

Exploration of child labor



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Child Labor, a Global Problem with Local Causes Christopher King, Debra Hang - Aguayo, India Williams University of Phoenix It is hard to imagine that in 2009 that child labor still exists. However, it is true that children all over the world are waking up and going to work instead of going to school. As the gap between the rich and poor grows, more children will be forced to give up school for work. Is there an answer to this problem that will lead to the elimination of the dilemma? Has the practice been in place for so long that it has become so accepted that there is no viable solution?

Is it possible to protect the children of the world by speaking up for those who are unable to speak for themselves? Within the exploration of the global cruelty of child labor, this paper will look at the nature of societies that breed the problem. In addition, there will be a focus on the social issues that lead to that society's rationalization of this gross violation of children's rights. Lastly, we will examine some of the global initiatives and interventions that have been established to combat child labor.

The Child Labor Education Project outlines the characteristics of child labor as including at least one of the following:

- Violates a nation's minimum age laws
- Threatens children's physical, mental, or emotional well-being
- Involves intolerable abuse, such as child slavery, child trafficking, debt bondage, forced labor, or illicit activities
- Prevents children from going to school
- Uses children to undermine labor standards

Child labor is found worldwide in industries such as agriculture, manufacturing, mining, domestic service, hotels and restaurants, even the atrocities of drug trafficking and prostitution.

Child labor has existed in many nations for centuries, including the United States until the early 1900s. In spite of a near universal understanding of labor standards throughout the world, there are many obstacles that hinder the enforcement of humane labor standards, such as the strains caused by a growing global economy, global competition and free trade (Child Labor Public Education Project). When looking into the nature of societies that perpetuate child labor, it has been found that the roots of the problem are often the same regardless of the country, race or religious background of those who lose their childhood to forced labor.

Furthermore, the family practice of instilling traditional skills in their children inevitably leads to the trap of child labor, as they will never have the opportunity to learn anything else (Causes of Child Labour). The industrial revolution magnified circumstances that encouraged child labor globally. As nations around the world continue to struggle on a daily basis just to survive, it remains an easy answer to have their children work to bring home even a tiny sum of money to keep food on the table.

Illiterate parents who are themselves uneducated are unable to come to the realization of the damage they are causing by requiring their small children to work. In addition, the idea that these children are forced to work instead of going to school causes an additional lack of education for the child, which ultimately perpetuates the problem from generation to generation. Simply put, the truths about the benefits of education are indistinguishable to the parents who are untrained themselves. Ultimately, the number of youth who are affected by child labor is immense.

As poverty stricken (sic) countries continue to fight the social issues confronting them and struggle to survive, child labor will persist. According to UNICEF, approximately 158 million children (one in six children in the world) between the ages of five and 14 are victims of child labor. Millions of these children are exposed to hazardous conditions like working in mines, working with pesticides and chemicals in agricultural work, and working with dangerous machinery. Children living in poverty and in rural areas are the most likely to be engaged in child labor.

Some other major factors that contribute to child labor include parental illiteracy, lack of education, exploitation of cheap labor, family expectations and traditions, limited choices for women and public opinion that downplays the risk of early work for children. Children are often given employment because they are easier to exploit than adults are. Children are considered powerless and paid much less than their parents who are often unemployed or underemployed. Child labor is often considered a problem that only affects developing countries, but child labor is a global issue.

Asia, Africa and Latin America have the highest rates of child labor, but the United States, Canada, Europe and other wealthy nations also employ a small number of child laborers. Some of the most common jobs for child laborers include domestic servants, factory workers, farmers and miners. In poverty-stricken areas, it is not uncommon for a child to desert school and begin work in order to provide for themselves and their families. Boys often work in mines, farms and factories, while girls are trained in house duties and sent off to become domestic servants.

Domestic servants are especially at risk of becoming victims of physical and sexual abuse by their employers. International economic trends have also increased the amount of child labor in poor, developing countries. “ Debt, bloated military budgets and structural adjustment programs imposed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, have eroded the capacity of many governments to provide education and services for children, and have also pushed up prices for basic necessities” (UNICEF, 2008).

The lack of education in these areas has undoubtedly encouraged children to begin work, while government indebtedness and recession has made it necessary for children to work and provide supplemental sources of income for their families. Children perform some types of low status work because they come from minority groups or populations that have long suffered discrimination. " In northern Europe, for example, child laborers are likely to be African or Turkish; in Argentina, many are Bolivian or Paraguayan; in Thailand, many are from Myanmar” (UNICEF, 2008) all groups that have suffered and been victims of discrimination and racism.

According to Steven J. Law, millions of children are trapped in mind-numbing labor that is barely able to provide enough money to survive. Forced labor stunts the creativity and potential of tomorrow’s workers. While it is imperative to help children out of the worst forms of child labor, it is also necessary to ensure that families have meaningful avenues of support that will prevent children from dangerous and abusive labor (Law, 2005).

However, other agencies and experts believe that raising the level of awareness throughout the world is the first step in reducing or eliminating child labor.

The 25 years of struggle of freedom from slavery has given us the experience that the illicit trade of our times-human trafficking cannot be stopped without a mass movement. Law is important and equally important is the political will substantiated with adequate resources and a prompt and honest enforcement mechanism. But, until and unless the very ordinary people are prepared to say 'NO' to the sale and slavery of children, women and men, complete abolition of this inhuman crime will remain a distant dream (Satyarthi).

Yet, the United Nations takes a third approach, an all-encompassing line of attack that seeks to fight the war against child labor on all fronts. The need to strengthen and widen the worldwide movement against child labour is a major theme. A growing set of global actors has emerged over the last decade, including other UN-system agencies. Donors have been central to putting child labour on the international agenda. The role of employers' and workers' organizations of course remains central to child labour elimination efforts, and the report provides examples of important initiatives taken by them over the last four years.

It also examines the challenge presented by the growth of the informal economy where much of the world's child labour, particularly its worst forms, is to be found. It also provides examples of how employers and trade unions are broadening their partnerships with other civil society actors, for example through sector alliances in industries such as sporting goods and agriculture (International Labor Office). It is apparent that the solution to the endeavor of eradicating child labor is a daunting task. A task will likely require a

combined effort of multiple agencies, lay people, professionals and advocates.

In due course, through a well-organized consortium of both public and private entities, utilizing multiple weapons to achieve a singular objective, child labor that inhibits human growth and development of the world's most vulnerable people can be minimized and ultimately eliminated. This paper was developed in hopes of providing a preliminary understanding of the societies that enable child labor, we have shown some of the social issues that are a contributing factor to the problem, and there has been a closer look at the various intervention strategies being developed.

Overall, it is hoped that there has been enough information presented in a meaningful manner that urges the reader to take a closer look at the problem and provides the spark to initiate a local response to a global problem. References Causes of Child Labour. (n. d.). Retrieved August 31, 2009, from Child Labor. in Web site: [http://www. childlabor](http://www.childlabor). in Child Labor Public Education Project. (n. d.). Retrieved August 31, 2009, from University of Iowa Web site: [http://continuetolearn. uiowa. edu](http://continuetolearn.uiowa.edu) International Labor Office. (n. d.).

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