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Survey on Situation of Child Labour

With Reference to COVID-19 Lockdown

(May-June 2020)

Survey Conducted by:
Campaign Against Child Labour
(CACL) Maharashtra

Introduction

The Government of India declared complete lockdown from March 24, 2020 to control transmission of COVID-19. This has severely affected the livelihood of underprivileged families, especially the children. Nutrition, health, education, and protection of the children were compromised. A survey was conducted by CACL (Campaign Against Child Labour) Maharashtra to understand the situation of children living under lockdown. The impact on important aspects related to children is discussed in detail as follows.

Demographics

The survey was conducted in 5 districts of Maharashtra, namely Mumbai, Nashik, Parbhani, Pune, and Solapur. A total of 215 children along with their parents were interviewed to understand their situation under lockdown.

The children from Nashik, Pune and Mumbai districts (almost 88% of total respondents) represent urban or semi-urban poor communities. Remaining 12% of the children from Parbhani and Solapur districts come from rural areas.

The youngest respondent was 7 years old, while the oldest one was 20 years old. 72% of the children fall in the bracket of school going age according to RTE Act, which is 6 to 14 years. Remaining 28% are older than that.

35% of the respondents reported that they work for a living or as a support to their family, while 65% children - mostly girls - work from home or help their parents in household chores.

66% of the respondents mentioned that they will have to resume work once the lockdown is lifted. 82% of the parents preferred that their children continue studies and not work, 14% parents insisted that both study and work are equally important. 4% parents feel that their children must focus on work instead of studies.

COVID-19 Awareness

The Government and civil society organizations are creating awareness about COVID-19. Through the widespread print, electronic and social media, people at large have become aware about the virus and its serious impacts. Almost all of the children interviewed for this survey were found to be aware of symptoms and threats of the COVID-19 virus. Children from both urban and rural areas knew that the virus spreads through human contact, coughing or sneezing in public, etc. They were also aware about avoiding physical contact, no shaking hands, maintaining safe distance, wearing face masks and washing hands frequently. Some of the children also expressed concerns over adults not following social distancing norms and not staying back at home until lockdown is lifted.

Children observed following impacts of the lockdown, in general:

- People forced to stay at home;
- Loss of jobs and income;
- Shortage of ration, food, grains and other essential goods;
- Schools closed, education stopped;
- No play, no meeting friends;
- Women are more affected than men;
- Increase in quarrels at home and in the community;
- Increase in addiction among people sitting idle at home;
- Drop in quantity and quality of daily intake of food.

Education

Almost all of the respondents were attending schools, mostly Government schools, before the lockdown was imposed. Only 4 children reported of dropping out or leaving the school earlier. 71% of the children mentioned that they have continued studying from home, however the Government or the schools have not provided any resources to these children, neither books nor digital devices. Other than lack of resources, few children also mentioned disinterest in studies, preference to playing, and even work fatigue as reasons for not studying at home.

Physical distancing norms are to be followed even after the lockdown is lifted. In this context, the Government authorities are planning to replace classroom sessions with online sessions through smartphones and television. However, 64% of the respondents from rural areas informed that they do not have access to a smartphone. Even the remaining 36% children whose parents own a smartphone are unaware of its use for digital learning. The internet data service is not recharged on a regular basis and the most used apps are Whatsapp and Google Pay. Only 28% of the respondents have heard about an educational App launched by the Government. 42% of the respondents know that some educational content is shown on Doordarshan. Only 9 parents from the rural areas mentioned that they are aware of such App or programme on TV.

Work

The lockdown has shut outside work possibilities for children to a great extent, however many of the children, especially girls, have continued to work at home. 35% of the respondents reported that they work for a living or as a support to their family. It should be noted that 83% of them are above 14 years of age. However, 65% children who reported that they work at home comprise mostly of girls of all ages. Their work includes helping the parents in household chores, looking after younger siblings, cleaning and cooking activities, etc.

Elder children from rural areas are mostly engaged in farm related work, such as farm labour, flower picking, fruit packing, and vegetable selling, etc. Children living in the urban and semi-urban areas are working as domestic helps, delivery boys, shop attendants, food stall waiters, or working in newspaper distribution and housekeeping jobs. Some of the rural and urban girls are involved in home based tailoring work. Usually, the children have to manage their time for school, homework, play and work. While the schools were closed during the lockdown period, 17% of the working children reported to have continued their jobs, earning paltry income for themselves. 53% of the working children were out of work since the lockdown was declared. 30% of them informed that their work continued for 15 to 30 days during lockdown, but even they are at home now.

66% of the respondents mentioned that they will have to resume work once the lockdown is lifted. When parents were asked about their preference, 82% said that they want their children to continue studies and not work. 14% parents insisted that both study and work are equally important, especially for children above 14 years of age. Only 4% parents feel that their children must focus on work instead of studies. It should be noted that poor economic conditions are forcing children to work, even if the parents and the children are willing to continue their studies.

Almost all of the parents reported that their children, if working before the lockdown, were not involved in hazardous occupations.

Food and Nutrition

65% of the children interviewed for this survey reported that their food and nutrition supply was affected to some extent during the lockdown period. Inadequate ration supply was a major reason cited by the children and their parents. The nutritious food supply in the form of mid-day meals has also stopped due to schools being closed under lockdown. Some of the children, especially from urban poor communities reported that food is being prepared only once a day at home. They have also restricted the variety and taste in food, resorting to very simple meal - daal, rice, khichdi, etc. The Khichdi is distributed by some local political leaders and NGOs. Some of the children also mentioned that they no longer have non-veg food in their diet.

35% of the respondents mentioned that their food and nutrition supply was not much affected during the lockdown, thanks to growing vegetables and grains in own farms (in rural areas) or regular food supply by few NGOs (in urban areas).

Protection

Almost all of the children interviewed for this survey denied any incidence of physical abuse at home or in the community during the lockdown period. However, children mentioned about their boredom and deprivation of play and meeting friends. The uncertainty about health, employment and education seems to have a subtle impact on the children, which they may not be able to identify right now. Some of the children informed about increased quarrels between their parents and in the community, over issues like ration distribution and implementation of lockdown. Children have also observed rise in addiction among adults due to remaining idle and jobless at home, subjected to increasing financial pressure. Some of the girls briefly mentioned about eve-teasing incidences in the community. However, none of the respondents reported physical abuse by parents during this period.

Parents

Parents of 67% children were working on salary or daily wages before the lockdown started. These jobs included brick kiln workers, sweepers, domestic helps, farm labour, food product manufacturing, gardening, gas delivery, housekeeping, petrol pump attendant, tempo driver, watchman, and welder. Remaining parents were involved in some sort of self employment including Ayurvedik medicine sellers, carpentry, selling balloons and toys, auto rickshaw drivers, farming at village, fish seller, garbage picking, idol making, iron press shop, map seller, painters, ration shop

owner, performing religious rituals, tailoring work, tyre puncture repairing, and vegetable sellers, etc.

58% of the employed parents reported that their employers have paid them salaries for the months of March and April. Remaining 42% did not receive any compensation for the loss of employment due to the lockdown imposed across the country. Adding to this, the self employed parents were also left on their own, with no alternate source of income or financial aid from the Government. 36% of the respondents to this survey expressed the fear of losing their single source of income post lockdown. Only 22% of the parents informed that they could rely on their savings for survival through these circumstances. All of the remaining parents had to resort to borrowing from friends and relatives, taking loans, selling animals or household items during these difficult times. 11 parents thanked civil society organizations for arranging food and other essential supplies for survival of their families.

Around 43% of the respondents expect the Government to focus on education as a top priority post lockdown. 39% also consider that livelihood matters the most to them and Government must provide some options here. 14% demanded supply of ration, while 19% expected financial help from the Government, considering loss of employment among the rural and urban poor communities. 6% respondents expected better health services, while 4% respondents also wished the Government find a cure to COVID-19 as soon as possible.

Government Response

Members of the Government bodies related to children were also interviewed as a part of this survey on situation of child labour during the COVID-19 lockdown. Both Mr. Ganesh Kanwade, DCPO, Nashik and Ms. Shobha Pawar, CWC Member mentioned that there would be increase in the number of child labour cases post lockdown. Many parents have lost their jobs and the families had to borrow money from others. For repayment of loans and survival of the family, more members of the family would be required to work. This will also increase number of family enterprises along with outside employment. Mr. Kanwade and Ms. Pawar informed about working on 2 and 6 child labour cases respectively during the lockdown (in Nashik District).

Mr. Kanwade informed that the State Government is planning to strengthen existing Child Labour Task Force to tackle the post lockdown increase in child labour cases. He also mentioned that the system is currently focusing on caretaking of children in CCI, while the next steps would be reintegration, rehabilitation of the children in the families. Ms. Pawar expects that all children should get back to school post lockdown, proper implementation of CLPR Act should be ensured, and maximum awareness should be created on prohibiting child labour.