

# Education Outcomes & Child's Work: A Case Study of Children in Slum

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## ABSTRACT

This study attempts to map two of the most vital social processes among children in the contexts of Slum. The two social processes being working and Learning; without violating the legislative frameworks on child labour, children working inside the household as domestic labour or in the household enterprise is a dominant phenomenon in the urban centers observed among those whose household income is derived from the informal sector and have lower income levels. The working forms and time vary from context to context. Due to the enormity of the informal sector in India and efforts to curb the exploitation of children due to labour, focus inlaid on making and implementation of social policy addressing child labour. In this light, this study tries to study the nature and forms of work undertaken by children in the slum, which inhabits a significant percentage of urban population. These working processes, although well in legal bounds, are yet observed to affect the education of the child, thereby highlighting the graveness of the problem even in legitimized forms. Educational outcomes are chosen as a tangible indicator to make sense of the learning process occurring in the child. This study highlights how various components that constitute educational outcomes are affected by the work undertaken by the child.

**Keywords:** Child's Work, Educational Outcomes, Slums, Labour

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The children and their socio-economic contexts would be the center of this study, as a subject undergoing the processes of learning alongside labouring. The aim of the study would be to analyze and discuss the

relationship and influence of laboring processes on the process of learning. The tangibility of the process of learning is established by taking 'educational outcome' into consideration which is a measurable variable. In using 'educational outcome' it also helps us, during the process of observation and study, to question and critique the compositional dimensions that cater to outcomes and lay a ground for developing an alternative framework in future.

There has been a widespread ambiguity in defining who is a child, what are the characteristics that

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constitute childhood. The ambiguity is because of the lack of a strict international standardized framework of understanding child labour (Siddiqi & Patrinos 1995) but different countries depending on their political & economic conditions, social customs legislated child labour with regard to how they understand childhood (below 12, 14, 15 or 18 years etc. of age) and the nature of labour/work that is undertaken (C138 - Minimum Age Convention 1973).

This study has chosen 'child's work' to differentiate itself from child labour. The legal definition of child labour, however, emphasizes on at least of 1 hour of economic activity or 28 hours of domestic activity for children between 5 to 11 years and 14 hours of economic activity or 42 hours of domestic activity for children between 12-14 years as per the norms of UNICEF. Child's work in this study is understood as any form of work undertaken by the child that falls within the ambit of norms and standards concerning Child labour. This restricts the domain of work forms largely to domestic work or working in household/family enterprises.

The operational definition, based on the literature, field observation & standards of UNESCO & other research consortiums (RECOUP: *Research Consortium on Educational Outcomes & Poverty* reports) (Gutman and Vorhaus 2012) can be characterized by the following dimensions that include years of schooling completed (prior learning), school participation (enrollment & attendance), literacy (reading, writing speaking and listening) and numeracy skills, communication skills, generalist skills, affective domain (sensitivity, emotional outlook, awareness), critical thinking, association between learning and current practices, competence, satisfaction, social behaviour, time spent on homework or tuitions and curiosity to learn.

*The objectives of the following study are to understand the concepts of child's work and educational outcomes and to explore various qualitative dimensions of 'educational outcomes' in the context of the study*

## **Methodology**

The research was conducted in slum in the New Delhi city using purposive sampling technique. The living conditions and standards and the socio-economic status

are relatively homogenous and outlying disparities which might affect the study are curtailed due to the nature of the site. This is a qualitative study consisting of in-depth interviews, participant observation, and field notes. The qualitative nature of the study enabled a deeper engagement and understanding thus capturing the complexities of the influences that child work has on one's educational outcomes and also in determining what play a more prominent in constituting the framework of outcomes in the given context.

The participants of the study are children aged between 6 and 12 who are enrolled in elementary school and indulge in domestic work or in the family enterprises. This indulgence in some kind of work is predominantly observed in the contexts of slums where informal labour is prevalent.

## **On Child's Labour: Perspectives & Issues**

There is no uniform understanding of the trends of child's work, it varied from country to country with different socio-economic, the cultural backgrounds, and the political economy of the societies. A minor amount of child's work is in paid format outside the household in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and is further decreasing, which is constrained by legislative frameworks such as banning child labour or enforcing compulsory schooling. These children who undertake some kind of work are in the informal sector in urban areas or agriculture sector in the rural contexts. However, there should be a fine distinction made between abolishing paid/unpaid form of labour to abolishing the exploitation of children through work. The empirical study suggests that exploitation has always accompanied any kinds of work considering the social relations to productions that are prevalent in the society.

The rate of disappearance of the paid form of labour or working of children outside the household cannot be understood as an explicit improvement in the well-being of the child. Empirically the abolishment of paid forms of child labour outside the household is rather found to be reemerging as a different form of work, either as domestic work or work taking place in family enterprises. One can also observe a rise in the rates of self-employment and also the prevalence of a significant

number of 'idle' children giving more and more avenues for the child to be absorbed into some kind of work rather than their wellbeing.

This work in the site of the slums signals a commonality between the work performed by the children who are currently aged between 6 to 14 and the one or two generations prior to them. Due to the lack of universal compulsory education, most of the slum dwellers have barely completed even secondary education (men and women included); they were counted as earning hands during their childhood as due to the sheer poverty and absence of compulsory schooling, they have started their wage contribution to the household as young as 10-13 years. These slum dwellers have worked in restaurants as cleaners, cooks, and waiters or as cobblers and maids, as cleaners, sweepers, as helpers in mechanic shops etc. As with the current generation of young kids, with higher enrollment rates in schools in urban contexts and also awareness of childhood impairment that might accompany working outside households is believed to abolish child's work in totality.

Contrary to the belief, this field study does not suggest to identify the current status of children who would be working to be 'abolished' but rather 'displaced', as the workplace is now accommodated inside the household itself. This generation of younger kids, do not work as cooks in small cafes and restaurants but cook at their kitchens at homes, they do not work as cleaners or sweepers at any shop or small scale enterprise but perform the same labour at home, they purchase the grocery/ration and assimilate the necessary things (such as water for use, minimum medicines, and other wage goods). In the prevailing socio-economic conditions, it can be argued that there is a high tendency of a child to not escape work but to be a part of it within the legitimate realms provided by the state. This is sometimes justified on moral turf like learning to work, traditional outlooks and socio-cultural fabric of a society. Govt. of India has recently cleared their stand on the issue of child labor, the act bans child labor and spells out that considering the social fabric of the country and the prevailing socio-economic conditions, children are allowed to work in their family enterprises and entertainment industry (which ought to be non-hazardous) without hindering

compulsory schooling (CLPR 2012, Ministry of Labour & Employment).

This act clearly does not abolish working in the case of children but restricts it to the boundaries of family enterprises without fixating or analyzing where these boundaries start, stretch and end. It does not question or problematize the prevailing socio-economic conditions or the social fabric of the society; it rather might risk legitimizing and shielding the exploitation and oppression that is prevalent.

(The nature of work is also changed significantly by banning any kind of labour outside household/family. The argument does not negate the acknowledgement of desirability and positive development of/by banning child labour. However, it highlights the process of labour in much more nuanced and complex in various socio-economic contexts.)

Indian informal economy has a significant contribution to the GDP, the workforce in unorganized sectors constitute to the 90.87% of the workforce in India and 76.7% in Urban parts India (55<sup>th</sup> round, NSSO 1999-2000). In this scenario, if there is any violation or oppression of a child through working, it might well be due to the very social fabric and the socio-economic conditions, adhering to them and reforming it in other domains would not address the root cause of the problem but merely help in tackling it at a surface level and improving the conditions of a meager percentage. The whole notion of what do we mean by 'family enterprise', what are its limits and possibilities are now brought into the realm of questioning.

### **On Education: Outcomes & Impacts**

With the emergence and domination of markets in the third world have led to a hegemony of homogeneity and universalization that have consequently reshaped one of the processes in society i.e. education. These developments have had implicit effects giving rise to mass education, universal elementary education, compulsory school enrollments and also bringing changes in curriculum designing, pedagogical tools & thought, outcome based education of knowledge production and dissemination.

The change/up gradation in technology necessarily demands a change/up gradation in the skill and being of the worker thereby expanding and shaping the idea of education and mass education. The proliferation of universal education was concretely accompanied and driven by the development of the forces of production.

This idea of education is needed not only for the workers to produce but also for the consumers to consume and thereby create an aggregate demand. For illustration, the basic elementary software skills of at least lower gradient are of necessity to the consumer who wants to use the commodity produced and is also required in a higher gradient by the engineer who is a worker producing such commodities in a better and efficient manner.

### **Working Conceptual Framework for Educational Outcomes**

'Education for All' is driving the need for a universal drive for compulsory education for children between the age group of 6 to 14 by their respective nations and is facilitated by many international organizations. With mass education, the ideas and dialogues about testing, pedagogy, critical thinking, quality, access, accountability, social justice have also proliferated and are occupying central themes of thought, policy, and action. Education is understood as a process, and various efforts are made to assess, measure, critique and drive this process effectively. There are multiple terminologies that grew around the idea of assessment of an individual's learning or education albeit they confer to different meanings. They confer to different meanings as the idea of education is itself subjective.

The idiom of 'educational outcomes', in contrast to the 'learning outcomes' provides a broader and better understanding of the overall status of child (Fatuma, Arnot & Wainaina 2010); learning outcomes usually typify measurement of specific skills or subject based knowledge whereas educational outcomes enable us the scope to capture the cognitive processes emerging from the non-formal settings in addition to the formal ones. They represent a more cumulative estimate.

The usage of learning outcomes, schooling outcomes refer to the respective achievements of the standards

set for a particular subject/course/program, particular institution (school), a particular grade or age of the individual. Educational outcomes imply a broader and more encompassing and overall characteristic development of an individual. They cannot be delimited to the learning that can happen at the formal centers of education but is also inclusive of the learning contributed through various life activities, diverse exposures and interaction with the socio-cultural 'environment.

Educational Outcome is an objective abstraction of the subjective interpretations of education or learning processes. A qualitative field-based work would help me in capturing the complexity of the dimensions that are involved in conceptualizing educational outcomes. The integration of these various dimensions is nothing but educational outcomes.

### **Relating Labour process with Educational Outcomes**

The factors leading to negative impacts is that labor process occupies the time slot that would have been dedicated to the child's homework, tuitions, reading and exploring such that he/she would be fatigued or tired after expending their energy in performing that labor which affects their cognitive space to grasp or pay attention to things that enhance their learning. Any kind of work is basically viewed as a hindrance to child's basic interests & agency which would disable him/her undergoing full-time formal schooling and impacts his/her well-being (Kabeer 2001). Studies have shown the adverse effects of child labor on the performance of elementary and secondary school kids in standardized test scores, chances of dropping out of school (Singh 1998, Stern 1997 & Cheng 1995). Rosati & Rossi (2001) suggest that the probability of a child failing or repeating grade increases with an hour increase of work per day.

work might not affect the enrollment or attendance of the child or also the amount of time spent in school as stated by few researchers, but studies have proved that it affects the learning, his/her enthusiasm and interest in performing tasks at school (Heady 2003). For that matter, time spent in school is argued to be a poor indicator of learning, bringing the focus of policy makers to the cognitive achievement of the child than the amount of time spent on an activity (Orazem & Gunnarsson 2003).

LLECE & TIMSS data suggests an increase in damage of cognitive achievement which reflects in the outcomes with an increase in the amount of time spent by the child on any kinds of work.

Mother's participation in labor force, which is found to have a statistically significant positive impact on domestic child labor and is complementary (Sharmistha Self 2011), it is usually the elder female child who would take care of the domestic chores and in the context of slums, women work as maids and domestic helpers for wages in other houses and the female child is obliged to do the maid's work in their own house.

The age, sex, family size & number of siblings (Emerson & Souza 2002) and rank order of the birth also shapes the nature and amount of work that is/are to be invested in the child. Being the oldest increases the chances of being involved in housework. As the age increases, the expectations and the responsibilities from the child also rise in low-income households, the chance of dropout from schooling also improves with years getting added. There is also evidence for the feminization of household labor doubling the burden on female children (Biggeri, Mehrotra & Sudharshan 2009).

Few findings suggest that the family structure affects the child's educational outcomes (Evenhouse & Reilly

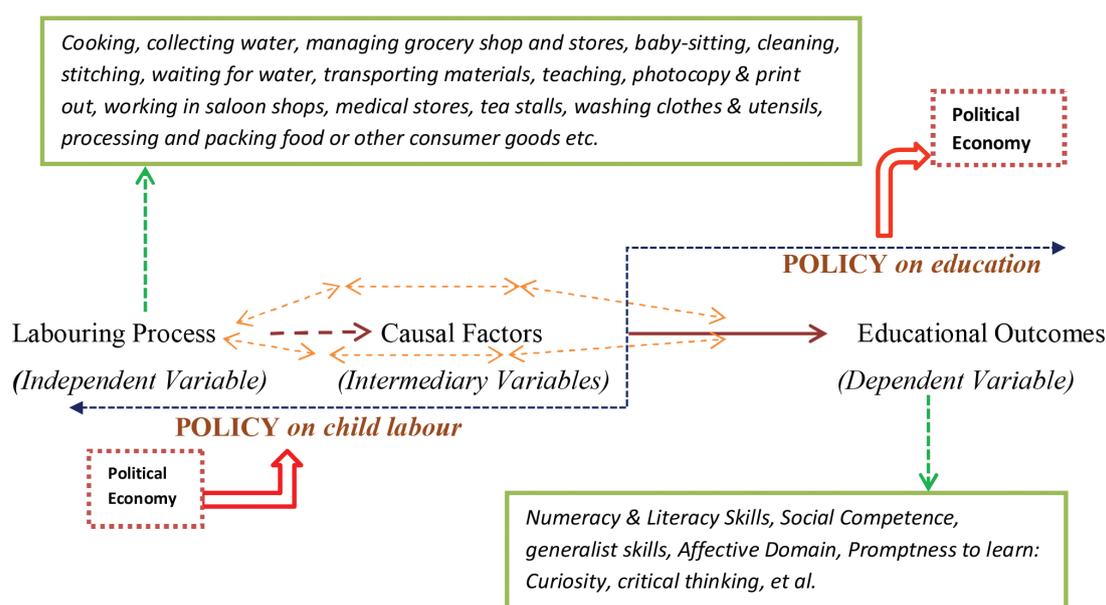
2004). Socio-economic status of the household (Basu & Van 1998) and parent's income (Ilahi, Nadeem *et al.*, 2003), especially mother's (Ray 2000), (Basu 1992) affects the prevalence of the working conditions of the child.

Research has pointed out other factors such as language spoken (if it is the same as the medium of instruction in school or the language in which the tests are administered), opportunity costs, quality of schooling, number of books present at home etc. and the last and most important parameter being how the educational outcomes are conceptualized and framed. These are detrimental in realizing the nature of the relationship and the effect child's work has over education.

Labor also gives an experiential account that shapes the child's mind in a certain way; these experiences are to be understood as a cumulative factor, thereby bringing in the factor of past work as an important characteristic of child's growth. The psyche of the child is affected by factors such as the power dynamics in the family (patriarchy, control & discipline), exposure to impolite behaviour, abuse or corporal punishments, partiality & insensitivity etc.

### Child's Labour & Education: Evidence from the Field

The conceptual framework demonstrating the working of the variables of the study through over-determination.



Children in this research site are often employed as helpers in the household enterprise such as predominantly shops selling wage-goods, in grocery stores, tea stalls, tailoring shops, saloons and slaughter houses etc. Other than these, children indulge in domestic labour or as helpers in the self-employment activity the household chooses for subsistence and a certain standard of living. Depending on the preferences and priorities and other socio-economic and cultural contexts, children spend varying amounts of time and energy on these activities. These children also go to school and pursue education. Education is a process that is continuously occurring with the everyday life of the child. The outcomes try to capture the current state of the child.

The above figure tries to model the findings in the field. The list of works taken up by the children is connoted in the rectangular box on the left. They constitute the labouring process which is the independent variable of the study. The explanation as to why only these set of works and no other categories of work can be found in the slum could be explained by the larger political economy (also historical processes) that guide the activities/labour occurring here. When children participate in these different activities, they give rise to multiple processes which again influence or shape if not determine the educational outcomes of the participants i.e. children. The right-below box connotes the constituents of educational outcomes, which again contribute to the political economy of the status quo. A policy addressing the issues of labour or education in a social context is depicted as a basic regulator which cannot be understood or analyzed by compartmentalizing the issues that they address as they have an implicit impact on the regulation and design of how other social processes occur and/or are directed to occur elsewhere. The framing and implementation of the policy are conceptualized to originate from the political economy that governs the whole social processes as a base.

A huge percentage of the children are attending government schools and it is found that people whose parents have attended college send their children to private schools. Parents whose education level is low are found to be involved in some kind of child labour

in domestic or unpaid forms in their childhood. There are instances in the samples, where parents who have dropped out of school have been involved in child labour in paid form.

Students are found to be not attending school regularly. However, they all have enrolled in schools. This evinces that the enrolment ratio in school determining the performance of the school or the child is problematic. The limitations of concepts of *Gross Enrolment Ratio* (GER) or *Net Enrolment Ratio* (NER) in talking about *Education for All* can be observed. The interviewed children have in fact been enrolled in schools but their attendance is definitively meagre, so are their educational outcomes. Child's work inside the household is a contributing factor of the absenteeism that is prevalent. Other reasons which were cited in various studies about the lack of returns in attending school from the parent's perspective are found stand verified in the study. This also reflects the quality of schooling as children, who's promptness to learn is high are also not attending schools but are participating in various unproductive (in an economic sense) activities outside the school.

### **Inferences from the Sample**

This can be observed on the field as they gendered understanding of work is still dominant wherein the girl is advised to cook, clean the utensils and look after the small siblings whereas the boys are usually engaged in a hard labour such as carrying water to the house or working in saloon or tea stalls. With the abolishment of paid/unpaid labour outside household for both girls and boys, there is still scope of reproduction of gendered spaces and gendered work, largely arising from the private sphere i.e. household.

However, the significant difference in working time is not carried to the realm of education. Any kind of work, be it feminine or masculine in a cultural sense has adverse implications on the educational of the child.

- **On Socialization process:** As the time spent in working inside the household increases, the socialization is severely limited. Social skills form an effective component of the education process. Children from younger ages are found to be more individuated and less joyful

stunting their socialization process from the childhood onwards. It is not very surprising to see less number of children moving or playing as groups and a significant number of children and parents expressing the social awkwardness they usually feel in any kinds of interaction. This is also due to different reasons such as language, status, and distrust that is prevailing but amongst children, the less experience of interaction and lack of being part of any play or study groups due to the work impairs their socialization skills.

## Conclusion

The policy of abolishing child labour in paid and unpaid forms but allowing household and domestic labour risks the well-being of the child perhaps equally. This policy, like it happened in the context of the subjects, will further regenerate and convert the other 'outside household' labour forms into those that are in the ambit of policy (i.e. inside the household) but would fail to address the exploitation or the challenges that are inherent in the labour processes and in the present relations of production. The policy might as well act as a shield to the exploitation of the child and would directly become a contradiction to the fundamental entitlement of the child's right to education (RTE). It gives a certain amount of legitimacy for the exploitation of the child withholding his/her educational outcomes to reach to the fullest potential. The study looks at the relationship between the child's labour and his/her education, in which I can ascertain that the exploitation and impacts of child's labour can only be been shifted, as there is a shift in the labour process and workplace, but would remain far from being addressed in the current social structures. This is a clear persistent challenge to the well-being of the child, at least looking the dimension of education alone. The socio-economic conditions within which a ban on child labour has taken place might de facto might only displace the workplace of the child to the household, without any significant improvement.

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