

Migration and Child Labour in Agriculture – A Study of Punjab

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Abstract

The present study has been conducted to know the general profile, educational status, activities performed and income of the migratory child labour *vis-a-vis* the natives engaged in agricultural activities in Punjab. The study is based on a sample of twelve villages randomly taken from three agro-climatic zones. In all the villages, 302 children working in agricultural sector were identified and all of them were the respondents of this study. It has been found that about one-fourth of the child labour working in agricultural and allied activities in the state of Punjab are migrants from other states, viz. Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. Most of the migrant child workers were in the age group of 12-14 years. The ratio of female child labour was higher in migrants than in natives. A very high number of child labour belonging to both migrant and native families were from scheduled caste families. All the migratory working children belonged to the landless families of labourers. The educational status of the migrant child labour portrayed a very grim picture. None of them was found going to the school and the reason behind their absenteeism was migration from other states. The child labour was belonging to the low income families. Children were engaged in various agricultural activities such as ploughing, sowing, irrigation, paddy transplantation, crop watching, cattle grazing, crop harvesting, wheat picking, stubble harvesting, pea plucking, cotton picking, potato digging, etc. Children were also employed in dairy farms and poultry farms. The wage earnings of working children were meagre. Special schools for migrants in the rural areas of the state can be opened where they may be taught through their mother tongue. Night schools or schools on the pattern of *Charwaha Schools* of Bihar may also be started to cater to the needs of working children. The study has also suggested that more employment avenues for adult labour, especially for the women in the villages of the state, should be generated through promoting agro-based industries and traditional handicrafts such as embroidery, pickle-papad making, etc.

Key words: Child Labour, Migration, Child labour wages, Migratory child labour

JEL Classification: J61, J62, R23

Introduction

Migration is the movement of human beings usually from rural to urban areas and rich states in pursuit of such objectives as better employment, better wages and better quality of life. Thousands of migrants from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Nepal come to Punjab in search of gainful employment. Tragically people who migrate are not only poor but have large families to support either at home or at the workplace. In majority of cases, the members of the family

including children accompany the migrants. In both the cases, the migration with or without the family is traumatic. The children feel insecure and unsettled or being without parents for a long period often makes them undisciplined and irresponsible. They become susceptible to all sorts of evil influences and sometimes step into the world of crime and thus create the problem of delinquency (Kulshreshtha, 1978). Deprived of parental care, these children are particularly vulnerable to exploitation by their employers. Moreover, they always live under the shadow of fear and insecurity and police atrocities. A large proportion of delinquent children come from our national work force (Mathur,

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1984). The earnings are usually not adequate due to low wages and non-enforcement of provisions of Minimum Wage Act, 1948. The meagre earnings of adult men labour are insufficient even for the survival of the family, forcing the female members and children to work. Millions of innocent children of migrant parents are thus exposed to acute and heart-rendering deprivation and exploitation. The joy and excitement of a normal childhood are totally lost to them (Mishra, 2000). Sometimes, run-away children migrate to cities on their own. These emotionally-deprived children run away due to hostile family atmosphere, ill treatment by parents, aversion to schooling, and abandonment by parents or the glamour of city life to seek a living. Thus, child loses upward mobility (Mishra, 2000). The entrepreneurs prefer to employ children because of their low wages and pliability but they profess that they employ children on compassionate grounds to help them to increase the income of their families. It has been amply brought out by the studies that a child worker takes the place of an adult worker but on half or even less wages as compared to that of an adult (Srinivasan and Gandotara, 1993; Mustafa and Sharma, 1997). It causes unemployment among the main workers. Kaur (2000) and Gandhi (1999) have pointed out the supply of too many children in India who are willing to offer themselves in the labour market, reduces the bargaining power of an adult worker, thereby lowering the wage structure. Kulshreshtha (1978) had emphasized that a child labour results in temporarily weakening the main labour force. In his study, Chandra (1997) had claimed that if all the children are withdrawn from the labour market, at least 15 million jobs will be made for adults in India.

Studies have indicated that a substantial number of migrant children is engaged in Delhi (Nangia, 1987), Varanasi (Juyal *et al.*, 1985), Baroda (Srinivasan and Gandotara, 1993) and Calcutta (Sinha, 1991). These studies have indicated a positive correlation between the number of migrants and the proportion of child labour. Sanon's study (1998) has observed that 83.6 per cent of child labour working in Ahmedabad city had come from the rural areas of Gujarat or other states of the country. In the carpet industry of Bhadoi, many children come from perennially drought-prone areas of Bihar. They are the children of landless labourers and socially-oppressed classes who are often being deprived of their lands by the landlords. In Glass and

Bangle Industry of Ferozabad (Burra, 1998), 50 per cent of the child workers belonged to the adjoining rural areas and were from the families of cultivators, while 11 per cent were from the families of agriculturalists and labourers. Sivakasi, one of the districts of Tamil Nadu, is highly drought-prone area and thus, the entire rural population suffering from vagaries of nature and pangs of poverty are left with no better alternative but to flock the local factories of Sivakasi to earn livelihood (Chandra, 1997). Many children from Bengal, Nepal and Assam who join circuses are from lower strata with very poor economic conditions (Nisha, 2011). Thus, the majority of the children working in the match and fire works industry of Sivakasi belong to migrants who are primarily agriculturists, landless labourers (Vidyasagar and Babu, 2002). Similarly, in Diamond Industry of Surat, child labour is from cultivator families (Prasad and Kohle, 1993) who had migrated from rural to urban area.

Migration embedded with poverty acts as a disadvantage to schooling. Parents struggling for survival and for fulfillment of their basic needs of food, clothing or shelter or employment are not in a position to fulfill their obligation to enroll their children at school. In addition, failure on the part of parents to help their children with their home work, adversely affects the motivation and self-confidence of children. Children from poor families suffer from continuous hunger and malnutrition and live in unsanitary conditions. In India, since a large number of people are illiterate who regard schooling as wastage of time and money; they want that their children should earn and should add some income to the family as early as possible. As they cannot wait and pay the expenditure involved in education (Verma, 1993), so, instead of sending children to school, they send them to work as an apprentice to learn skills.

With this background, the present study was carried out with the following objectives:

- To find the socio-economic profile of migratory child labour in agricultural sector,
- To investigate the activities performed and income earned by migratory child labour in agricultural sector, and
- To make a comparison of migrant child labour with their native counterparts.

Methodology

The main occupation of people in Punjab is agriculture and the children of Punjab, natives or migrants, can be seen collecting fuel, fodder on their heads, rearing cattle, harvesting and watching the crops in the fields working all alone or along with other family members (Goyal, 2009). As per Census estimates, the child labour in absolute number in the state of Punjab was 2.32 lakh in 1971, 1.79 lakh, in 1981, 1.32 lakh in 1991 and 1.11 lakh in 2001 (Government of Punjab, 2010). Hence, the present study was undertaken in the agricultural sector of Punjab. The whole state was divided into three agro-climatic zones (Sidhu *et al.*, 1999) and from each zone, two districts were selected on the basis of maximum number of agricultural workers. One district from each zone was randomly selected, viz. Hoshiarpur district in zone I, Moga district in zone II and Ferozepur district in zone III. Again two blocks from each selected district and two villages from each block were chosen randomly, making a total of 12 villages. From these 12 villages, 302 children were identified for study. Primary data were collected through a pre-tested, well-designed questionnaire.

Results and Discussion

Age and Gender Distribution

The child labour in Punjab agriculture sector was maximum in the age group of 12-14 years (57%), followed by 9-11 years (28 %) and 6-8 years (15 %). In 12-14 years age group, 60 per cent were the native children (belonging to the state of Punjab) and 36 per cent were migrants. In other age groups also, the number of native children were more than migrant child labour. In terms of gender, the shares were: 74 per cent males and 26 per cent females in native working children and 68 per cent males and 32 per cent females among migrant child labours.

Caste and Religion

On the basis of caste, children were divided into three categories, viz. scheduled castes, backward classes and general (so-called upper) class. It was found that 88 per cent of the working children belonged to the scheduled castes (Majhabis, Ramdasias and Balmikis, Adh Dharmi and Chamar), 7 per cent to backward class and 5 per cent to other castes. No child belonged to scheduled tribes category. The child

labour belonging to Hindu scheduled caste families was found mainly in Hoshiarpur, while in Moga and Ferozepur districts, the majority of child labour belonged to Sikh scheduled caste families. Child labour from the backward classes belonged to all religions, viz. Hindu, Sikh and Muslims. Muslim backward class child labourers were found only in case of migrant child workers under the sample survey and they belonged to the pastoral nomadic group called Vangujjar or Gujjar. Only 5 per cent of them belonged to general castes, viz. Rajput and Jat. The majority of migrant (85%) as well as native (89 %) children belonged to the scheduled castes category. The percentage of child labour belonging to backward class was higher in migrants (12 %) than in natives (6 %).

Agricultural Land

It was found that families of 94.0 per cent of child workers had no agricultural land. The landholder families were about 6.0 per cent comprising 4.3 per cent marginal (less than 2.5 acres), and the remaining 1.7 per cent small (2.5-5.0 acres) holdings of agricultural land in the state. All the migrant child labour (100 %) and the majority of native child labour (92.%) belonged to the landless families of labourers who on account of increasing economic compulsions devote most of their time working for others (Kumar, 2002). Only 8 per cent native families of child labour had agricultural land.

Educational Level of Child Labour

Out of the total 302 child workers taken for the study, only 129 (=43%) were found going to school and 173 (=57 %) were not going to any school. Among these 173 children, 78 (=45%) had never been to any school, while 95 (= 55 %) were drop-outs. The district wise study revealed that the percentage of working children going to school was highest in Moga (68 %) and minimum in Hoshiarpur (19 %), while drop-out rate was highest in Ferozepur. The percentage of the children who had never been to school was maximum (=56 %) in the Hoshiarpur district. It was due to the higher percentage (83 %) of migratory child labour in Hoshiarpur. This shows that migrant children were largely deprived of the educational opportunities. When the working children were contacted to enquire about the reason behind their not attending the school, they reported that migration was the main cause behind their absenteeism from the school.

Table 1. Socio-economic profile of migratory and native child labour in agriculture

State	Migrant child labour	Native child labour	Total
Uttar Pradesh	66(88)	-	66(88)
Himachal Pradesh	9(12)	-	9(12)
Total	75(100)	227(100)	302(100)
Age			
6-8 years	14(18.87)	30(13.21)	44(14.57)
9-11 years	25(33.33)	60(28.43)	85(28.15)
12-14 years	36(48)	137(60.36)	172(57.28)
Total	75	227	302
Caste			
Scheduled caste	64(85.33)	202(88.99)	266(88.08)
Backward class	9(12.00)	12(5.29)	21(6.95)
Other castes	2(2.67)	13(5.72)	15(4.97)
Total	75(100)	227(100)	302(100)
Land			
Landless	75(100)	209(92.08)	284(94.03)
Land-owner	-	8(7.92)	18(5.97)
Total	75(100)	227(100)	302(100)
Educational status			
(i) Never enrolled to school	62(82.67)	16(16.33)	78(45.08)
(ii) Drop-outs	13(17.33)	82(83.67)	95(54.92)
(i+ii) Not going to school	75(100)	98(43.17)	173(57.28)
Going to school	-	129(56.83)	129(42.72)
Total	75(100)	227(100)	302(100)
Family income (₹)			
<20000	13(17.33)	143(63.00)	156(51.06)
20000 - 30000	36(48.00)	56(24.67)	92(30.46)
30000 - 40000	16(21.34)	15(6.61)	31(10.26)
40000 - 50000	8(10.67)	7(3.08)	15(4.97)
50000 - 60000	1(1.33)	4(1.76)	5(1.66)
60000 - 70000	1(1.33)	2(0.88)	3(0.99)
Total	75(100)	227(100)	302(100)

Family Income

It was found that family income of more than half (51%) child workers was less than ₹ 20000. In this group of family income, the percentage of native child workers was very high (63%) compared to the migrants (17%). Among the family income group of ₹ 20000-30000, there were about 30 per cent child workers, of which about 25 per cent belonged to native families and 48 per cent belonged to migrants. There were only about 10 per cent families of child workers whose annual income was in the range ₹ 30000-40000. In this group, the number of migrant families was more

(21%) than native families (7%). Only about 5 per cent families of child workers had annual income in the range of ₹ 40000-50000. In this group also, the share of migrant families was higher (11%) than native families (3%). Thus, about 97 per cent families of child workers had annual income up to ₹ 50000, i.e. about ₹ 4200 per month. The annual income of majority (88%) of native families of child workers was up to ₹ 30000 while this range was higher in the case of migrant families, ₹ 20000-50000. Only a few families of child workers had annual income of more than ₹ 50000 in both natives and migrants.

Table 2. Employment of migrant and native child labour in agriculture

Agricultural activity	Migrant child labour	Native child labour	Total
Help in ploughing	1 (1.33)	14 (6.17)	15 (4.97)
Sowing	1(1.33)	20(8.81)	21 (6.95)
Irrigation	1 (1.33)	14 (6.17)	15 (4.97)
Hoeing and weeding	15 (20.00)	18 (7.93)	26 (8.61)
Paddy transplantation	12 (16.00)	122 (53.74)	134 (44.37)
Crop harvesting	30 (40.00)	203 (89.43)	233 (47.15)
Cotton picking	-	8 (3.52)	8 (2.65)
Potato digging	53 (70.67)	39 (17.18)	92 (30.46)
Pea plucking	26 (34.67)	11 (4.85)	37 (12.25)
Crop watching	10 (13.33)	1 (0.44)	11 (3.64)
Fodder harvesting	1 (1.33)	199 (87.67)	200 (66.23)
Cattle grazing	11 (14.66)	133 (58.59)	133 (44.04)
Poultry farming	2 (2.66)	-	2 (0.66)
Dairy farming	12 (16.00)	24 (10.57)	36 (17.92)
Loading & unloading straw	-	30 (13.22)	30 (9.93)
Wheatear picking	4 (5.32)	182 (80.18)	186 (61.59)
Stubble harvesting	50 (66.67)	57 (25.12)	107 (35.43)
Total	75 (100)	225 (100)	302 (100)

Note: Figures within the parentheses indicate percentage.

Total exceeds actual the number of child labour in respective category due to multiple responses.

Work Practices

It was found that the children were engaged in various agricultural activities like ploughing, sowing, irrigation, hoeing, paddy transplantation, harvesting, crop watching, cattle grazing, poultry farms, dairy farming, etc. A very high percentage of child workers was found engaged in fodder harvesting (66%) and cattle grazing (44%) in the state. Some child labourers were found engaged in uprooting of the green grass to be used as fodder for the cattle. This practice was adopted by the child workers whose families had no agricultural land of their own. It was also noticed during the study that child labour that belonged to landless families offered their services to cultivators to bring four bundles of fodder and got one bundle in lieu of their services.

A very high percentage (80%) of native child labour was engaged in wheatear picking. Wheat harvesting done manually or mechanically, leaves some wheatears (*sitte*) which fall in the fields and remain unnoticed by the farmers. When the harvesting process is completed and the produce is taken home or to the market, then the child labour comes to the fields with bags to pick and collect these uncared and unclaimed wheatears

from the fields. After collecting, they spread it on the village road or highway. The vehicles passing through the road help in separating the grain from the chaff. This chaff is brought home to make straw (*turi*) out of it. In this way the child labour utilizes the thrown away plant material.

Nearly 47 per cent of the child labour in the state was found engaged in harvesting of crops like wheat, maize, sunflower, pulses, etc. About 44 per cent each were engaged in paddy transplantation and cattle grazing, viz. cows, buffaloes and goats. Some families in the rural sector adopt the profession of a *bagi* or *garzier*. Children were found taking goats of other households along with their own goats for grazing in open fields for which they charge 50 per goat per month. The child workers were also found taking the calves of others for grazing till their maturity on the assurance of getting one half (*adhiara*) of the market value of the matured milch animal.

Wheat harvesting through combines leaves approximately one-foot long stubbles (*karche*) standing in the fields. Earlier the farmers used to burn or plough out these stubbles to prepare land for the next crop. To

save the environment from pollution, burning of the stubbles is not recommended. In the mean time the landless labour and their children come to the help of the cultivators to harvest the stubbles free of the cost and the poor families engaged in this activity make use of these stubbles in making straw (*turi*) for their cattle heads. It was found that 67 per cent of the migrants and 25 per cent of the natives were stubble harvesting.

Nearly 18 per cent of the children were involved in dairy farming. They feed the animals, take them to the village pond for bathing, remove their excreta and female child labour sometimes make cow dung cakes besides sweeping or washing the floor. About 10 per cent were engaged in straw (*turi*) loading and unloading.

Nearly 13 per cent of the migrant child workers were involved in crop watching. Several fruits like guava, peach, pear, almond, grapes, ber and mango and vegetables like methi and palak and crops like sunflower, maize etc. are damaged by birds like house crow, sparrow, myna and rose ringed parakeet in the fields. These birds attack at sprouting, budding and ripening stages of the crop. The parakeet is a major pest of oilseed crop, especially sunflower and maize. False gunshots at different intervals in the field and fixing of scarecrow at a height in the field are some of the mechanical controls to scare the birds from the fields (Mahindra and Mangat, 1999). But personal watching the field is the common practice adopted by the farmers. In the present study, children were reported to watch the sunflower and maize crops. These child workers beat the tin with a stick to produce a loud noise to scare away the birds.

The native child labour was engaged more in ploughing, sowing and irrigation activities as compared

to their migrant counterparts. Only migrant child labour (2.66 %) was engaged in the poultry farming. Children generally feed the hens, collect the eggs and put them in treys. As reported by the respondents, they usually take up these activities in the evening while their parents take rest after a long-day work. The child workers stay with their parents on the very premises of the poultry farm.

Wage Earnings

Nearly one-fourth of the child workers (Table 3) earn up to only ₹ 1000 per annum through wages on working in agricultural and allied activities. The annual wage earnings were of ₹ 1000-2000 for 20 per cent native and 12 per cent migrant child labour. Similarly, the proportion of the native child labour in earnings of ₹ 2000-3000 and ₹ 3000-4000 per annum was higher, viz. 16.32 per cent and 15.86 per cent, respectively as compared to that of the migrants, viz. 14.67 per cent and 8.00 per cent, respectively. But, in the higher segments of the wage earnings, the reverse trend was found. The proportion of natives earning wages in the range of ₹ 4000-5000, ₹ 5000-6000 and above ₹ 6000 was lower, i.e. 8.81 per cent, 8.81 per cent and 1.76 per cent, respectively as compared to that of the migrants which was 13.33 per cent, 17.33 per cent and 16.0 per cent, respectively.

Conclusions

The study has observed that the supply of about one-fourth of the child labour in the Punjab agriculture is in the form of migrants from other states, viz. Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh. Most of the migrant as well as native child workers

Table 3. Distribution of wage earnings of migratory and native child labour in agriculture

Income (₹)	(₹ / Annum)		
	Migrant child labour	Native child labour	Total
< 500	10(13.30)	34(14.98)	44(14.57)
500-1000	4(5.33)	30(13.22)	34(11.26)
1000-2000	9(12.00)	46(20.26)	55(18.21)
2000-3000	11(14.67)	37(16.33)	48(15.89)
3000-4000	6(8.00)	36(15.86)	42(13.91)
4000-5000	10(13.33)	20(8.81)	30(9.93)
5000-6000	13(17.33)	20(8.81)	33(10.93)
6000 & Above	12(16.00)	4(1.76)	16(5.30)
Total	75(100)	227(100)	302(100)

are in the age group of 12-14 years. The ratio of female child labour is higher in the case of migrants than in natives. A very high number of child labour belonging to both migrant and native families is from scheduled caste families. All the migrant working children belong to the landless families of labourers. None of them goes to the school and the reason behind their absenteeism is migration from other states. The child labour belongs to the low-income families. The child workers have been found engaged in almost all types of agricultural activities, including dairy farms and poultry farms. The wage earnings of working children are meager as nearly one-fourth of them earn up to ₹ 1000 per annum only.

The study has revealed that the working children of migratory labour families remain totally deprived of education. Special schools for migrants in the rural areas may be opened where they may be taught in their mother tongue. Schools on the pattern of *charwaha schools* of Bihar may also be started. The children have shown interest in getting education. They wanted to be in the government job, or to be in police or army. They are ready to attend night schools. It is, therefore, suggested that for the children who are being deprived of education due to their involvement in work during the day time, the government or NGOs should start night schools near their working or residential place. It is also suggested that caste system should be discouraged. To solve the problem of child labour and to ameliorate their economic conditions in particular and rural labour in general, it is further suggested that more employment avenues for adult labour in the villages of the state should be opened. Agro-based industries can be set up to provide employment to adult labour. After attaining Green Revolution with the help of massive mechanization, one cannot think of de-mechanization of agriculture in the state in the near future. So, small-scale industries should be set up to generate the employment in the rural areas of the state. Efforts should also be made to provide employment to adult labour, especially women in the rural sector. They may be engaged in traditional handicrafts such as embroidery, pickle-papad making, *dari* making, etc.

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