

The harsh Reality: How COVID-19 has Exacerbated Child Labour in the Hotel Industry

Juhi Naseem¹, Dr. Gurmeet Singh²

¹Research Scholar, Faculty of Legal Studies, MJP Rohilkhand University, Bareilly, Uttar Pradesh, India

²Professor of Law, KGK College, Moradabad

ABSTRACT

The paper envisages bringing out the impact of Covid 19 on Child Labourers and how it has exacerbated Child Labour in the hotel industry particularly. Loss of income and hunger had urged the families to push their children into dangerous work when the country was facing a complete lockdown and the schools were closed. Children working in the pandemic environment were prone to the virus directly as they had to wash utensils and clean the tables and chairs to earn their living. Home deliveries were the reason why Hotels and restaurants had to remain open even when the virus had spread all over the world. The paper outlines the challenges faced by child labourers in the hotel industry and also sheds light on the legislation of the Government. On the International level also, many conventions are there to curb child labour. The paper tries to bring out how these legislations can be implemented in the way that the percentage of child labour could be declined not only at the hotel level but in other traditional and non-traditional sectors too.

Keywords: Child Labour, Exacerbated, Hotel Industry, Pandemic, legislations

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INTRODUCTION

In India the problem of child labour is concerning. An estimated 152 million children worldwide are thought to be involved in child labour; around 10 million of these children are from India. Approximately 10% of children worldwide are compelled to work as minors, with some being coerced into dangerous jobs as a result of human trafficking. Children are compelled to leave their homes and work in dangerous jobs primarily as a result of poverty. The hotel industry is saturated with millions of youngsters, but it is

evident that this horrible behaviour has started to transfer from traditional to non-traditional sectors. Children are also at risk of working in dangerous environments in the hotel and restaurant business with little to no safety precautions or protection for their health; which mainly impacts their well-being. (1)

International Labour Organisation (ILO) defines “child labour” as the work which deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development.(2)

The COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching effects on various sectors of the economy, with significant impacts on vulnerable populations, including children. One of the less discussed but deeply concerning outcomes of the pandemic is the exacerbation of child labour, particularly in the hotel industry. It outlines the factors contributing to this troubling trend and sets the stage for a detailed analysis. The global health crisis triggered by Covid-19 led to unprecedented disruptions in economic activities.

In the hotel industry, the demand for cheap and easily exploitable labour rose as businesses struggled to maintain operations with reduced budgets. Children, who are more vulnerable and less likely to demand fair wages or safe working conditions, became prime targets for exploitation. This trend was particularly pronounced in developing countries where labour regulations are weak.

The pandemic strained govt. resources, diverting attention and funds away from social protection programs designed to combat child labour. This left many children without the safety nets that might have otherwise protected them from being forced into work. NGOs that typically monitor and combat child labour also face operational challenges due to the pandemic further weakening the support system for these vulnerable children.

During the pandemic, 84% of households reported income loss, which added to the challenge of attending school. The country’s dropout rate tripled- from 1.8% in 2018 to a staggering 5.3% in 2020; which predominantly impacted children from marginalised communities, exacerbating existing inequalities. There was a stark downfall in education quality across the country after the pandemic ended.

It has significantly exacerbated child labour in the hotel industry by increasing economic pressures on families, reducing access to education and weakening protective measures and regulatory enforcement. This situation calls for urgent and coordinated efforts from governments, businesses and international organisations to address the underlying causes and mitigate the impact on children.

Challenges faced by Child Labourers in the hotel industry

They are often subjected to hazardous working conditions, with little to no protection from health risks, such as exposure to the virus. The pandemic has strained healthcare systems worldwide, making it difficult for these children to receive the care and support they need. The lack of proper safety measures and health protocols put these children at risk of contracting COVID-19 further jeopardising their well-being. Working in hotels under exploitative conditions can take a toll on the mental health and well-being of child labourers leading to feelings of isolation, despair and hopelessness.

The stress and trauma associated with such work environments can have a long-lasting impact on these children, affecting their overall development and future opportunities.

Laws and Child Labour

Indian Constitution and Child Labour

Article 21(A) – Provides for free and compulsory education for all children in the age group of 6 to 14

years

Article 24 – Prohibits employment of children below 14 years of age in dangerous factories

Article 51 – the fundamental duty to provide education opportunities for his/her child between 6 to 14 years of age

Other Legislations

- **The Factories Act, 1948**
- **Plantation Labour Act, 1951**
- **The Mines Act, 1952**
- **Apprentices Act, 1961**
- **Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) of Children Act, 2000**
- **Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education, 2009**

International Conventions

Many international conventions and treaties have been entered into to deal with the issue of child labour.

They are:

- UN Convention on the Rights of Child
- ILO Minimum Age Convention
- ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour (Convention No. 182)

Action taken by Stakeholders to address Child Labour

The government can implement laws and regulations to prohibit child labour and enforce penalties for violations. Stakeholders can promote education initiatives to keep children in school and raise awareness about the harmful effects of Child Labour. Companies can implement policies and practices to ensure their supply chains are free from child labour and support community development programs. NGOs and advocacy groups can monitor industries and supply chains for instances of child labour report violations and work with stakeholders to address them. Countries can also collaborate on efforts to combat Child labour through international agreements, sharing best practices and providing support to affected regions.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified the plight of child labour within the hotel industry; highlighting systemic vulnerabilities that need urgent attention. As hotels grapple with economic hardships, children are increasingly exploited due to heightened financial pressures on families and diminished oversight. Addressing the issue demands collaborative efforts between governments, businesses and civil society to enforce labour laws, provide social protections and promote sustainable economic recovery that prioritises the well-being of all children.

Beyond the economic downturn, the pandemic has disrupted education systems, leaving many children out of school and susceptible to exploitation. With parents facing job losses and financial strain, children are often pushed into work to supplement family income, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and exploitation. Additionally, the closure of schools and community centres has removed protective environments for children, making them more vulnerable to traffickers and exploitative employers. Addressing the root causes of child labour in the hotel industry necessitates not only interventions but also long-term strategies

focused on education, social support and economic empowerment to create a safer and more sustainable future for children worldwide.

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