

Type of work and physical abuse of child labourers and their moral development.

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ABSTRACT

Realizing that abolition of child labour is practically infeasible, researchers lately have shifted their interest in the personal lives of child labourers using theoretical models such as ethno-theories, eco-culture and psycho-social development. The impact of such new drive on the lives of child labourers, however, is yet to be assessed but it has certainly thrown light on the finer aspects such as micro-culture of economic activities. Current research follows a quantitative approach to explore the work culture at different types of workplaces of child labourers and their physical abuse. It also studies the development of an essential humane aspect i.e. moral development and how far it is affected by the work culture and physical abuse. The study also tries to identify causation between the studied variables using an approachable sample of physically abused child labourers. Finally, the researcher tries to explain the intricacies of the cultural setup in which child labourers grow.

To make more perceivable and relevant the complexity of child labour, the neoclassical approach to the value of children has shifted the focus of social scientists and policy makers from poverty indicators to their personal and family contexts and their resultant social and educational growth. Child labourers not only provide crucial contribution to their family's subsistence but also help in production of the goods that reach the market at prices far below their labour value. In the midst of the need to realize self-esteem through paid work and international moral pressure on the government, the poor child gets unwittingly lost somewhere while facing harsh realities and abuse at work places.

Many countries have now either ratified or adopted modified versions of child labour legislation prepared and propagated by the ILO (ILO, 1988, ILO, 1991). Legislation, however, selects chronological age as the universal measure of biological and psychological maturity, and it rejects cultural and social meanings attached to the local systems (La Fontaine, 1978). Furthermore, the current child labour policies emanating from ratifications and legislations fail to address the quality of their lives instead reinforce paradoxically children's vulnerability to exploitation (Nieuwenhuys, 1996) and unknowingly push them further into a horrifying work-culture of unorganized settings. The work that children do in dingy, dark workplaces is likely to remain hidden because children are not in close contact with supportive adult spokespersons and the nature of their work may also be illicit or illegal

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(Cluver et al, 2007). Furthermore, working children incessantly face abuses of many kinds at their work places, mainly the physical abuse. Physical abuse is rampant at workplaces and its type and severity varies with the type of work. Apprehension of losing their job keeps them gagged regarding prevalent abuses with and around them.

Physical abuse of children is a common and worldwide problem with high incidence in India (WHO, 2006). World Health Organization (2006) defines physical abuse as the intentional use of physical force against a child that results in - or has a high likelihood of resulting in - harm for the child's health, survival, development or dignity. This includes hitting, beating, kicking, shaking, biting, strangling, scalding, burning, poisoning and suffocating. Huge volume of scientific evidence developed over the decades proves that physical abuse is detrimental to a child's growth at physiological, behavioral, cognitive and social levels (Dubowitz and Bennett, 2007). Research findings suggest that children who have experienced physical abuse are at increased risk of behavioral and emotional problems, relationship difficulties, educational underachievement and taking health risks such as substance abuse and self-injurious behavior (Kaplan, Pelcovitz and Labruna, 1999; Kendall-Tackett, Williams and Finkelhor, 1993; Yates, 2004). Likewise, physical abuse of working children which occurs differently under different situations influences them deeply at different levels (Edmonds & Shreshtha, 2014; Fafchamps & Wahba, 2006).

Author's close observation of the work life of child labourers revealed that levels of their maltreatment varies according to the type of work they are doing. It is also entwined with adapting to the 'required' bad practices inherent to the work culture. Normally, these practices are considered contrary to the requirement for the normal progression of a child's personality. For example, a trainee child at a motor garage has to learn to trick and cheat the customers. Failing to perform results in employer's wrath manifested with verbal and physical abuse. First-hand versions from employers and victims revealed that even heavy metallic tools such as spanners were used in implementation. On the other hand, a child as domestic help has a straightforward likelihood of getting physical punishment which is quite much dependent on the irritability and tolerance of the employer. This is of extreme concern that workplaces chronically uphold a culture which facilitates an operant learning of badness and immorality for the child labourers.

The cultural ecology of workplaces provides a developmental platform for a working child. The phenomenon explained here could well be understood with the help of the eco-cultural model of Berry (1975, 1995) which says that human development and behavior are viewed as adaptive to cultural and biological features of populations, which themselves are adaptive to ecological context. An explanation rather direct to the context has been given by Whiting (1980) which suggest that children's social behavior is a product of its immediate settings, including the people with whom children routinely interact, the places where they spend time together, and the roles they are assigned. Along with other developmental aspects of a child, the cultural settings and child abuse detrimentally influence the normal progression of morality amongst child labourers. (Faruquie, 2002; Faruquie & Ahmed, 2002).

Cognitive developmental theorists consider moral development as stage based phenomenon which unfolds throughout a lifespan (Piaget, 1932 & 1965, Kohlberg, 1958, 1964, 1976). Moral judgement and actual moral practices are the manifestations of the process of moral growth or development. Moral judgement specifically involves the consideration of the ethics of various courses of action and weighing of costs and benefits to the actor, the beneficiary, and the social order (Gelfand & Hartmann, 1980). It is a decision in the face of any moral dilemma which indicates the cognitive capacity to perceive the relationship between an abstract principle and an actual behavior and to judge the behavior as right or wrong, good or bad (Sinha & Verma, 1972). This cognitive-developmental concept of moral growth has been established as being global or undifferentiated by various cross-cultural

researches (Eckensberger, 1994; Edwards, 1987; Gielen, 1991; Moon, 1986; Snarey, 1985; Vine, 1986). In specific context of India, Sengupta, Saraswathi and Konantambigi (1994) and Vasudev (1983) argued that socialization practices limit or mold moral thinking in prescribed ways associated with justice reasoning, which leads to the principle of *ahimsa* (non-violence).

In a scenario where a certain set of India's children i.e. child labourers unquestionably undergo their regular moral progression, it is indeed important to see that how far this essentially humane aspect is distorted due to their physical abuse and uniquely bad culture of their workplaces. Therefore, the present research tries to identify the contingent relationship of the severity of physical abuse of child labourers with different kinds of works they are involved in. The study is also an effort to find causation between the studied variables and aspects of moral development in an approachable sample of child labourers.

The following three research objectives were framed on the basis of the review of previous literature and researcher's observation of the field situation:

Objectives:

1. To study the impact of physical abuse and type of work on moral judgement and moral practices.
2. To study type of work, occurrence of abuse, moral judgement and moral practices with respect to age and sex.

Method:

Description of sample:

89 child labourers age ranging 8 - 14 years (as per ILO norms) and working in non-organised settings in Aligarh city were interviewed. These children were engaged in different types of jobs. All of them personally confirmed occurrence of physical abuse with themselves. Their work wise distribution has been given in the table below:

Table 1
Gender wise distribution of sample into different types of work

Subjects' gender	Type of work						Total
	Lock maker at home	Domestic helper	Small hotel helper	Lock maker at factory	Butcher's shop helper	Motor garage helper	
Male	3	2	15	19	5	8	52
Female	25	8	2	2	0	0	37
Total	28	10	17	21	5	8	89

Measures used:

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 abuse 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).

Moral Judgement Test:

Moral Judgement Test developed by Sinha and Verma (1968) which is based on the cognitive moral development theories of Jean Piaget (1932) and Lawrence Kohlberg (1968) was used. This test has been constructed for use with Indian children and based on fourteen positive and negative moral concepts (virtues and vices) prevalent in Indian culture. The

seven positive moral concepts or virtues are *Ahimsa* (non-violence), sense of duty, respect, purity, forgiveness, *punya* (merit) and truth. Seven negative moral concepts or vices are betrayal of faith, greed, anger, lie, revenge, stealing and sin. The test consists of a number of items on which the subjects had to take moral decisions, group moral contexts in the statements, work out the relationship between words with moral connotation, evaluate a given piece of action, use logical reasoning in moral problems and select the appropriate definitions of the moral values. Authors using split-half method had adjudged reliability of the test to be 0.93. Prior use of this test with working children (Faruque & Ahmad, 2002; Faruque, 2002) led to some modifications to make it appropriate for the population of working children.

Moral Practice Test:

In order to test the actual practice of moral concepts which the subjects knew and judged, this test was developed using rational-theoretical approach. There were seven items which were based on seven distinct dimensions of morality viz, respect of older, control over telling a lie, control over deception, control over stealing, control over anger, control over revenge and control over greed. The questionnaire intended to enquire subjects' actual practice of these moral behaviours in their daily lives. Questionnaire was to be administered to parents, employers or peers of the subjects who closely knew their behaviour.

Procedure:

Selected child labourers were interviewed to assess the levels of their moral judgement. Their employers, peers or parents were interviewed to assess the level of their moral practices. Those who confirmed occurrence of physical abuse, their level of severity of abuse was determined with the help of prepared scale. Only those victims were included in the study whose account of physical abuse was confirmed by peers, parents or any other person. Data was coded / scored and organised in a computer spreadsheet.

Analysis:

Chi-square was used to find out association between categorical variables. To calculate the effect size of these associations, Cramer's V was used. This test was chosen because our contingency tables contained more than two categories. Fisher's exact tests for significance were also applied to the Chi-square statistics where frequencies were too low in the distributions.

Student's independent samples t-test was used to see the significance of difference between means of sub-groups such as gender and age range. High and low age groups were identified through quartile splits. Entire analyses were conducted using SPSS software.

Results:

Chi-square statistics helped to identify associations of type of work with other variables and Cramer's V helped to estimate the size of effect of these associations. The analysis revealed dynamic associations (and their effect sizes) between gender and type of work $\chi^2(5) = 56.67$, $p < .001$; $V = .798$, $p < .001$, physical abuse and type of work $\chi^2(10) = 19.322$, $p < .05$; $V = .329$, $p < .05$, age and type of work $\chi^2(5) = 3.81$, p non-significant; $V = .305$, p non-significant, MJI (categorized) and type of work $\chi^2(10) = 13.649$, p non-significant; $V = .277$, p non-significant, MPI (categorized) and type of work $\chi^2(10) = 43.492$, $p < .001$; $V = .494$, $p < .001$. This seems to represent the fact that child labourers (or their parents) generally choose the type of their work based on their gender. Cramer's effect size for this association is very high signifying that gender has very high bearing on the choice of work. These results also represent that different types of work determine different levels of physical punishment or abuse at work place. Some types of work have more likelihood of occurrence or severity of

physical abuse whereas others have less. We got medium effect size for this association indicating a moderate strength of relationship. The most interesting finding is strong association of type of work with actual moral practices with a highly significant effect size. This indicates that different type of work employ different levels of moral practices which in turn influence the process of moral progression amongst child labourers. High significance of effect size communicates that such a phenomenon is unlikely to have happened by chance. We did not find significant association of type of work with age of the subjects and their moral judgement.

Likewise, categorized versions of our dependent variables viz moral judgement and moral practices were also tested for association with physical abuse. Results revealed that moral judgement $\chi^2(4) = 11.926$, $p = .017$; $V = .259$, $p = .017$ had significant association with physical abuse with low to medium effect size whereas moral practices $\chi^2(4) = 21.719$, $p < .001$; $V = .349$, $p < .001$ were strongly associated to physical abuse with an average effect size. These results clearly indicate that physical abuse has some bearing on both the aspects of morality amongst child labourers.

Table 2
Showing difference between male and female subjects on moral judgement, moral practices and experience of severity of abuse

	Gender	N	Mean	S. D.	T	df	Sig.
Physical Abuse	Male	52	2.54	.576	3.087	87	.003
	Female	37	2.16	.553			
Moral Judgment	Male	52	22.5577	4.53056	1.443	87	.153
	Female	37	21.0811	5.06282			
Moral Practice	Male	52	12.1923	3.49250	-4.124	87	<.001
	Female	37	15.0811	2.89039			

An observation of the above table indicates statistically significant difference between male and female children on the level of physical abuse they received. Results clearly indicate that male subjects received harsher physical abuse as compared to their female counterparts. The table also shows that female subjects were higher on actual practice of morality whereas there was no significant difference in terms of their moral judgement.

Table 3
Showing difference between subjects of high and low age on moral judgement, moral practices and experience of severity of abuse

	Age	N	Mean	S. D.	T	df	Sig.
Physical Abuse	High	19	2.53	.576	1.464	39	.151
	Low	22	2.23	.553			
Moral Judgment	High	19	24.4737	5.48096	2.403	39	.021
	Low	22	20.5909	4.86640			
Moral Practice	High	19	12.6316	3.09499	-1.335	39	.190
	Low	22	14.2273	4.34173			

An observation of the above table indicates statistically significant difference between the subjects representing high age group and low age group on the level of moral judgement in the sense that older subjects showed higher level of moral judgement. These two groups however did not show statistically significant difference on the severity of physical abuse they received and their actual moral practices.

Discussion:

Irrespective of they work or they do not, the mere fact of their being children sets children ideologically apart as a category of people who deserve space for growing as a normal human beings. Although working for pay offers the poor and underprivileged children an opportunity for self-respect, it also entails sacrificing their childhood, and to adapt what is absolutely opposite to a normal advancement of childhood.

The findings of this research clearly indicate that child labourers' work places are not only dominated by an abusive culture but this work environment is evidently distorting their standard moral and social growth. This is intriguing to realize that globally, childhood is a highly contested domain still children are neglected or allowed to face the hardships of their workplaces. Moreover, the agency of children in creation and helping to run their families is also overlooked no matter how hazardous conditions they have been dealing with. The first question at this juncture comes forward that why child labourers choose to join or land into a certain type of work? Researchers, however, suggest that chronic poverty in the form of lack of basic income underlies a large proportion of harmful work done by children (Edmonds&Shreshtha, 2012). The phenomenon of child labour comes with a paradox of good economics and survival of the poor. The most glaring confusion is undoubtedly the one between the moral oppression and the economic exploitation of children (Morice, 1981, Nieuwenhuys, 1995). Reference to broad and ahistorical causes of the oppression of children such as poverty, illiteracy, backwardness, greed and cruelty fail to go beyond the mere description of oppression and ignore the historical and social conditioning of exploitation (Sahoo, 1995).

We clearly see gender based difference in the choice of work types. Boys are generally employed in works running under hazardous and abusive environment. Girls mainly choose to go for domestic help or getting home-based jobs (e.g. from hardware factories) in which they develop countable units at home. Kakar (1981) seems to have provided explanation that girls are trained early to accept and internalize the feminine ideals of devotion to the family. By working from home, they get more opportunity to carry out their family related duties and also get safety from social hazards at the factories. Likewise, age is also considered while choosing a work type. This factor however did not show a significant influence on the choice of work in our study but as researchers argue, age certainly plays its developmental role on morality. Regarding consideration of age on the choice of work type, Anthropologists have helped to disclose that age is used with gender as the justification for the value accorded to work and children's appropriateness to the work (Nieuwenhuys, 1996).

Anthropologists have also uncovered how children's work plays a cardinal role in the intricate and extensive family sustenance patterns that becomes the core support system in the developing world. While servicing the immediate household is mandatory task for a young child, going for a paid work is mandatory for a relatively older child (Caldwell,1982, Kayongo-Male, 1984, Morice, 1982, Slazar, 1991).

Central to any kind of culture are rules as normative regulators for the ethical evaluation of individual actions and social interactions (Geertz, 1973). Morality is one such normative standard which takes place through the process of learning (Bandura, 1969) or positioned in our instincts (Elgmork, 1988). The most interesting finding in our research is the evidence of normal moral progression of a child as we see that one of its indicators i.e.

moral judgement is progressing with age. Our research has shown it to be a predictable association signifying that child labourers attain age appropriate knowledge of moral concepts. Our second stage of predictive analysis however revealed that they do not actually practice those concepts of morality. The noticeable phenomenon is that physical abuse is influencing both the aspects of morality, however moral judgement without predictability. As theories support, gender predicts moral practices with fair results favouring the girls. Thus we see distinct effects of workplace ecology, physical abuse, age and gender on moral development.

While explaining female morality, Gilligan (1982) introduced "morality of responsibility and care" whereas Simpson and Graham (1971) emphasized on contexts such as different gender-specific role coercions and stimulating conditions in a culture that determine gender differences in morality. Regarding age, initial cognitive developmental theorists (Piaget, 1932, 1965; Kohlberg, 1969, 1976) constructed their explanation on stage based progression in which new stages of morality unfold as age progresses. Therefore, age being as predictive factor of knowledge of moral concepts titled in our study as ability of moral judgement has been approved.

Impact of physical abuse as a distorting agent on the progression of moral development has been approved and theorized earlier too. While May (1998) showed impact of physical abuse on one of the aspects of Kohlbergian morality namely 'Principled Morality', Miltenberg and Singer (2000) analysed recurrence of affective problems in abuse survivors which were found to be connected to moral confusion and insoluble moral dilemmas. Researchers like Graziano and Mills (1992) considered mediating factors while studying effects of abuse on psychological functioning. The mediating factors e.g. quality of the parent-child relationship, poverty, type and severity of abuse, child's developmental stage, and degree to which development is disrupted clearly elaborate a child labourer's ecological system. They were interestingly similar on outcomes too which are common to our child labourers such as low self-control, high aggression, less empathy, poorer cognitive skills and academic performance, and less moral development. Elbedour et al (1997) further justified that these findings support the hypothesis that moral reasoning amongst targeted children is significantly linked to real-life situations and resources.

A child's development is possibly multidirectional and essentially contextualized. From the multitude of possible life-course trajectories, children active in their specific contexts construct their individually unique life courses. It is claimed here that this construction process is based on mutual constraining of the child by the environment, and of the environment by the child. In the specific context of the work place, a child labour moving around in an abusive work environment comes under the spell of multitudes of feelings such as powerlessness/helplessness, fantasized aggressive retaliation, negative image of the batterer, feeling controlled by the employer/perpetrator, remorse, contradiction, affective experiences while witnessing a peer's battering (anger, fear, sadness, and uncertainty) and the family's silence/compromise about his maltreatment in the fear of losing the job.

Although social learning theory and other traditional models of explaining violence and abusive interactions are valuable in helping to understand the feelings and outcomes of the affected child labourers, this study's findings suggest that no one theory encompasses all of the complex aspects of this phenomenon. This researcher proposes that a multi-theoretical approach using a combination of trauma theory, social learning theory, object relations theory, and family systems theory may provide a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of these children's perceptions, interpretations, fears, aspirations and concerns along with their own position as bread winners of their families. In the light of previously stated theories and also the cultural ecology of the work places of child labourers, this researcher tries to theorize the developmental aspects of these children.

Suggestions for further research:

This researcher emphasizes the need of deeper knowledge into the cultural life of child labourers. Therefore, qualitative research and ethnographic research elaborating all three facets of the developmental singularity would be required to get clear picture of child labourers' lives.

Policy implications:

The findings of this study and a developmental approach to the ecologies of a child labour opens up wider opportunities for the policy makers and stakeholders. They might like to consider the personal lives and developmental patterns of child labourers while designing welfare or ameliorative programmes for them. As the current study has highlighted that one of the most humane aspects of psycho-social development i.e. moral development is adversely affected by various factors altogether ---- work type and environment, physical abuse and the upbringing of a poor child who is groomed by his family to become a child labour. Theoretically, the hypothesised sequence of causes and consequences are linked together by a developing child (labour) through culturally structured environment. Practically, specially designed interventions trying to improve the 'causes' might end up improving the 'outcomes' of child labourers---one of those certainly is moral development.

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