

## Materialistic values amongst abused working children in rural and urban settings in India

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the linkage of different kinds of abuse of Indian rural and urban working children on their materialistic values (MV). 200 working children (age 8-14) employed in different work types in rural as well as urban areas of India were subjected to two self developed measures namely severity of child abuse and a measure to study MV. The severity of child abuse assessed the subjects for physical, sexual and economic as well as a composite index of abuse (n=100 & non-abused=100). Physical abuse was the most frequent and severe form of abuse amongst working children. Abused subjects were significantly high on MV in comparison to their non-abused counterparts ( $t=3.48$ ,  $p<.001$ ). Male subjects were generally high on MV in comparison to females ( $t=2.15$ ,  $p<.05$ ;  $t=2.25$ ,  $p<.05$ ;  $t=2.13$ ,  $p<.05$ ). The findings suggest that MV of abused working children may be related to their abuse.

Impact of childhood abuse is detrimental and generally seen in the form of poor mental and physical health (Browne & Finkelhor, 1986; Cloitre, 1998; Wyatt, 1990) which is manifested through psychological and behavioural symptoms (Boney-McCoy & Finkelhor, 1995). Moreover, it gets associated with a number of interpersonal, psychological and spiritual problems (Beitchman, Zucker, Hood, da Costa & Ackman, 1991; Kendall-Tackett, Williams, & Finkelhor, 1993). Problems commonly seen amongst abused children are maladjustment (Caffaro-Rouget, Lang & van Santen, 1989; Conte & Schuerman, 1987; Finkelhor, 1984), aggressive and withdrawn behaviour, disturbances in relationships, problem with self-concept, physical and cognitive development (Ammerman et. Al. 1986; Azar et. Al. 1988; Fiering, Taska and Lewis, 1999; Malinosky & Hansen, 1993), fear, guilt, shame, depression, somatic complaints, sexuality and social functioning (Browne and Finkelhor, 1986; Kendall-Tackett, Williams, & Finkelhor, 1993). Different kinds of abuse such as physical (Gil, 1968), sexual (Corby, 1993; Kempe' & Kempe', 1978) and economic in the form of child labour (Faruque, 2002) are usually found in combination (Bryant and Range, 1997). This multitude of abuse is most commonly seen amongst working children (Arata & Lindman, 2002; Bryant and Range, 1997; Desai, Arias, Thompson, & Basile, 2002; Faruque, 2002; Faruque & Ahmad, 2002).

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Working children in India form a large group who are generally abused at their workplaces (Agnivesha, 1994; Burra, 1987; Chauhan and Sharma, 1997; Faruquie & Ahmad, 2002; 2006; Faruquie 2003; 2004; Lalor, 1999; Ojanuga, 1990; Pandey, 1991; Whitbeck & Simons, 1990). Workplace abuse adversely influences various psychological dimensions pertaining to socio-cultural life perspectives such as attitudes towards others and the abuser, self esteem, absenteeism from work, hostile and aggressive behaviour, thoughts of retaliation and/or committing suicide, lowered ethical standards (Kewalramani, 1992), formation of negative attitudes (Kousar et al., 1993), constriction in the self development and healthy character development (Famularo, Kinscherff and Fenton, 1990), degraded perception of moral concepts and practices of values (Faruquie & Ahmad; 2002; 2006). Some research indicates that such harsh experiences pave the way for the dominance of values with materialistic orientation (Chernoff and Davison, 1999; Bromrick and Swallow, 2001; Faruquie, 2004; Fishbein and Perez, 2000; Kewalramani, 1992).

Personality theories like self-determination (Deci & Ryan, 2000) and humanistic-existential (Fromm, 1976; Maslow, 1954; Rogers, 1961) help to classify human values (Shwartz, 1992). Intrinsic values lead people to engage in actions which tend to satisfy psychological needs whereas, extrinsic values are other-based; and help forming goals like material achievement and fame (Kasser, 2002). Domination of extrinsic orientation in the value system leads to various psycho-social problems such as lower self-actualization, depersonalisation, increased depression, anxiety, narcissism and substance problems in comparison to people with dominated intrinsic values (Kasser & Ryan, 1993; 1996; 2001; Richins, 1994). Certain life experiences such as abuse are responsible for a shift in the orientation of value system from intrinsic to extrinsic (Bromrick and Swallow, 2001; Chernoff and Davison, 1999; Faruquie & Ahmad, 2002; 2004; Fishbein and Perez, 2000; Harthshorne & May, 1928; Kluckhohn, 1955; McGehee, 1983). This materialism gets promoted amongst abused children as monetary gains contribute to imparting a sense of independence, social status and security (Faruquie, 2002; 2004; Suar, 2000). Furthermore, characteristics and manifestation of materialistic values vary in rural and urban settings (Gill & Matthews, 1995; Kwong, 1994; Moschis & Churchill, 1978; Westhead & Wright, 1998).

This research aims to investigate the impact of different abuses of rural and urban working children on their materialistic values. It also aims to identify significant predictors of high materialistic values.

Questions addressed include:

- Do abuse/s and their severity influence the materialistic values amongst working children?
- Does working children's status of being rural or urban have any influence on their materialistic values?
- Do age and sex influence a working child's status on materialistic values?

## Methods

### *Participants*

200 working children age ranging from 8 to 14 years (conforming ILO norms of age of child labour below 15 years) were interviewed. Out of these, 100 had been subjected to physical, sexual, economic or multiple abuses. Abused subjects amongst working children were identified with the help of volunteers, who belonged to the subjects' locality or workplace, and knew the details of abuse of subjects. All working children were picked from urban as well as rural areas. Urban children worked under non-organised settings such as lock factories, brassware factories, motor garages, roadside small hotels, rag picking and as domestic helps. Rural children were tobacco processing labourers, *bidi* (country made cheap cigarette) makers, *zari* (embroidery handicraft) workers, kiln labourers, construction

labourers and agricultural labourers. The remaining 100 were non-abused working children under mixed rural and urban settings.

*Procedure:*

Informed consent of children as well as their parents or caretakers was obtained before conducting the interviews.

*Measures*

*Measure of Severity of Child Abuse:* In line with the method used by Bryant and Range (1997), a measure to study type and severity of abuse was developed which rated physical, sexual and economic abuses as mild, moderate or severe on an interval scale. This measure enabled the sample to be divided according to the levels of abuse on its scoring such as 0 (not abused), 1 (mild), 2 (moderate), and 3 (high).

*Measure to study materialistic values:* To investigate subjects' materialistic value priorities on a continuum, a scale was developed following rational-theoretical methods (Kelly, 1969) representing culturally appropriate items related to certain value domains. These value domains were identified through referring literature of Mahatma Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, Swami Vivekananda and other spiritual leaders of Indian culture. Identified domains were *selfishness, combative behaviour for gains, charity, self abnegation, flattery, greed, self control, self centricism, consumerism, honesty, equity, arrogance, caring for others, austerity, fun/pleasure, patience, forgiveness, wealth, power and righteousness* etc. Presentation of the items was similar to Allport-Vernon-Lindsey Scale of Values (1951). Scale consisted 18 items each presenting a pair of material value – non-material value and subject had to choose one (either material or non-material value) as a solution of the given issue in the item. A score of one was assigned to each item which indicated subject's materialistic preference. Total score of a subject indicated materialistic value index which ranged from zero to 18. Item analysis (Guilford, 1954) yielded the Cronbach's alpha of .701 (N = 200) indicating reasonable internal consistency.

*Analysis*

Student's t-test was applied to compare means of various groups on materialistic values. To identify significant predictors of high materialistic values, binary logistic regression (Bonney, 1987; Field, 2000; Le Cessie & Van Houwelingen, 1994; Pregibon, 1981; Press & Wilson, 1978) was conducted. For this analysis, dependent variable was dichotomised in the categories of high and low materialistic values by quartile split (Jaccard, Turrisi & Wan, 1990; Waller & Meehl, 1998; Watkins et. al., 2002). Similarly age groups were identified using quartile split. Analyses were conducted with SPSS software.

## Results

All abused children experienced physical abuse of different levels whereas 33% of abused subjects experienced sexual abuse and 90% of them experienced economic abuse. Mean values of their physical abuse was 2.34 (SD=.65), sexual abuse 0.51 (SD=0.81) and economic abuse was 1.96 (SD=0.95). Mean value of composite abuse was 4.81 (SD=1.41) experienced by the abused group of working children.

### Showing difference between various groups on the counts of materialistic values

	Groups compared	Mean	S. D.	t	df
1.	Non Abused	5.10	2.39	3.48**	198
	Abused	6.49	3.20		
2.	Non Abused males	5.73	1.87	2.15*	107

	Abused males	6.90	3.15		
3.	Non-abused females	4.66	2.62	1.56	89
	Abused females	5.63	3.17		
4.	Non abused male	5.73	1.87	2.25*	98
	Non abused female	4.66	2.62		
5.	Non abused urban	5.29	2.54	1.01	98
	Non abused rural	4.78	2.11		
6.	Low age non-abused	5.61	2.18	0.10	57
	High age non-abused	5.55	2.53		
7.	Abused male	6.90	3.15	1.88	98
	Abused female	5.63	3.17		
8.	Low age abused	6.40	2.58	0.370	64
	High age abused	6.11	3.56		
9.	Abused Urban	6.94	3.53	1.52	98
	Abused Rural	5.98	2.72		
10.	Urban Male	6.60	3.00	2.13*	114
	Urban Female	5.37	3.18		
11.	Abused Urban Male	7.25	3.52	0.918	51
	Abused Urban Female	6.29	3.57		
12.	Abused Rural Male	6.50	2.68	1.977	45
	Abused Rural Female	4.87	2.56		

\* p < .05, \*\*p < .01

Impact of composite value of abuses was found on materialistic values as abused and non-abused working children differed. Similarly, abused and non-abused male children differed whereas, abused and non-abused female subjects were not having a statistically significant difference.

Within both the groups, samples did not differ significantly in materialistic values on the basis of gender, age and status except in non-abused males and non-abused females.

### Discussion

These findings indicate that materialistic values of working children may be related to the abuse they experience. Abused children in our sample were more likely to have higher levels of materialistic values in comparison to their non-abused counterparts. Moreover, influence of demographic factors such as age, gender and status was minimal as their effect was found

statistically non-significant. However the difference in the groups of abused and non-abused males and non-abused males and females was statistically significant.

It is important to observe the distribution pattern of different abuses amongst working children. Average index of physical abuse shows its high severity which is quite consistent in the sample. On the other hand, sexual abuse remains at very low side with a high variability. In fact, all working children in the sample are physically abused and most of them have experienced its severe form whereas sexual abuse is rather rare and our sample consists of very few cases of high sexual abuse. Economic abuse is somewhat equally distributed. Such a trend of abuse in the sample is quite a representative as workplace environments are generally abusive and employers are focused on exacting labour from children. In due course, they often use physical assault to keep their manpower working. Similar for economic abuse as employers are not very happy to pay their workers instantly. With sexual abuse, though its mild level prevails at workplace, its severe form is rarely uncovered.

The importance of these observations has implications for our understanding of the socialization process of working children who face harsh realities in their lives. Their ideals and beliefs are constructed through the active interpretation of a variable external environment (Misra, Srivastava & Gupta, 1999). Abused children may have been socialised to be more acquisitive as our sample shows a bias towards materialistic values over the non-materialistic values, which are normally considered to be higher, more distinctively human values. This supports the conclusion provided by McGehee (1983) that the role of work life combined with adverse work conditions, social environment of family and workplace help to develop their materialistic values. It appears both at the level of family and workplace that child labour with its high probability of abuse, and an adverse social environment brings marked change in their value orientation, pushing it towards a materialistic orientation. Money-oriented behaviour may be justified as balanced or appropriate approach towards the attainment of wealth. Sometimes this behaviour changes due to circumstances such as abusive hardships and may turn into an approach focussed towards the earning of money. An increased level of materialistic values amongst the poor abused children seems to be the outcome of this.

The relationship of high materialistic values with physical abuse can be understood in the light of "betrayal trauma theory" in which interpersonal trauma vary in degree of dependency in the victim - perpetrator relationship. Abuse perpetrated by an employer on whom the victim is dependent may lead to distorted psycho-social systems of the victim (Freyd, 2001; Goldberg & Freyd, 2006). This is a kind of "spiritual injury" emanating from violation of a social contract which modifies the value system which moves opposite to the spiritual or positive values (Lawson et. al., 1998).

We find greater association of economic abuse with high materialistic values in rural sample. This indicates a direct intervention of a socio-cultural system in rural areas where family bonding, care and identity is generally higher in comparison to urban working children who are totally more dependent on their employers. Dissatisfaction due to high economic values gives rise to a materialistic orientation amongst rural children. However, physical and sexual abuse do not have such strong influence for two possible reasons. First, physical abuse is to some extent an expected treatment to a rural working child. Culturally, parents suggest employers should correct their child through physical punishment. Mild or moderate levels of such punishments do not generally invoke the sense of betrayal trauma because of parental endorsement. On the other hand, sexual abuse seldom takes a severe form due to more interconnected rural society and sex being a major taboo.

Though the distribution of materialistic values is almost homogeneous across the groups, still we find non-abused female working children having lower level of materialistic values in

comparison to non-abused male working children. Our findings seem to be concordant with Bromerick and Swallow (2001) who classified girls as oriented towards others such as family and friends whereas boys as relatively selfish.

Sexual abuse has not been found particularly influencing materialistic values overall. However, it is contributing to the impact of composite abuse and certainly influencing materialistic values particularly in boys. Previous research such as Futa, Hsu and Hansen (2001) have established that childhood sexual abuse influences values such as collectivity, conformity, inconspicuousness, middle position virtue, shame, self-control, and fatalism. Values which correlate positively with materialistic values grow with sexual abuse and positive values and are influenced detrimentally (Chernoff & Davison, 1999).

There is a negative association between materialistic values and well-being (a working child's well being in terms of socio-economic condition) primarily due to poor satisfaction of inherent psychological needs for security and esteem (Kasser, 2003). With a hedonistic viewpoint we can enquire how the phenomenon takes place. Fraenkel proposed an approach of values reported by Ryan (1985) involving seven steps: (a) to identify the dilemma; (b) to identify the alternatives; (c) to predict the consequences of each alternative; (d) to predict the short and long term consequences; (e) to collect the consequential evidence of each alternative; (f) to assess the correctness of each consequence according to a number of criteria based on the enhancement or diminution of human dignity; and (g) to decide on a course of action. Thus the practice of materialistic values reflect a well calculated line of action mediated by certain external factors such as abuse, low goal attainment (Oishi, et al, 1999) and seeking social honour (Clammer, 1985; David 1994; Murray & Perera, 1996) etc.

This study supports the idea that children who experience abuse, generally work in a pre-shaped abusive and hostile environment which lacks opportunities of good learning. Experiences by physical, sexual and economic hardships produce an environment conducive for negative values to be internalised in the child's behaviour.

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