

Child Labor and Globalization

Child labor is primarily employing minors in any work, which results in depriving children of their childhood. This form of labor interferes with the child's ability to experience the mental, physical, and moral growth. Therefore, child labor exploitation is an unfair use of child labor by employers for their benefit due to the fundamentally asymmetric power relationship that exists between them. Child labor is prohibited across the world with strict legislations in place to protect children from exploitation by employers. However, there are some exceptions to the child labor laws. In particular, works done by child artists and supervised training are among the exceptions to the labor laws relating to the child labor. There are numerous factors, which affect the child labor either negatively or positively with the globalization being one of the major ones. Globalization is the integration and corporation of countries through the exchange of views and ideas. This paper will seek to illustrate the relationship between the globalization and child labor during the industrial revolution and the current century.

Child Labor during the Industrial Revolution

Throughout the history, child labor has been employed to varying extents in different countries and cultures. During the industrial revolution era (1820-1840), child labor was at its peak with children working in factories starting from the age of five. A research indicates that children between the ages of 5-14 years formed the work force in factories in the United Kingdom and the rest of the world. Notably, the industrial revolution was a crucial era in the United Kingdom, which facilitated the creation of the modern society. During this period, child labor was divided into two categories, namely the parish apprentice and the free labor children. The parish apprentice children comprised orphaned children, who were the first to be brought to the factory setting. Rich factory owners approached the parish leaders and negotiated a deal that

would allow them to take children from the orphanages in their factories. On the other hand, the free labor comprised children employed in the production factories under unhealthy conditions and extremely low compensation, thus called the free labor.

The children in the factories were subject to long working hours and worked under dangerous and unhygienic conditions. Further, the children were subject to harsh punishment when they failed to comply with the set performance standards in the factories. For instance, the supervisors in the factories used to beat the children among other punishments. A most common punishment was commonly referred to as 'weighted'. This form of punishment involved tying a heavy weight on the culprits' neck and forcing them to walk along the factory aisles to serve as a deterrent to others. This punishment had serious implications on the health of the wearer, resulting in serious back and neck pains and injuries. Additionally, the children were denied even a recess to take their meals in between their shifts in the factories. The youngest ones who could not operate the heavy machinery were sent to assist the textile workers.

Accidents were rampant among the child labor due to the age, sex, and the kind of work done. Standing for long hours without rest resulted in back pains and spinal injuries with some of these injuries leading to crippling. Fatigue among the children also resulted in uncountable cases of fainting other fatigue-related incidences. Spinal injuries were among the most serious injuries and had the major impact on the health of the children. As a result, a significant number of the children working in the factory became paralyzed due to spine-related accidents and accidents in the factory.

Mentally, due to the lack of proper childhood and constant abuse, most children were constantly under depression. Their mental growth was also significantly affected due to the prevailing conditions. Spending the whole day in factories considerably influenced the normal

mental growth of the children as they lacked the necessary environment for their growth. The working hours also restricted the time for the children to play with others, further complicating their mental growth.

Considering the facts mentioned above, one can state that the industrial revolution marked a significant advancement in England. However, the children working in the factories were denied their rights to being children as most of them grew up in the wrong environment, experiencing depression and injuries.

Child Labor in the Modern World

The percentage of child laborers has declined significantly from the 20th to the 21st century mainly due to the strict measures imposed to deter any employer from hiring or forcing children to work under unsafe environment. However, child labor persists in the large cities all over the world. The International Labor Organization (ILO) reported that although the percentage of child labor has reduced significantly in the 21st century, a number of children still work under deplorable conditions. Nowadays, the most widespread child labor is in various sweatshops across the globe. As defined by the department of labor, a sweatshop is any establishment or factory that violates a number of labor laws set forth by the regulatory bodies. They are characterized by exposing workers to considerably unsafe and unhygienic working environment. The children working in these sweatshops work for long hours without a fair wage or, sometimes, no wage at all, seven days per week. According to the ILO, the majority of the children in sweatshops is slaves in that their parents or other parties sold them to the owners of the sweatshops as a form of payment.

Poverty and unequal distribution of resources among the countries affected heavily influence this modern form of child labor. Poverty forms the base of child labor in most big

cities, especially in the manufacturing and production cities in, for example, China and India.

The common characteristics of the cities with considerable percentages of sweatshops are massive unemployment and population. The rural-urban migration to the towns causes an influx of labor, thus disrupting the forces of demand and supply. Children complain less and do not question the pay received at the end of the day; therefore, the majority of the sweatshops prefers children's workforce to adults' one. High population in the cities further facilitates the existence and the sustainability of the sweatshops. Further, the lack of proper monitoring by the relevant bodies on the issue of child labor worsens the situation in the sweatshops.

The children are the future leaders of their generations; therefore, their childhood should be protected. Their place in the society is vital to the advancement of the culture, economy, and the political agenda in the future. Consequently, there is a need to protect children from child labor and slavery, as the mental and physical injuries incurred by the children under the working conditions are irreversible. The children's affairs should be paramount and strictly monitored to avoid deviations like those brought about by the child labor menace.

Causes of Child Labor

The causes of child labor throughout the history have remained relatively similar. The following are some of the major causes of child labor across the globe:

- Capitalist system. This social system principally recognizes the individual rights, especially the rights of private ownership of properties. In this social system, the government only serves as a protector of the said rights of the individuals. The private ownership of properties results in private individuals owning major production and manufacturing industries. During the industrial revolution, the factory owners used the readily available cheap child labor to run their factories cost-effectively. Currently, the

situation is similar. Large production factories are privately owned, which facilitates the emergence of sweatshops in search of cheap labor from underage persons.

- **Inequality.** It is the gap between the wealthy and the poor and the characteristics of the two categories of people. This cause of child labor affects the poor people only. Many households with limited sources of income lead to working under severe conditions. Furthermore, this cause of child labor is closely related to slavery. There have been incidences where parents sell their children or offer them as a payment to rich individuals who in turn make the children slaves in their factories.
- **Economic crisis.** This term is used broadly to illustrate a situation where financial assets abruptly lose their nominal value. When the economic crisis arises, production and manufacturing industries seek ways of reducing the cost to process or manufacture finished goods. It creates an avenue for child labor because of its availability and the cost. Offering children minimal wages reduces the costs in the process; thus, the owners avert the economic crisis by reducing the inputs necessary for the output.
- **Unemployment.** Unemployment is a situation where there is an availability of an adequate number of both skilled and unskilled labor but with lower demand for employees. Unemployment is among the chief causes of child labor. The market is saturated with a huge number of both skilled and the unskilled labor; thus, employers exploit this situation by hiring children because the latter tend not to complain even under horrible working conditions. It facilitates serious exploitation of child labor by exposing the children to the unsafe working environment and having them work for long hours with poor payment.

- **Poverty.** It is being able to satisfy the primary basic needs and unable to satisfy the secondary needs. Poverty has a direct relationship to child labor. The families in poor households, as discussed above, work in the unsafe and exploitative environment. In addition, as stated earlier, there are incidences of parents or guardians selling their children to wealthy individuals as a form of debt payment.
- **Institution family crisis.** A family crisis arises in incidences where a family breaks up and the kids are caught in-between. When such crises occur, children are forced to take care of themselves, which leads to child labor.
- **Immorality.** Immorality is the violation of the set standards and moral laws in the society. Thus, one can consider child labor as a form of immorality. Children should be protected against unsafe environment they face while working in factories. Therefore, the act of employing children to work in the factories is immoral.
- **Indifference.** It presupposes being unconcerned, insensible, and showing the lack of interest in something or someone. The society, as discussed above, is indifferent regarding the situation of the existence of the sweatshops located in certain regions. They are also less concerned about the children working in those factories under poor and dangerous condition. Indifference has facilitated the existence and the continuation of the sweatshops across the world, even though they violate major moral and labor laws.
- **Education system.** This factor mostly affects the African and Asian countries. Most African states have a theoretical and an expensive education system, which limits creativity and accessibility. Thus, the system only prepares one for white-collar jobs. Such education system results in an increase in dropout number. Eventually, the children seek employment and the issue of child labor arises.

- **Urbanization.** Urbanization is the population shift from rural areas to urban centers. This shift of the population results in an increase in population in urban centers. This increase enhances the number of both skilled and the unskilled labor and the unemployment rate. Furthermore, this increase in the supply of labor results in employers employing children to cut the costs by paying them poorly.
- **Racism.** It is the discrimination based on the race. The majority of the immigrants lacks the skills necessary for white-collar jobs, which makes them seek employment in sweatshops. The children of the immigrant families are also forced to work in the same sweatshops in an effort to raise enough money to satisfy their primary basic human needs. It leads to child labor since the children are subject to the same environment as their parents in the sweatshops.
- **Social exclusion.** This cause presupposes rendering a certain group of people as inferior and less important. The marginalized group of people tends to be associated with manual jobs. This notion creates an avenue for child labor.
- **State welfare.** It is a concept of government, according to which, the state takes precautionary measures to protect and promote the social and the economic welfare of its citizen. The lack of state welfare in regions mostly affected by child labor facilitates the advancement of this immoral behavior. If the state is less concerned about its citizens' social welfare, the rich utilizes the cheap and available child labor to cut on the cost of production and manufacturing.
- **Laws.** As stated earlier, there are countless laws in place to protect the rights of children against child labor. The ILO monitors the application of these laws in cases where children are faced with child labor. However, there are countries that have very lenient

laws concerning child labor like Bolivia, China, India, and most African states. This leniency contributes to the advancement of child labor as the employers are less concerned about the legal implications of their actions.

Different Views on Child Labor

Globalization has facilitated the process of International Corporation and integration through the exchange of world views, ideas, new products, and certain aspects of culture. Globally, child labor is viewed as a negative and an immoral conduct. The regulatory bodies all over the world monitor and advance the laws regarding the child labor. The organizations such as the ILO highlight and monitor countries with poor compliance of the set international laws regarding child labor. Further, in Eastern countries globalization has increased the rate of child labor as the developing countries try to keep up with the developed world. Children who ought to be in school are hired in various industries to cut on cost in order to compete effectively with products from the developed countries.

Child labor in the Western countries is significantly minimal as a result of strict labor laws regarding the use of child labor. During the industrial revolution, child labor was at its peak in the Western countries. The 18th century saw the highest percentage of children working in factories under deplorable conditions. A research indicated that in Britain, almost 13% of the workforce in the factories comprised underage children. The children were divided according to their genders and assigned tasks appropriately. In the United States of America, the rapid industrialization increased the percentage of the child labor. The nationwide census conducted during the 1870s indicated that one in every ten children was employed in the factories. Immigration further contributed to the growth of the child labor. The majority of the immigrant's children was transferred to Canada, where they were relocated to farms and some worked as

house servants. At one time, the children's contribution to the family earnings was almost equal to the adult one.

However, the 20th century saw a significant drop in the child labor in the Western countries. The introduction of the compulsory schooling laws further facilitated the abolishment of the child labor. Similarly, a crusade against child labor in most Western countries in the late 19th century contributed to the significant drop in the percentage of child laborers. This crusade demanded the abolishment of child labor and the legislation of strict labor laws regulating and protecting the rights of children against labor exploitation. Culturally, during the period of the industrial revolution in the Western countries, employing children was interpreted as an important activity towards self-reliance of the children. Currently, the Western countries have strict laws regarding child labor. However, the laws are relatively considerable as not all child labor is immoral.

The Eastern countries face the biggest challenge concerning the child labor even with globalization. In the Asian and the Pacific region, almost 9% of all children engage in child labor, predominately in the agriculture and the production sectors of the economy. Most sweatshops are located in the Eastern countries, further complicating the issue of child labor in these states. The majority of the Western countries outsource their production and manufacturing processes to the Eastern countries which in turn advance child labor in the East. Countries like China and India record the highest percentages in child labor in factories of overseas companies. The worst forms of child labor are experienced in these regions.

The ILO and other regulatory bodies are constantly advocating the complete end of the child labor. With globalization, most companies with overseas factories are becoming stricter concerning the issue of child labor through the corporate social responsibility reviews as a result

of globalization. Such a measure has become necessary because stakeholders and consumers became more interested in the hiring practices of the company and the working conditions of the employees in the overseas factories. The social responsibility reviews assist in the certification of the products and in reducing the child labor. Further, the regulatory bodies and non-governmental organizations like the UN are constantly legislating laws to eradicate child labor and provide each child with equal opportunities for education and access of other services. The majority of the Eastern countries' governments is improving their laws in efforts to regulate the labor market, especially the child labor.

Consequences for Children

The child labor affects the children both physically and mentally. During the industrial revolution, children suffered severe spinal injuries due to standing long hours while working. Also, disruption of the sleeping pattern of the children during this era and the working condition depressed most of the underage workers. Currently, child labor extends to commercial sex work, which has severe consequences to the affected children. Most children contract HIV and AIDS virus and other sexually transmitted diseases. Spending most of their time in an unsafe environment hinders the mental growth of the children.

Child's Place in the Society

In most cultures and countries, the place of children in the society is under the protection of their parents or guardians. Their childhood should be protected since it is the critical time for healthy human growth and expansion of the cogitative capacity. Moreover, with the notion of the young people being the future of the society, children ought to be protected against anything that may deviate their future and compromise the whole society.

The child labor violates the human rights of the children. Therefore, to completely eradicate child labor, the human rights of the children should be adhered to strictly. Furthermore, there should be a strict punishment for violators. A child has a right to live in a family that is able to provide all the primary and secondary needs, including security, food, clothing, and housing, among others. The satisfaction of these needs eases the growth of the child both mentally and physically. The governments should formulate education systems that are easily accessible by all children. Additionally, there should be a compulsory education for every child. The effective implementation of this system should be monitored. Further, the governments should build enough learning institutions for the compulsory education program to be effective. Lastly, the urban and the residential environments should be suitable for the transition of the child from childhood to adulthood. Finally, the environment should provide the child with enjoyment and opportunities to be creative.

Conclusion

Globalization, as discussed in the paper, is the exchange of world views regarding different sectors in the economic, political, and social setting. This exchange of views has facilitated the abolishment of child labor in the majority of the countries. The international advocacy against child labor as a result of globalization has facilitated the significant decline of child labor. However, during the 18th and the 19th centuries, globalization led to the increase in child labor in the factories. During that period, child labor was viewed as a meaningful way of acquiring cheap labor. Currently, the child labor is minimal in most Western countries due to the strict laws regarding it. Nevertheless, even with globalization, Eastern countries still face a big challenge concerning the issue of child labor. Conclusively, globalization has facilitated the reduction of the child labor in the world through the exchange of views regarding it.