

# Working Conditions and Problems of Domestic Child labour in Kathmandu Metropolitan City

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## Abstract:

In general, the children working in employer's house for household work with or without wage are known as domestic child worker. Domestic child workers are seen to operate household chores such as cooking, washing, cleaning and taking care of employer families' children.

The study was conducted in Kathmandu Metropolitan city, ward no. 16 of Bagmati province in 2020. This paper aimed to highlight the social issues, primarily the working conditions of child labour in the study area. The purpose of the study was to identify the major problems faced by domestic child workers from development perspective.

The study was based primarily on both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The study revealed that employer families have appeared to involve domestic child Labour in household chores without either pay that is insufficient or without any pay as compensation. The study also found that in the name of providing them with education and promise of better life, these child labours had been misused and exploited. The long working hours and unpaid labour and merely any facilities of education and health services, child labours have been both physically and mentally abused in majority of the cases. The study also found that guardians and relatives were agents to fix the domestic child worker. The money earned by them was kept by their parents. Domestic child workers had been low paid and therefore exploited in terms of remuneration, lack basic amenities and even lack security.

**Key Words:** Domestic child labour, employer family, physical and mental abuse, exploitation

## 1. Introduction

Children are regarded as a future of nation. They are that bud of flower which will flourish in the future as a pillar of nation. There is a need to provide ample of opportunity to children for their better future. The hindering reality of Nepal is that poverty is great threat to survive people and for getting rid from poverty, parents send their child to urban areas as a domestic child labour.

Child labour refers to any work that deprives children of their childhood, their right to education, health, safety and mental development (ILO, 1973). As a consequence children are not only deprived of their dignity and also freedom to play and emotionally lost. In other words, child workers or child labour means "a person in the age group of 5 to 13 employed for hire or reward on a full time basic and includes a self employed child and a child assisting his/her presents in their occupation for two or more than two hours in household chores" (CWIN, 1993). Generally child labour are those who are below fourteen years of age deprived of minimum level of facilities, working long hours, getting low wages and hindering their physical and mental development and the work done by them which affects their schooling and health. Child labour has existed everywhere. Studies (Pradhan, 1994 & 1995) have revealed that child labour is an integral part of our labour market.

Nepal is one of the poorest among the poor countries in the world. According to the World Bank (2021), the GDP Per Capita income of Nepal is only US \$ 1,155.1. The 4.9 million people are multi-dimensionally poor, which is 17.4% of Nepal's population (NPC/GoN, 2021). Almost half of the population lives under the poverty line. Agriculture is the pre-dominant occupation on which 80% of people of Nepal depend. Industrial and services sectors are growing but they are still in infant stage. The population size of Nepal 26.5 million out of which 36% of them are children and half of the population of the children are economically active to support their poor families (CBS, 2012).

We have realized that the world today is full of unrest, anxiety and grievances. Though, we have been living in the twenty first century problems of food, shelter and clothes have remained the same or even

growing more complicated than earlier. Millions and millions of people in this world are suffering from hunger, disease and malnutrition and the same size of people are suffering without home and land. It means they are living the poorest life below the absolute poverty line but on the other hand, a handful of people are getting rich and richer. It means the gap between haves and have not is widening with every passing days. This hindering reality of the world today is directly affecting the growing child labour and has led to child exploitation.

While speaking in the mass meeting and writing essay that the "Children are the future of the nation, builders of the nation, twinkle stars for the nation" and so on, but those who are taking responsibilities even do not care about what is happening to those children at present. The reality exposes the fact that a vast number of child populations is elapsing a dreadful and fearful life under uncertainty. Of course, the children are not happy to work in such a young stage but what shall they do for their hungry stomach? So, there is no other way except then to involve in the economic activities. But in the mean time, some people with the exploited nature do not hesitate to maximize the use of child labour because of cheapness and easy availability.

Domestic child labour is now recognized as a serious social problem in Nepal. It is rooted in the history of the country, its agrarian structure, low level of development and the poverty of the people. From agriculture to industry, domestic service, platform, construction and transport service one can find children employed as labours. The target number of working children is found in the agricultural sector (80%), followed by the service sector (6%), cottage industry (3%), industry (2.4%), construction (0.6%) and other informal sector (2%) (Upadhyaya, 2017).

Meeting basic needs of children is basic challenge of Nepalese society where as domestic child labours are in vulnerable condition. It is a major problem in both rural and urban society. The casual relationship between poverty and child labour has been the subject of controversy and argument that existing child labour is not only a result but also a cause of poverty. Wherever, the actual cause and effect relationship is the commonly held view that poverty causes child labour, raises the question of whether poor children should attend school. Poverty is seen as a justification for the continuity of child

labour and the attitude that is acceptable for poor children to work instead in prevalent illiteracy and family's lack of awareness is another cause of child labour. Therefore, there is a clear need to identify the working conditions of these child workers.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

Domestic child labour has been accepted as an integral part of existing Nepalese society. Children who works in household as domestic labour starts at dawn and extends until late evening everyday. During the day of labour of those children, they deprived from their basic rights to protection, participation and development. The seriousness of this issue requires that all hidden domestic child workers should be recognized for the purpose of betterment of them. The constitution of Nepal has provisioned child rights as one of the fundamental rights. However, children are deprived from the right to have education, better health and necessary love and care (CWIN, 1998).

No sector of labour is completely free of child labour. In Nepal many children are engaged in various kinds of labour. The previous study has revealed that in about 65 different organized and unorganized labour sectors children work for own survival and family subsistence. They work long hours with a little or no pay at all. They are deprived of basic amenities. Most of them don't have access to their families. They are vulnerable to all kinds of physical emotional and economic exploitation and abuse, more over many children in Nepal work in most intolerable conditions like slavery and bondage.

Enrollment of the children in various domestic works is termed as a domestic child labour. It has become a major challenging issue in Nepal to combat for the better society in Nepal. The domestic child labours are those who involve in household chores for supporting the masters although child labour has been abolished by law in Nepal. So, the study attempted to fulfill the following objectives;

- i. To examine working condition and socio-economic status of domestic child workers
- ii. To identify the major problems faced by domestic child workers

### 3. Literature Review

Theoretical review has provided details on theoretical foundations and concepts related to child labour in general and domestic child labour in particular. Several theoretical contributions on the determinants of child labour are put forward, some of which are;

- a) Demand Side Factors in Child Labour: Indeed, the demand for child labour can be understood as part and parcel of the demand for unskilled labour such as household chores, doing dishes in restaurants, agriculture etc.
- b) The Supply Side of Child Labour: Parsons and Goldin (1989) tested three alternative theories concerning household decision-making. As follows;
  - i. Model I assumes that parents make child labour/education decisions to increase family wealth. A family promotes child labour so that family can accumulate assets equal to the value of a child's work which they can transfer to the child in the future.
  - ii. In Model II, the families in Model I are credit constrained and children will work only if household assets/property are zero.
  - iii. In Model III, parents are selfish but cannot control the income of their children once they become adults. In this case, child labour arises due to a desire of parents to have their children earn income when they are still young and control their children's income. Child labour and substantial household assets will co-exist.

Many domestic child workers are subjected to the worst forms of child labour as defined under ILO Convention No. 182 (1999), and they need urgent help. Children engaged as domestic workers often work long hours and in hazardous conditions, many of them suffering physical, sexual or mental abuse. Such conditions are harmful to a child's physical and psychological development – mental, social and emotional. They are deprived of education, and the exploitation they experience during childhood denies them opportunities in later life. Many of them work between 12 and 14 hours a day and a majority work seven days a week (Khair, 2004).

Tamang (2013) recommended that the problem of child labour is closely linked with the wide spread poverty, illiteracy, cultural tradition and lack

of effective enforcement of existing law. For this it needs to come up with clear and comprehensive policy and programme focusing formal and informal sector of the country. Child labour is causes and consequences of the exploitative socio-economic and political reality of the country. It is not the isolated issue, it is interlined with the prevailing socio-economic and cultural practices of the society.

Shrestha (2014) concluded that the exploitation of child labour is explicitly seen in the society. Because of family poverty children are bound to work in others' houses. Moreover, their parents have no other alternatives rather than sending their children working in factory. The children are regarded as burden to their own family because of their low income.

From the careful perusal of literature, it was acknowledged that that much of the study on child labour had focused on the social and economic causes responsible to force a child into labour have been descriptive. However, the study on working conditions of child labour and problems they encounter is still scanty.

#### **4. Research Methodology**

The study was based on both quantitative and qualitative methods. The study adopted the case study methods that comprised the Key Informants Interview (KII), observation, semi-structured interview schedule/questionnaire were used to obtain primary data whereas secondary data were collected from different published and unpublished literatures. The study extended for a period of three weeks in the month of August, 2020 with frequent field visits.

A total sample of 10 domestic child labours was selected through purposive sampling method.

#### **5. Results and Discussion**

Human being has different age. Among them child age is important. Age is one of the most important characteristics of an individual Age may not only refer to the length of time that organism have lived on but it also implies one's mental and physical maturing and roles and responsibilities in the family.

From the child development perspective, the age under 14 is a very

important period for their overall development which will carry them into their adulthood. In this regard an attempt had been made to know the age structure of the domestic child labours.

**Table 1: Age and Sex Structure of Respondents**

S. N.	Age (years)	No. of respondents		Percentage (%)
		Boy	Girl	
1	less than 8		2	20
2	8- 10	1	2	30
3	11-13	2	3	50
	Total	3	7	100

*Source: Field Work, 2020*

The data showed that the half of the child labour belonged to age group 11-13 years. This indicates that the child too young or close to puberty (close to 14 years) was considered appropriate age by the employer family. By this age, the child could cook, clean and go shopping and understand social norms and values that would help the employer family tame them. More than 2/3rd of child workers were girls.

It was also revealed that the family breakdown and death of parents (both or either one of them) stood as the main causes (40% each) to become child labour while poverty appeared to be the next significant cause of child labour.

Out of the total 10 children interviewed assuming the children who were once enrolled also literate, 60 percent girls child labour were literate. Proportion of the literate was higher than not enrolled children. Among 10 children, 4 children never enrolled to school in the past. As mentioned by the respondents main reason for not being enrolled to any school was they could not afford it economically. The other reasons by the respondents for not being enrolled to school were need to work at house and no interest for studying.

When asked about the parental status of respondents (child labour), it was found that 40 percent children have their parents alive. 30 percent replied that their mother died and 20 percent replied that their father has died. Only 20 percent mentioned that both of their parents had died while the

remaining children were unknown about the whereabouts of their parents. Majority (70 percent) of them informed that absence of their parents forced them to leave their home and become a child labour. It was also revealed that 60 percent children had step parents. However, minority 40 percent did not have step parents.

For 50 percent of the domestic child workers, agriculture had been the main occupation for their parents, followed by wage labours at 30 percent. This matched to the livelihood of the rural population of Nepal where agriculture is the major economic activity.

When asked about how they arrived at the present work place, 20 percent were brought by their relatives. 20 percent of children were brought by their parents while 40 percent of children were brought by employers themselves or by employers relatives and 10 percent reported that they came with their friends. 10 percent of children came by self.

An effort was made to find out the age of the domestic child labour at entering the service,

**Table 2: Age while entering into the service**

S. N.	Age while entering into the service	Number	Percentage (%)
1	8 - 10	3	30
2	11 - 13	6	60
3	14 & above	1	10
Total		10	100

*Source: Field Work, 2020.*

30 percent of them entered into the work before they reached 10 years of age. The majority (60 percent) entered into the work at the age 11-13 years while the least (only one child labour) at the age of 14. Hence, it can be understood that children enter into the work at relatively younger age.

### **Employment and working conditions**

Every child has different rights. Children have rights to adequate standard of living. Contrary to their rights, they are exploited in various sectors and one of them is domestic sector. These child workers are underpaid. This



section attempted to look at working conditions at present in which they are engaged. The conditions of the work place, the hours of child works and the brutality to which they are exposed to.

### **Nature of the work**

Domestic child labourers have almost any fixed work schedule. They have wide range of activities at their employer home from kitchen work to the house cleaning. It was found that majority of 30 percent had to do household chores some children have specific roles such as baby sitting 20 percent. 80 percent children said that they had to help in cooking, cleaning and washing dishes. The field observation justified this fact.

These children were always on-call by every family member to do anything and everything and these include polishing shoes, cleaning the toilets, fetching a glass of water going to nearby shop and so on based on major categories of work respondents were asked about their working hours also. A majority (70 percent) of the respondents said that they had to work for more than 12 hours that is from early morning to late night before sleep. Only few (30 percent) child workers had less than 6 hours of work. All of the domestic child labour workers woke up before 6 in the morning. So, they had least time or no time to have fun and relax.

### **Arrangements of Food and Living**

30 percent of child workers reported that they were given separate room usually made for storing varied items, followed by 30 percent domestic child labour who reported that they had to sleep on the kitchen floor while 10 percent were given the space below the staircases. 30 percent children were given other space such as the corner of the employer's children's room or corridor of the house.

As all the domestic child labour workers were staying at their master's home the fooding arrangement was also made available at their work place. Almost 90 percent of the domestic child labour was, given same food as master's family while only 10 percent was given different food, usually low grade rice separately cooked. All the respondents mentioned that they were given adequate quantity of meals.

### **Health and Hygiene Situation**

Health and hygiene situation is required for all persons. As domestic child labours are disposed to unhealthy and unhygienic working conditions

they are vulnerable from hygienic point of view. 70 percent of the children mentioned that they were never ill. Other 30 percent mentioned that they were ill at least once after joining the work. However, no major illness, expect cough, cold headache, stomach ache and minor wounds was reported. In most of the cases, they were given medicines by the employers without having checked up with medical professionals.

### Leaves and Holidays

Domestic child labours are deprived of their own parent's affection. Therefore, it is necessary for them to have enough opportunities to get holidays and meet their dear ones. Among 10 respondents, 50 percent of the respondents were not aware about holidays. They were not given holidays in general. The employers wanted to engage them at their household work regularly. If domestic girls child labour leave employer's house, then they could not return back to the employer's home. 30 percent of respondents said that they were getting holidays as per need or more than twice a year. This was true for the domestic child labour workers, who had come to work from peripheral districts. 20 percent children reported that they got leave to go home once a year. Usually, they were sent to their home during big festivals. All the respondents reported that usually they got one week or two weeks leave.

### Behavior of Employer

Children need love and respect too for their healthy growth. Therefore, it is important to see how have been relationships between the employer and the domestic child labour. Large proportion of the children reporting good treatment was not doing. Out of the 10 respondents interviewed and majority of domestic child were found not happy with behaviour of employer. Beside that domestic girls child labours could also share their problems with their mistress. However, the problem is unheard by the mistress. Thus, this indicates that child labour faced punishment form the employers.

**Table 3: Distributions of Respondents by Nature of punishment**

Punishment	Number	Percentage (%)
Scolding	6	60
Physical assault	4	40
Total	10	100

*Source: Field Work 2020.*

The nature and intensity of the punishment given to domestic child labour by their employing family varied. Majority (60 percent) were limited to scolding while 40 percent children were reported to have been physically assaulted by the employers.

## **Conclusion**

Domestic child labour is considered as one of the worst of child labour, which is the main cause to exploit the children socially and economically. All the domestic child labours are reportedly employed in the employers' house for getting good opportunity. But the consequences are bitter and considerable. The study portrayed that majority domestic child workers were from rural area than urban areas. The children belonging to economically poor were serving as domestic child worker, and family breakdown and loss of parents were other significant reasons for child labour. The guardians and relatives were agents to fix the domestic child worker. The money earned by them was kept by their parents. Domestic child workers had been low paid and therefore exploited in terms of remuneration, lack basic amenities and even lack security.

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