There is a responsibility on the part of every government, international organizations and communities to ensure that every child has the opportunity to live their life with dignity, free from the shackles of labor exploitation.

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According to UN, child labour can be defined as, "work performed by children who are under the minimum age legally specified for that kind of work, or work that because of its detrimental nature or consequences is considered unacceptable for children". Despite the existence of International frameworks child labor continues to be a global concern. United Nations Convention on the Rights of child (UNCRC), obligates nations to protect children from economic exploitation and hazardous work while promoting education and welfare. Similarly, International Labour Organization Convention No. 138 (1973) sets minimum age for employment typically 15. ILO Convention No. 182 (1999) prioritizes eliminating the worst forms of child labour, including slavery, trafficking and hazardous work. However despite these Conventions, child labour continues worldwide. According to a report by ILO and UNICEF, the number of children in child labour has grown to 160M worldwide. Africa has the highest percentage of children involved in child labour. Subsequently, Asia and Pacific region stands second, where 48.7M children still remain in child labor.

~~When it comes to the reasons behind the neglect of child labour, there are many and quite easily detectable.~~

First of all, limited political will is a significant factor contributing to the neglect of child labor. In many cases, governments fail to prioritize the enforcement of child labor laws, often pressing on other important national issues such as economic growth and political stability. Thus in such circumstances children involved in child labour are neglected. A study by UN highlights that corruption and weak law enforcement are primary factors preventing the eradication of child labour. Until and unless sets its priorities straight, child labour will continue to prevail.

Apart from this, poverty plays a crucial role in the perpetuation of child labour. It forces families to rely on children for their survival. Child labour thus becomes a diversified source of income for poor households. For example in rural areas across many developing countries, children often work in farms, or factories or as domestic workers to support their families. The link between poverty and child labor can be evident from a report by ILO that states that the percentage of children in child labour is highest in low income countries. Since these children become breadwinners for their families their exploitation is neglected because of the short term benefits they bring for their families.

In addition to this, lack of access to quality education is another factor that contributes

to child labour. In underdeveloped regions many children are unable to attend school due to various barriers. Schools are often located far from homes and families cannot afford the cost associated with education, such as transport, school uniforms and books. Thus children in such regions frequently involve in child labor as attending school is not seen as an affordable option. For example, According to Pakistan Economic Survey 2023-24 literacy rate in Punjab (one of the maximum developed provinces) is around 70%, whilst in Balochistan it is about 40%. Because of the low literacy rates in Balochistan, over 15000 underage children in Balochistan are working at construction sites, coal mines, garbage collection and automobile workshops (Dawn). Thus, lack of education restricts children future prospects, trapping them in low wage, unskilled labour.

Moreover, insufficient awareness and advocacy are central to continued neglect of child labor. In many communities, particularly those in rural and developing regions, there is a lack of understanding about the detrimental effects of child labor on children's health, education and future opportunities. According to ILO, 1 in 10 children worldwide are involved in child labor, yet the issue is often overlooked due to limited public awareness. The absence of

robust policy implementation and advocacy campaigns means that the problem is not sufficiently communicated to the public or policymakers.

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Moreover, lack of resources for enforcement of child labor laws are a key reason behind the neglect of child labor. While many countries have enacted laws to protect children from exploitation, the enforcement of these laws is often weak due to insufficient funding, staffing and infrastructure. For example, several laws like Islamabad Capital Territory Domestic Workers Bill, 2021, Punjab Domestic Workers Act 2019, Sindh Prohibition of Employment of Children Act, 2017 have been enacted by Pakistan but because of lack of strong integrated enforcement mechanisms and resources the reality on the ground remains unchanged.

In addition to this, economic benefits derived from cheap labour play a significant role in the neglect of child labour. Many industries, particularly in agriculture, textile and manufacturing industries children are exploited. This is because children are a low source of low cost compliant labor as compared to skilled men. The world bank estimates that child labor contributes approximately \$ 3 billion annually to the global economy, underscoring its economic importance to various

sectors. These economic incentives discourage businesses from adopting fair labor practices or from implementing policies to eliminate child labour.

The consequences of the criminal neglect of child labour are staggering. It subjects children to severe health and psychological conditions/risks. Children working in hazardous environments, such as mines, factories and agriculture are exposed to dangerous chemicals, unsafe machinery and long working hours which can lead to lifelong physical and mental health issues. According to ILO approximately, 79M children were carrying out work that is hazardous, endangering their health safety and moral development. In environments with pesticides and toxins, brain damage is more likely. Malnutrition is also common among children subject to child labour.

Apart from severe health and psychological risks, the neglect of child labour also reinforces the cycle of poverty. Families that rely on child labour as a source of income often live in poverty, where the need for children to work overshadows the value of education. As a result, children who labour instead of going to school are unlikely to escape poverty in later life. The lack of

education prevents them from securing better paying skilled jobs, forcing them into a future of low income unskilled labour.

The ILO estimates that without significant intervention, child labour will keep millions of families entrapped in generational poverty.

Apart from this criminal neglect of child labour limits a country's economic potential by preventing children from acquiring the necessary skills and education to become productive members of the workforce. This skills gap not only hampers individual advancement but also stunts national growth by limiting the human capital available for innovation, entrepreneurship and industrial advancement. ILO reports that child labor costs countries billions of dollars annually in lost productivity. Consequently the cycle of underdevelopment persists as the labor force remains ill equipped.

The impact of neglect of child labor on local labor markets is straightforward. When more workers are willing to work at a given wage than there are jobs, workers will compete and drive down wages. An abundance of inexpensive unskilled labor discourages the adoption of skill intensive technologies. Countries adopt technologies that is complimentary to factors they are abundant in. Hence the more

child labour, the more unskilled labor, and the less likely are countries to adopt technologies that take advantage of skilled labor. The resulting lack of skilled labor market discourages the accumulation of human capital, leaving countries worse off over the long term.

Criminal neglect of child labor increases the vulnerability of children to sexual exploitation and abuse. Most of the children who are hired as domestic workers are ill treated.

They are not allowed to meet their parents for months.

The case of 14 year old Rizwana who worked as domestic help in the home of a well to do judge is an example. Rizwana's parents did not see her for six months. When they were finally called to take her home, they discovered she had been brutally abused.

Report by NGO Sahil, "11 children were sexually abused everyday in Pakistan last year"

Another case of abuse of a child was reported on May 31, 2020 when an eight year old domestic worker was brought to a hospital in Rawalpindi. The child's employers had brutally assaulted her for mistakenly releasing two costly parrots from their cage which were apparently worth more than her life. Thus, it highlights that fact that children involved in labour are more vulnerable to abuse.

The neglect of child labor can lead to an increase in crime and extremism, as children subjected to labor exploitation often grow up feeling disenfranchised, angry and marginalized. Being denied access to education and a stable childhood, many children turn deviant and adopt extremist ideologies as a means of asserting control over their lives or expressing their dissatisfaction with society. Research by Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime shows a correlation between child labor and increased rates of criminal behavior and extremism in countries with weak law enforcement. Thus lack of opportunities for social and economic mobility creates fertile ground for radicalization.

As far as measures are concerned to eradicate child labour, there are many but the most fundamental is increasing the number of school going children. Schooling and child labor are inextricably linked. In the words of Nobel Peace laureate Kaulash Satyarthi "We will not end child labor until every child is in school, and we will not succeed in ensuring every child is in school until we end child labor". Schooling must be <sup>made</sup> affordable in order to be a viable alternative to child labor. Governments must invest in building and maintaining schools.

especially in remote and impoverished areas where child labor is more prevalent. Additionally, making education free and accessible for all children, including those from low income families is crucial.

legislation alone cannot eradicate child labour. However, it is equally impossible to eliminate child labour without effective legislation. Many countries have laws prohibiting child labor, but these laws are weak, outdated or poorly enforced. To effectively combat child labor, govts must modernize these laws to meet international standards and ensure their rigorous implementation. For example, countries should introduce sticter penalties for employes who exploit children, along with increasing the frequency of labor inspections to identify and address viodations. By strengthening legal frameworks and increasing the resources allocated to lawenforcement, countries can reduce the incidence of child labor and send a clear message that child labor is unacceptable.

In addition to this, continued progress against child labor will require policies that help mitigate the economic vulnerability of households. Government should launch programmes that provide cash stipends to vulnerabile families with children. Conditional

cash transfers, food security programs and microfinance initiatives can help families meet their basic needs without resorting to child labor. These measures would allow families to prioritize education over child labor, ultimately breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty and exploitation.

In conclusion, child labor persists as a complex and deeply entrenched issue, driven by poverty, inadequate education and ineffective enforcement of laws. Its devastating effects rob children of their innocence, education, mental wellbeing and future opportunities. Not only children are impacted by this scourge, the entire social fabric of the society also gets disturbed. Addressing this challenge demands a holistic approach - strengthening laws, ensuring access to quality education and providing economic support to vulnerable families. By tackling these root causes, we can pave the way for a society where every child grows and have the freedom to learn, enjoy and fulfill their potential.

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