

**CEC Working Paper**

**CURRENT TRENDS IN  
DOMESTIC CHILD LABOUR:  
Case Studies from Delhi**

**Seema Gaiwad**

**2001**



**Centre for Education and Communication**



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# Introduction

Children constitute the nations future human resource. Investment in a child's development is thus an investment in the country's future and in improving the nation's quality of life. Neglecting children means loss to the society as a whole. If children are deprived of their childhood – socially, economically, physically and mentally – the nation gets deprived of potential human resources for social progress, economic empowerment, social stability and good citizenry. When they reach adulthood they are in no position to develop their innate capacities and skills and hence become a liability for the nation. The incidence of child labour is an indicator of the economic ill health of the country, a curse for the children and a slur for modern and civilized society.

Child labour is a global phenomenon, which has assumed serious dimensions in developing countries.

According to the estimates of the ILO some 250 million children between the ages of 5-14 work in developing countries and some 50 million to 60 million children between the ages 5-11 work in hazardous circumstances.<sup>1</sup>

An estimated 20 million, and perhaps as many as 40-43 million, girls and boys in South Asia toil in debt servitude<sup>2</sup>, hunched over looms, making bricks, or rolling cigarettes by hand. Countless others spend their childhood and adolescence in domestic servitude, sweeping floors and scrubbing pots and pans.

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1. ILO, Child Labour: Targeting the Intolerable, Geneva, November 1996

2. Human Rights Watch, The Small Hands of Slavery: Bonded Children in India, Human Rights Watch, New York, September 1996, pp.2 and 17.

# Magnitude of Child Labour in India

Article 39 (e) of the Indian Constitution shows special concern for children and directs the State to secure conditions in favour of children so that in their tender age, they are not abused nor coerced by economic necessity to enter avocations unsuited to their age and strength.<sup>3</sup>

Despite this the children in India constitute a formidable section of the workforce today. According to the 1991 census India had a total child population of 297 million in the 0-14 age group. Of this, the number of children in the school going age (5-14) is 203.3 million, of which 11.28 million were workers, indicating that 5.2 percent of the child population were workers. These children spend their growing years toiling in order to survive. They lead a life of misery, deprivation and exploitation.<sup>4</sup>

It is difficult to give a precise estimate of the magnitude of child labour in India on account of the numerous limitations such as the predominance of the informal and unorganised nature of the labour market; multiplicity of concepts, methods of estimation and sources of data.

The 1983 Operations Research Group of Baroda estimated the number of child workers at 44.5 million.<sup>5</sup> The Planning Commission put the figure at around 20 million by the end of the year 2000. According to the National Sample Survey of 1987-88, the number of child workers was approximately 17.0 million (8.2 million males and 6.9 million females in rural areas; 1.2 million males and 0.8 million females in urban areas). Unofficial studies have put the number of child workers in India at around 100 million<sup>6</sup>. UNICEF has claimed that 25% of child workers are street children.<sup>7</sup>

However, according to the 1971 census the estimated number of child labour estimates were 10.74 million and rose to 11.28 million in 1991<sup>8</sup>

In India the child work force is not only large but it is also increasing each year despite ILO conventions on child labour, labour legislations and India's commitment to provide universal and compulsory education up to the age of 14 years. The distribution of child labour in different states appears to indicate certain co-relations. States with a larger population living below the poverty line have a higher incidence of child labour. The higher incidence of child labour is accompanied by a high dropout rate in schools. The state with the highest child labour population in the country is Andhra Pradesh (14.3 per cent), followed by Madhya Pradesh (12.5 per cent), Maharashtra (11.4 per cent) and Uttar Pradesh (10.5 per cent).<sup>9</sup>

The large scale employment of the children below the age of 14 years is generally found in the following

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3. The Constitution of India Article 39(e)

4. Census 1991

5. Nangia S. Child Workers in the Carpet Weaving Industry of Jammu and Kashmir. Child Labour Series, National Labour Institute, Noida, 1993 (December):5-8

6. Deshpande RY. Child Labour in India (Legal Provisions). Central Board for Workers Education under ILO/IPEC/CBWE Action Programme 1996:3.

7. Ruikar M. Child Labour in India: Problems and Solutions. Indian Journal Occupational & Environmental Medicine 1998;2(1):45-52.

8. Census 1991

9. L. Mishra, Child Labour in India, pp26

occupations: Agriculture, Plantations, Mining and Quarrying, Beedi Rolling, Glass and Bangles, Handloom and Carpet weaving, Match and Fireworks, Machine tools, repair shops and petrol pumps, Zari and embroidery, Gem cutting, Helpers in hotels, restaurants, canteens, rag picking, brick kilns, construction, hawkers, shoe shining, coolies, domestic child labour and child sex workers. All these trades are in the unorganized sector where the incidence of child labour is much higher than in the organized sector.

A study conducted in Madras City reported the following distribution of children in different jobs: coolies, 22%; hotel workers, 10.4%; rag picking, 9.6%; rickshaw pullers, 8%; etc.<sup>10</sup> Bansal & Banerjee found that, in Surat, 37.7% of child workers were involved in zari work, 12% worked in eating houses, 8% in small-scale industries, 6.3% were diamond cutters, 3.3% were shoe shiners and 1.7% of child workers were involved in illicit alcohol trade.<sup>11</sup>

The Constitution of India prohibits the employment of children below the age of 14 years in factories, mines or hazardous occupations. The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 and the National Policy on Child Labour provide the framework for the intervention on child labour issues. The above law prohibits employment of children in certain listed hazardous industries and provides regulation of employment of children in other industries (applicable only to factory sector or registered units). Domestic child labour is not a prohibited occupation for children. The only step in this direction is that the Government of India has amended the Central Civil Service Conduct rules to prohibit Civil servants from employing children below the age of 14 as domestics.

Several studies have been conducted in India on child labour, which have helped in revealing the magnitude of the problem, the sociological profile of the children and their parents, the factors that contribute to its high incidence in various occupations and possible solutions. But these studies focus on the 'recognised' child labour in the unorganized sector. It is only recently that campaigners against child labour (child rights groups and organizations) have begun to focus on Child domestic workers, which is probably the largest group of child workers in the world. This is also due to the realization by national and international agencies that the practice of child domestic labour is so widespread in the developing countries that something needs to be done to address it urgently.

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10. Arimpoor J. Street Children of Madras. National Labour Institute, Noida, 1992(June):1-16

11. Bansal RK, Banerjee S. Child Labour in Surat. Indian Journal Maternal & Child Health 1991;2(4):121-4.)



## The Present Study

The present study is limited to the city of Delhi. Delhi has recently witnessed several horrifying cases of inhuman torture of the child domestic workers.

A boy of 14 in the house of Muradnagar (Ghaziabad) MLA, was shot in the mouth by the MLA's personal security officer when he delayed to offer a glass of water! -The Times of India, Nov.3, 1999<sup>12</sup>

In November 22, a teenage domestic help, Suraj Kumar Das was accused of theft, beaten up, and finally thrown off the second floor of the building in Greater Kailash. Ironically the theft for which Suraj was accused took place even before he had resumed to work- The Hindu, Nov. 25, 1999.<sup>13</sup>

These inhuman acts against the children have directed the attention of social activists, NGOs and researchers to undertake studies for understanding the working conditions of these children. Such efforts are in initial stage and the present study forms a part of this initiative.

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12. The Times of India, November 3, 1999

13. The Hindu, Nov. 25, 1999.

## What we know of Child Domestic Workers

Information is scarce about the child domestic labour as they are an 'invisible' workforce – invisible because each child is separately employed and works in the seclusion of the private house, unlike children in a factory or on the streets. They do not move as a group and are difficult to reach out and count. Domestic work belongs to the informal labour market, is not registered and therefore does not show up clearly on any statistics. These children are amongst the least visible of all children, because the domestic tasks performed by the children are often not even dignified with the label 'work'. The obscurity and the low status of their toil put them at risks. Many of them are physically and sexually exploited.<sup>14</sup> These children have yet not figured on the agenda of the policy makers and planners. Due to their invisible nature it is also very difficult to organize them. Therefore, the knowledge about child domestic workers remains patchy .

However, the available literature on Child Domestic Workers is enough to indicate the magnitude of this phenomenon. Improved statistical survey methods being pioneered by the ILO indicate how widespread globally the practice is: in Indonesia, for example, an estimated 5 million children are in domestic service, and 20 per cent of all Brazilian, Colombian and Ecuadorean girls between the ages of 10 and 14 work as domestics. In rural areas the percentages rise, e.g. in Brazil 35.6 per cent of the girls between the ages of 10 and 14 work as domestics, in Colombia it is 32 per cent and in Ecuador the figure is as high as 43.8 per cent. In Togo, a sample survey revealed that 95.6 per cent of the domestics working full-time were aged between 7 and 17 years.<sup>15</sup>

According to the 'Child Domestic Workers In South Asia', an UNICEF document, while it is difficult to count child domestic workers, as most of them are dispersed, hidden and invisible, it is estimated that about five million are working as domestics in the region, predominantly in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal.

In Bangladesh an estimated 300,000 child domestics below the age of 14 are in work in Dhaka alone; 81 per cent of them are girls.<sup>16</sup>

In Sri Lanka, an estimated 100,000 children are employed in the domestic service and food catering<sup>17</sup> A sample survey conducted in eight towns of the Southern Province of Sri Lanka indicates that out of every 100 houses, 28 employ domestic servants. 25 per cent of the domestic workers are children below the age of 14 years.<sup>18</sup>

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15. UNICEF, Innocenti Digest, Child Domestic Work, May 1999

16. Shoishab, Bangladesh, A quantitative Study of Child Domestic Workers in Dhaka Metropolitan City, 1997

17. Childscope, "Domestic Child Labour Through the Eyes of Sri Lanka" paper presented at ILO/IPEC supported Asian Regional Consultation on Child Domestic Workers, Manila November 1997.

18. De Silva, Harendra, et.al. "Domestic Employment of Children – Gravity of the problem in some urban areas in the Southern Province, 1997. Sponsored by UNICEF, Radda Barnen and Redd Barna

55,000 children under the age of 18 work as domestic servants in Nepal. In Kathmandu Municipality alone, an estimated 22,000 children under the age of 18 work in this sector, with one in five households employing a child for an adult job. More than half of these workers (57 per cent) are boys.<sup>19</sup>

A survey in India, noted that 17% of domestic workers were under 15 years of age and also reported that girls aged 12 to 15 were the preferred choice of 90% of employing households.<sup>20</sup> According to another study undertaken by Peace Trust, 11,280 children below the age of 14 years were involved in domestic chores for a wage in 19 towns of Tamil Nadu, of which around 3,000 children were employed in the homes of government servants.<sup>21</sup> Yet another study undertaken in Chennai (Tamil Nadu) showed that 25 per cent of child domestic workers interviewed began working before they were nine and a further 65 per cent began work between the ages of nine and 12 years old. More than 80 per cent were girls.<sup>22</sup>

As quoted in the Child Domestic Workers in South Asia, a UNICEF publication, 2001, roughly one out of every five children under 14 years working outside the family is a domestic child worker.<sup>23</sup>

The above studies indicate that:

- a) There is no comprehensive data on Child Domestic Workers
- b) Majority of Child Domestic Workers are girls.
- c) Child Domestic Workers enter the labour market at a very early age (of nearly 8-9 years.
- d) They are a sizeable part of the child labour force.
- e) Children working as Child Domestic Workers remain unrecognized for various reasons.

The high incidence of domestic child labour as indicated in the above evidences calls for urgent intervention by policies makers, NGO, researchers and other actors of the civil society. It was with this backdrop that the present field study on "Current Trends in Domestic Child Labour: Case Studies from Delhi was undertaken by this scholar. The study was sponsored and guided by Centre for Education and Communication, New Delhi.

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19. ILO-IPEC, 2001, A Rapid Assessment

20. UNICEF, State of the World's Children, 1997.

21. Ramya Kannan, "India: Study shows lack of follow-up action", The Hindu, 20 September, 2000, citing The 'preliminary assessment' of the prevalence of domestic child labour, by Peace Trust, and 15 other NGOs.

22. Anti-Slavery International and Arunodhaya, "Out of Sight, Out of Mind, Out of reach: A Study of Child Domestic Workers in Chennai, India", 1999.

23. MICS, 2000, Child Labour in India, Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys, conducted in all the states and Union Territories in India. (Presented in Child Domestic Workers In South Asia, UNICEF).

# Objective and Methodology

Objectives of the study is to have an insight into the following aspects of child domestic workers:

- socio-economic background ;
- educational status;
- working conditions;
- employment / wage pattern of the children.

## Methodology

- The following methodology was adopted for the study.

## Case study method

- It was decided that a case study method would be used to draw insight into the present day conditions of the Child Domestic Workers. The enormous difficulty in accessing the child domestic worker at their workplace and the employer, keeping in mind also the time and resource constraints a case study method was considered most viable and reliable to capture the current trends in Child Domestic Workers in Delhi. The case study method was also chosen to enable us to make a complete and careful observation of the individuals and the family thus highlighting the conditions of the Child Domestic Workers.

## Selection of the Study area

- Due to the invisible nature of this workforce it was decided that those areas would be chosen for study wherever 1) there is a large upper middle class colony with a slum adjacent to it, 2) where a NGO was working with the community and 3) where the researcher was familiar with a domestic worker. It was on the basis of these criteria that it was decided to undertake the study in the Juggi Jhopdi clusters near the middle and upper middle class residential colonies in West and South Delhi. For this purpose the field work was conducted in Kacha Rasta Basti in Khirki , Malviya Nagar; Kusumpur Pahadi Basti in Vasant Vihar and Sukhpur Basti in Punjabi Bagh.

## Collection of data from primary sources

- Interviews of the child domestic worker were conducted to enable us to have knowledge on the situation of child domestic worker in Delhi it was decided to conduct case studies of 25 child domestic workers. This was done by means of a semi-structured interview schedule. These interviews enabled us to have an insight, a careful and complete observation, of the individuals and the family. The socio-economic background, age, gender, terms of employment, working conditions, educational development, contribution to the family income, age of entry as a domestic help, cases of gross abuse, exploitation were some of the important aspects that were looked into while conducting the case studies

- Interactive sessions with the parents were also held, though it was more difficult to speak with the parents and make them understand why the interview was being conducted they finally answered some of the questions. It was difficult to get information about the address of the employers – either they actually did not know the exact house number and street or they were not willing to share the information with us.
- Interactive session with the employers was an uphill task only five employers were willing to meet the Researcher and discuss the situation of the child domestic worker.
- Meetings were held with NGO's and Community Based Organizations in the area where the interviews were undertaken.

### **Collection of data from secondary sources**

- Select readings on Child domestic worker was done to get an insight on the kind of studies already undertaken on the subject.
- Studies by other researchers gave us an insight into the gravity of the situation of the child domestic workers.
- Media reports

### **Processing the data**

- After conducting the interviews the data was processed and on the basis of the case studies an insight into the conditions of the Child Domestic Workers is presented below.

## Child Domestic Workers: An Overview

'Child domestic' or 'domestic workers' are being defined here as children under the age of 18 years who work in other people's households, doing domestic chores, caring for children and running errands, among other tasks. The study focuses mainly on the situation of part-time child domestics (children who work part-time in exchange of remuneration) and live-in child domestics (children who work full time in exchange of room, board, care and sometimes remuneration).

Many people may presume that the domestic work or performing household chores is very light in comparison to work in other organised and unorganized trades. This however does not hold true. A large percentage of working children get into this occupation. This is perhaps due to the high demand of domestic help. Though it is illegal to employ children for such a purpose (as stated in the Constitution of India) nevertheless the child is hired as a domestic worker in many households.

In spite of child domestic work being widespread it is the most neglected form of child employment. Within every household a wide variety of domestic tasks needs to be undertaken: cleaning, mopping, washing, cooking, shopping, laundry, looking after the siblings. Domestic service is therefore one of the world's oldest occupations and one in which the children have traditionally played a predominant role.

Since time immemorial, work around the household has been regarded as a natural part of a child's upbringing, especially that of girls. Their help is needed in washing dishes, minding livestock, looking after the younger children and contributing to the other tasks that make a household function. Children have also been contributing traditionally to family occupations such as agriculture, beedi making, embroidery etc., but this picture is dramatically changed when the child has to work in another household which takes a form of commercialized and sometimes potentially exploitative arrangement. Long hours of work, low rewards, lack of childhood development opportunities, lack of love and affection and other deprivations ensue and kill the natural innocence of the child contributing to his unnatural premature development.

# An insight into The Conditions of Child Domestic Workers in Delhi

## Migration and the growth of Delhi

In the recently concluded Census of India (2001), the population of Delhi has been recorded as 13.78 million, registering a net increase of 4.36 million over the Census of 1991.<sup>24</sup> It is projected that if the present trend continues the population of Delhi shall reach 18.24 million in 2011, 22 million in 2021 and 30 million in 2051.<sup>25</sup> This shows that rate of population growth of Delhi is much higher than other major metropolitan cities namely Kolkata and Mumbai during the same period.<sup>26</sup> 62% of the growth of population of Delhi during the past decade (2.7 million) was due to natural increase and 38% (1.6 million) due to net in-migration.<sup>27</sup> The contribution of migration to population growth is significantly higher. The major reason of this is the increase in in-migration. Nearly two hundred thousand people are migrating to the city every year in search of livelihood.<sup>28</sup>

As it is clear from the above figures the population of Delhi has grown 221.57% during the course of last years. It is also evident that this growth has been influenced by poverty-induced migration, from different parts of the country, particularly from the neighbouring States, in search of livelihood. Unending streams of poor villagers have swamped into the city and have found shelters in the numerous squatter settlements and offered their cheap labour and services to the capital's burgeoning trade and industry. According to an estimate prepared by the Society for Development Studies, the rate of growth of squatter population in Delhi (natural growth of existing squatter population plus the fresh migration) during the period 1981-94 was four and half times larger than the non-squatter population. The squatter population during the period grew by 13.2 per cent per annum as compared to the 2.9 per cent growth of the non-squatter population.<sup>29</sup>

It is estimated that 83.9% of the population who migrated to the city belonged to the rural areas, 15.8% to the small and medium towns (with population of less than a million) and 0.3% to the metropolis (million plus cities)<sup>30</sup>, but almost every individual who migrated to the city, irrespective of the level of education, income and social status, did so with a dream of a better future. They do so being unaware of the consequences of their action; of the hazards of city life.

A combination of push and pull factors have influenced the pattern of migration. As is also evident from the present case studies. They indicate that most of the in-migrants were agricultural workers, who did not own

24. Growth of the population of the city, as recorded in the decennial Census, is given in Table 1.

25. Delhi Development Authority, Report of the Sub-Group on Population Projections and Demographic Profile for Preparation of Master Plan for Delhi 2021, 2000, New Delhi.

26. The comparative growth of the three megapolises of India is given in Table 2

27. Net in-migration is the total migration into the city minus the total migration out of the city. The total migration in the city during the decade was 1.88 million and out migration was 0.28 million only.

28. Table 3

29. The rate of growth of squatter population in Delhi during 1981-94 is provided in Table 4

30. Delhi Development Authority, op. cit.

any land, they were 'pulled' by the better opportunities of employment and living that the city offered to them. The 1991 Census data on "reasons for migration" indicate that 81.56% of the migrants came to the city in search of employment, 7.65% for business, 1.84% for education, 0.12% due to natural calamities and 8.83% for other reasons.<sup>31</sup>

The neighbouring states of Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Rajasthan accounted for more than 80 per cent of migration to Delhi, while 12% came from Bihar and the remaining 8% from all other States put together.<sup>32</sup> The present case studies also indicate that there are a number of migrants from Salem, Tamil Nadu who have settled in the Sukhpur Basti in Punjabi Bagh.

Therefore, it is the comparatively poorer States of India, who also score poorly on the basic human development indices that are the major contributors to the massive urban growth of the capital city. A typical migrant family would influence male members from near and distant relations to join him as the "aura of success in Delhi continues to kindle rays of hope among the people back home."<sup>33</sup>

The Juggi Jhopdi clusters (JJ clusters) are often formed along regional, linguistic, religious and caste affiliations of the migrants, although there are many settlements, which are more cosmopolitan in their composition. Inter-household solidarity within a JJ cluster provides some measure of social security among the residents although dissensions and conflicts over trivial issues are very common. In situations of distress and challenges they exhibit tremendous degree of unity and resilience to work and live together. This is clearly reflected in all the case studies that were undertaken and particularly in the case of Satbir and Savitri.

*Satbir and Savitri left their ancestral two room house in Haryana for Delhi in 1990. Unable to cope with the demands of the large joint family, Satbir decided to break away and move to Delhi with his wife and three year old Kavita. His family consisted of his parents, his paternal uncle - his wife and three children who were married and also had a child each. Satbir's younger brother was also married and had one child. Their small agricultural land was unable to produce enough for sustenance of the family. Satbir says' "the question of income from the sale of produce never arose as there was ever enough for the family".*

*His cousin Chandan Singh had recently moved to Delhi and had not only found himself a job but had also settled in the Kusumpur Pahadi slum in Vasant Vihar, South Delhi. Assured of at least a roof over his head he took the plunge and moved to Delhi. The family has now rented a juggi in the same slum and Kavita has two siblings. Satbir also found work and is working with a contractor who takes down the electricity meter readings in Vasant Vihar close to his residence.*

In the case of Satbir, 'social security' was provided by his kins. In yet another case the community provided the much needed help to Rekha and her family.

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31. Migration Table, Census of India, Series 1, Vol 3, Registrar General of India, New Delhi, p- 76

32. Ibid, p-79

33. Lall V. D. and Suri D. A., Strategies and Action Plan for Resettlement of Squatters of Delhi in New Townships of the National Capital Region, Society for Development Studies, New Delhi, 1994, P- 22



*Eighteen years ago, the family came to Delhi from Salem, Tamil Nadu where her father, Rangaswami, had worked as an agricultural labourer. They did not have any land of their own and soon decided to leave for Delhi. At that time Rekha was a new born baby and her brother Mukesh was two. Presently they live in the Sakhpur Basti near Punjabi Bagh. Rekha is the eldest daughter in a family of six, which includes father, two brothers and a sister. Today Rekha is about 18 years old, her brothers Mukesh and Krishna are 20 and 15 years old respectively. Her sister Puja is seventeen .*

*Rekha's father, Rangaswami worked as a labourer on daily wages in the nearby construction company in Punjabi Bagh and earned Rs 500/ per month. Her mother Saroja, was always ill as the climate, especially the winter, did not suit her. Rangaswami with no other source of income took a lot of debt from the community to cover the doctor's bills. Rekha with tears in her eyes says, “ Amma (mother) was constantly ill, despite taking loans from the members of the community we were unable to provide the right medical facilities to Amma who constantly complained of pain in her chest”. All the money was spent on her illness and they also had to mortgage the juggi to pay the heavy bills. Eventually Saroja was taken to hospital where she collapsed, went into coma and never came out of it.*

*Being the eldest daughter, the burden of running the house fell on the shoulders of young Rekha, who was a mere child of 13 years. At the time of her mother's death Rekha was in standard five and she had to give up studies. Rekha was like a mother to her brothers and sister. Their well-being now rested solely on her shoulders. Her father had taken to drink and also lost his job. Since then he has never worked! She started working as a domestic help in 4 households of Lawrence Road, she earned Rs 300/per month and was soon the sole earning member of the family.*

*Mukesh and Krishna continued going to school and Puja the youngest hung around the house. Mukesh passed standard nine and dropped out of school and took up work with a cement godown. Puja started school but she too dropped out of school after passing standard 5. She joined Rekha in contributing to the family income and started work as a domestic help as well. Krishna, now 15, still continues his studies.*

*But troubles were not to end here. Mukesh developed a skin disease and it was further aggravated by the fact that he worked in the Cement Godown. Handling the cement bags each day only made matters worse. He earns about 700 to 800 per month but a good percentage of his income goes in his medicines. He keeps going to a new doctor each time but his condition does not seem to be improving.*

*Today Rekha and Puja both work as domestic helps in eight households each in the nearby DDA flats and the kothis of Punjabi Bagh. Their day starts at 5.30 am and after preparing the meal for the house and cleaning it they start for work at 7.30 am. Sweeping, mopping, washing clothes and cleaning utensils and have become routine. “The hands” Rekha says,*

*“move mechanically”. “Moving from one household to the next I sometimes feel like a machine”. Each household gives her Rs 200. With the money she earns she runs the household, gives her brothers school fees and also gives money to her father to buy his drinks. She takes her lunch break in one such household where she has worked for the past 6 years and after the afternoon rounds of cleaning utensils she returns home at 4.00pm , sometimes even 5.00 pm. “The people I work for are very nice and some of them very considerate. They also give me food to take home”, says Rekha. She further adds, “it is very difficult to get leave. I do not get a single day off. Sometimes when I want leave one of the Memsahib agrees and the other doesn't , but if I am not well what can I do I have to take leave. This creates quite a hassle. Sometimes when I return to work I am snubbed often my job is always at stake as I am often told ' kar nahin satkthi to chod do, hum koi aur rak lengay (if you can't work please leave, we will find someone else).” “With this threat hanging on my head I have to continue working whether I am fit or not. I cannot afford to lose my job”. There is a lot at stake. Rekha's life is defined sharply by her circumstances and her father's wishes.*

*She has also tried to save some money and has bought saris and salwar kameez for herself and her sister. We have to hide them as father will be very annoyed. He does not like it when we spend the money on ourselves.*

*What are Rekha's dreams? “Does she want to continue studies, does she want to learn craft, stitching..... simply spend some time with her friends?.....” Rekha says, “ I will continue sweeping houses, I am not educated to do anything else, there is no time for friends, I am so tired after I come home there is the evening meal to prepare. This is my life, the struggle will continue, will there ever be an end?”*

### **Migration as a cause of Child Domestic Labour**

Tragically, the people who migrate are not only poor but have large families to support either at the home, or at the place where they have migrated. The cost of migration is too heavy as the earnings are never adequate due to the low wages. The meager earnings of the men are insufficient even for the very biological survival of the families, forcing their wives and children to work. This paves the way for the emergence of child labour.

*Palmichami decided to move to Delhi with his wife Marima and daughter Malti in 1992. His cousin was already well settled in Sukhpur Basti in Punjabi Bagh and he decided to join him. Being a landless labourer in Salem, it was hard for Palmichami to provide for the family. So he set out for Delhi unaware of the hardships ahead. He was unable to find work for nearly two years for he was not only having language problems but was also unskilled. His wife started accompanying his cousin to work as a house-maid in the kothis of Punjabi Bagh. She soon found 4 households where she would wash clothes, sweep the house and clean the utensils. Her earnings helped to buy the rations. Palmichami was also able to find odd job as a gardener in the nearby Kothis of Punjabi bagh though his earnings were very little. They even put Malti in a nearby MCD school. But gradually the family grew and with it grew the*

*family responsibilities. Malti was 8 years old and the increasing financial burden forced her parents to take the decision to introduce her to domestic work outside the family home. She would accompany her mother to the households in the Punjabi Bagh area, sweeping and mopping in the four households earned Rs 300/ per month. Such a situation is reflected very commonly with other child domestics as well.*

*Malti now 18 has been working as a domestic help since the past 10 years. She laughs and says “I have become an expert in doing household chores, I can complete the work in one household in 30 – 40 minutes. Today she works in 4 households and they pay her Rs 400/- each. She has a busy day and once home is able to help her mother in the household chores as well. Her sister Chitra and brother Ramesh go to school. “Ramesh is in class 9 and is doing well in his studies”, she states. Malti says that though she too had wanted to study but she was unable to do so due to the financial situation at home . She is training Chitra, a student of class 6 to look after the house as Chitra will soon be discontinuing her studies. They hope that their brother will continue his studies and become a police officer.*

Guileless children who have migrated along with their parents in search of greener pastures are thus exposed to acute deprivation in terms of joy and excitement of a normal childhood which are totally lost to them. We can deduce that migration was the root cause that contributed to this state of affair.

### **The upward mobility of the urban middle class**

It is common in Delhi that wherever there is a large upper middle class colony we also find a slum adjacent to it. This has become a pattern in Delhi, which is also evident from the areas covered under the study, namely, South Delhi and West Delhi.

Rapid urbanization has led to the breaking down of traditional joint family system among middle class families as more and more women are joining the formal work force. Traditionally it was the extended family that generally looked after the children, and the other household chores were shared among all the women of the family. This situation has immensely contributed to the demand of Domestic Child Labour in cities.

*Premlata and her husband rented a flat in Lawrence Road soon after their marriage in 1985. Both were already well settled in their professional lives she as a teacher and he as an engineer, they continued with their careers. As the parents were not living with them the household responsibilities fell solely on Premlata's shoulders. She soon found that she could not cope with the demands of the family and the career and the couple decided to hire domestic help to do the household chores. Fifteen year old Sujatha was hired as she was well recommended by her landlady with whom she was also working. Premlata is very happy with the work Sujatha does. During the interview Premlata was full of praises “she (Sujatha) is very meticulous and clean. Sometimes I feel it was a good decision to hire this child instead of her mother , till date she has never taken any leave nor does she have any other family responsibilities. She works well in the house, she's been with us for 4 years and I have never heard her being rude or answering back”.*

*Sujatha's father Kaveri and mother Rajamma migrated to Delhi 20 years ago. Kaveri recalls the fateful day they had taken the decision, "Vijaya and Saroja were still toddlers and I had had, another bad day at work. I was working as a agricultural labourer in Salem, I was feeling unwell, he recalls and was very slow in my work, but my employer refused to understand that I needed some rest, he abused me and asked me not to come for work and threw me out. It was fated that I leave the land (Salem) of my ancestors. I moved to Delhi." Today Kaveri works with an export company in the packaging section and earns Rs 2000/ per month. Though he has not been able to make his own house he has taken accommodation on rent in the Sukhpur Basti in Punjabi Bagh and pays Rs 1200/- per month towards house rent. The family has also grown since then. We have five children Vijaya, Saroja, Sujatha, Murgesh and Mohan. Sujatha has two younger brothers Murgesh (17)and Mohan (15). Murgesh studied till class 5 and decided to stay at home . He is not interested in studies at all. Mohan is in standard 8. Vijaya and Saroja are married. Sujatha studied till class 5 and works as a domestic help. She cooks, sweeps, washes clothes, cleans the utensils and earns Rs 1000/ per month. Sujatha says, "I am quite happy with my employer. They provide me with meals and often during the festive season they also gift me new clothes. They have never abused me and I am comfortable working with just one household unlike some of my other friends".*

With the nuclear families coming into existence the parents are left with no option but to find other alternatives for the smooth running of the household and thus the demand for domestic help has increased.

*As put forth by Mrs Reema (name changed on request) during the interview . I have always preferred to employ young girls to do the household chores as they are more silent and submissive. They can be easily moulded into the way we want them to work than adults who do have set ways of doing household chores and despite repeated instructions often fail to adopt them. Dolly, 16 works in Mrs Reema's house for the past 2 years. The eldest of 5 children, Dolly has never been to school. Her parents Aziz and Amina moved to Delhi 10 years ago from Aligarh. With no work at hand Aziz and Amina decided to move to Delhi where Aziz's younger brother Rehman was already working . He had set up his own business as a 'Kabadi wala'. Aziz too joined the business on his arrival . Today the two families live together and also work together in the business.*

*Mrs Reema says, "at least I am assured that the child is not being mistreated while she works in my house. I not only give her a good meal but during festivals she is the first to get gifts and sweetmeats. Since financially they are not stable Dolly has to work and I feel that it is better that she works in a household that treats her well than to work somewhere which may abuse the child".*

A similar case can be cited is the case study of Smitra and Rajeev Khanna (name changed on request).

*After they were married the couple rented a flat in Malviya Nagar. As both were well settled in their careers they had hired Rajmata a young lady of 22 to do the housework, to enable the*

*two to pursue their careers, she as a Chief Assistant in a Company in Nehru Place and he as a free lance journalist.*

*Rajamata and her husband Sumare were migrants from Badaiun, UP. As they were not able to find work for their sustenance, they first migrated to Firozabad where they worked in the Bangle Factory. Rajamata recalls that “in Firozabad we were very happy , both of us were earning and Kavita was also employed at home where she did the work of joining the bangles. Between them they were bringing home Rs 4000/. But due to some reason not known to them the factory was closed down and it was time for them to move again. They decided to move to Delhi, where Rajamata found work as a domestic help in Malviya Nagar close to the place where they had taken a juggi on rent in the Kachha Rastha Basti of Khirki. She was earning only Rs 800/. Her husband worked only during the “Wedding Season” for he was a 'Mandap' decorator and found work only during the season. He was earning upto Rs 2000/ during the season. Financially the family was becoming very weak.*

*As the years passed by the Khanna's family grew and Sumitra gave birth to a boy. She had taken leave but after six months of rest she was to go back to office. In the meanwhile Rajmata's family was also facing problems. With a lot of time on his hands Rajmata's husband, Sumare, had also taken to drinking and each evening he would beat her and their daughter, Kavita, aged 9. Rajamata felt an answer to the solution of the problems both the families were facing would be taken care of if Kavita took up employment with the Khanna's. Not only could the baby be looked after, but Kavita would also have a chance to live in a better environment. It was decided that Kavita, a child herself, would be paid Rs 500/ and live with the Khanna's and help in the household chores but primarily look after the baby. While Kavita looked after the baby the Khanna's were able to pursue their careers. The Khanna's also attempted to teach Kavita, since leaving Firozabad she had lost interest in her studies and disliked the very idea of sitting down and studying. She likes looking after the baby and doing the house hold chores. In the free time she is able to watch some TV and she enjoys watching films. She meets her mother every now and then as a mother also works in the neighbours house. She goes home during the weekends and Rajmata says that she has to really convince her to come home.*

Another reason for the increase in demand for domestic help is that earlier only the upper sections of the society engaged domestic help, but now with the formation of the nuclear families and increase in the affordability, the middle and lower middle class people are also hiring domestic help, particularly children, as they are easily available and also very cheap.

### **Socio-economic background of the parents**

The child domestic workers most commonly come from poor, often large rural families. The main reason of the children taking on work as a domestic help naturally is the poor socio economic background of the parents. Most of them were once marginal peasants who have been reduced to landless labourers due to the



sharpening of class differentiation in rural areas resulting in their pauperization. This forced them to migrate in search of better sources of livelihood. We also see that the overwhelming majority of the parents belong to the lower castes. Some of them are traditional occupational castes like in the case of Bhojiram and Anardevi, who belong to the Jatav community.

*Bhojiram and Anardevi had migrated to Delhi in 1980 from Tundla Junction area in Dist Agra. Bhojiram recalls how his family had lost the small piece of land which they had owned to repay the debt taken by his father. They were soon reduced to work as agricultural labourers. The family had to work on the land of upper caste landlord to repay the debt, and it was then that the family decided to migrate to Delhi in search of an alternative livelihood. He settled his family in Kusumpur Pahadi Basti in Vasant Vihar. Life was not easy for them. Bhojiram found work as a cleaner in the Vasant Vihar Guest House and Anardevi was hired as a house maid in the nearby Air India Colony. We had nine children, recalls Anardevi. 'Some of my children have never been inside a school. But Seema, my youngest, was sent to school, but my five elder daughters were working as domestic helps in the Air India colony nearby. The total incoming home from the girls was Rs 2500/. It was not sufficient to feed and clothe the family. The boys did go to school but were no good in their studies". It was unfortunate that Seema was unable to continue school after class 5 as her father died. Her mother had to take up work as a domestic servant and Seema was asked to accompany her as well, to enable her to contribute to the family income. Anardevi recalls the struggle they had to face to feed and cloth the family. "The girls were also of marriageable age and slowly from our meager earning I was putting little bit aside for their weddings."*

*Today Seema and her mother are the only ones at home. The others have all got married and have children of their own. Seema says that they rarely come to visit them and none of them contribute to support herself and Anardevi. "I am now looking after my mother and myself- I work in 4 households in the Air India Colony, which is walking distance from the house. As mother has now become very old, she is unable to do any housework. So after completing some of the chores I leave for work. In the afternoon I do the rest of the household chores and also prepare the meals. She laughs and says "I may even have to find my own groom".*

### **Educational Status of the children and the parents**

The ability to claim and enjoy the rights of an informed and responsible citizen rests squarely upon a child's access to a good basic education. The fulfillment of a child's right to education offers protection from multitude of hazards such as a life consigned to poverty, bonded labour in agriculture or industry or domestic labour, commercial sexual exploitation or recruitment into armed conflict.<sup>34</sup> In many poor families, for instance, when choices are made about whether to send a daughter or a son to school. It is her gender that tips the scale against the girl. As a result, millions are shunted away from education onto the well-worn path of domestic work, labouring at home for their own families or and outside their homes for others.

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34. The State of the World's Children 2000, UNICEF pp46.

The children are deprived of their natural social surroundings on the one hand and on the other they are also deprived of educational opportunities as we see in Malti's case cited above.

*There is rarely a literate environment in the homes of the children to reinforce what they have learnt in the classroom for their parents are also non-literate and non-numerate. The medium of instruction at the place they have migrated to in case it is from the South to the North is also different and leaves little scope for self learning or guided learning in totally alien surroundings that are not conducive to this. In Malti's case what we see is that despite the initial desire to educate the child the parents were forced to withdraw her from school. Nor could they provide her any environment and opportunity at home for learning as they themselves were not fully literate. Palmichamni himself has only attended school till class 3<sup>rd</sup>. His wife is completely illiterate.*

Few children in domestic service have the privilege to complete schooling. Some of them have studied upto the lower primary level (standard five) and due to the family situation have had to drop out of school. In cases where the child domestic worker of school going age is permitted by the parent to continue studies, they have to fit their studies around the duties which he /she performs not only in the households they work in, but also the chores to be done at home. The demands of the work always takes precedence. This leaves them with very little time to complete their studies. They are unable to cope up with their homework and due to the lack of guidance are soon found lagging behind class resulting in poor performance and followed by dropping out of school. The lack of schooling not only reduces skills and knowledge but also limits their personal development. As a result the child continues to work as a domestic help. Their identity remains imprisoned in their servant persona.

*Jayshree has been working as a domestic help since the age of seven. Her father Krishnan today works as a lift operator in Private company in Nehru Place. He earns Rs 2000/ per month. Her mother, Vasanthi continues to work as a domestic help. But this was not the case when they first arrived in Delhi in 1985. Krishnan was a landless agricultural labourer from Salem Tamil Nadu and was unable to provide for the family. His son Mohan was five and Vasanthi was carrying again. With the growing family he was finding it difficult to make ends meet. He had heard about the opportunities in Delhi and was greatly influenced by some of the members of his community who had migrated to Delhi. The aura of their success was enough to draw him to Delhi as it kindled a ray of hope in his heart for possible avenues to provide well for the family. On his arrival he was not immediately able to find work, Vasanthi took up work as a domestic help to help matters. But within two months Krishnan was able to find work in a guest house as an attendant. He was earning 500/ per month . Vasanthi soon gave birth to a daughter and they named her Jayshree. Jayshree stayed at home and her brother was admitted to school. He has passed standard 10<sup>th</sup> but refuses to do any work in preference to sitting at home and moving about with the other boys of the basti. Jayashree has never been to school. She joined her mother as a domestic help when she was seven. She accompanied her mother to work and picked up the reins from there. Today, at*

*seventeen, she works in 5 households independently and earns about Rs1500 /- per month. Would you like to learn another skill,"she was asked during the interview, she shrugs her shoulders and says, " it is of no use as all I have learnt is to sweep, wash and clean and probably that is what I will continue doing even after I am married. There does not seem any point in learning any other skill as this stage".*

*She wistfully regrets never having gone to school nor ever attending any informal school but says that it is now too late think about such things.*

But in a few cases despite the girl children performing well in the school, the parents prefer them to drop out of school. A common attitude of the parents is that 'if you can read and write, there is no need for wasting more years at school'. Most of the children are found to be very pessimistic about their future and the lack of education and even have difficulty thinking about the future. Another very common approach of the parents is that if the girl child attains a high level of education it will not be possible to find a suitable groom for her. Therefore, it is sufficient that the child knows how to read and write as after marriage she has to look after her house. Many children were of the view that they would like to continue their education.

*Babli, now 17 and has been working since she was 13. She too belongs to a large family and has 4 sisters and one brother. Her parents, Marumuttu and Kamla migrated from Salem 15 years ago. With very little chances of any other source of employment other than being a landless agricultural labourer, the family decided to move to Delhi. His cousin and his wife had migrated to Delhi and had settled in the Sukhpur Basti in Punjabi Bagh. Marumuttu decided to make the most of this opportunity and asked his cousin to find him a job and a place to stay. His cousin arranged for him to work as a helper in the nearby Britannia Biscuit factory and also arranged for rented accommodation in the same basti. Initially language was a problem but as Kamala recalls, "we tried our best to understand Hindi and after one year we were able to converse quite well in Hindi. I also took up a job as a domestic help in two households of Lawrence road. But we were never able to settle financially as the family was growing. I have five children she proudly states. My son is pampered a lot as he is the only male child. He is now 20, he studied upto standard 4 and decided not to go to school. He neither goes out for work as he is unable to get work. Who will employ a standard 4<sup>th</sup> pass when there are MA's and BA's out of work. He indulges in drink and stays around the house and loiters around the basti with some of the other boys".*

*Babli is upset with her mother's proud narration of her brother's fallacies and says that "after completing standard five her father did not allow her to study further despite her good performance in the school. Instead she was asked to work as a domestic help in the Lawrence Road area where her mother also worked".*

*She dislikes being a domestic help. Her parents, Marumuttu and Kamla are of the opinion that if a girl knows how to read and write, that should be enough for her to manage her future Her father was also of the view that if Babli was educated it will be very difficult to find a*



*groom for her. Her sisters Sapna, Pinky and Pushpa were also allowed to study upto standard 5 only. Today they are also working as domestic helps in the household of Punjabi Bagh and contributing to the family income.*

### **Discrimination against the girl child by the parents**

The discrimination against the girl children in Asian societies continues to be both extensive and accepted. Gender discrimination is so entrenched in social norms as to escape notice, keeps young girls from school and women from active and equal involvement in their communities. This discrimination is at the base of many of the violations of women's rights.<sup>35</sup>

To be a girl born into poverty is to endure discrimination many times over in pervasive and insidious patterns. From the moment of the girls' conception, their rights are in peril. There may be as many as 60 million 'missing women' in the world who, except for the gender discrimination that starts before they are born and continues throughout their lives, would be alive today.<sup>36</sup>

For girls in certain cultures, the lack of separate facilities, primarily or exclusively male teaching staff and the belief that girls need little education to be wives and mothers all keep them from getting a solid basic education.<sup>37</sup> Gender discrimination combines with poverty to crush girls' sense of autonomy and self, as well as their potential.

Although discrimination against girls and women is found on every continent of the world, for the sheer scale of its population and the cultural strictures against gender and class, few regions compare with South Asia, where every year millions of girls are born into poverty, debt servitude and dehumanizing birth castes. Poor pregnant women, worried about the future dowry costs of a daughter, increasingly seek the services of the traveling 'sonogram doctors', and female feticide has been reported in 27 of India's 32 states. In communities of Bihar and Rajasthan, birth ratios, naturally expected to be 100 females for every 103 males are dramatically lower at 60 females for every 100 males<sup>38</sup> including physical duress of domestic violence.

The Census of India 1991 recorded the most adverse sex ratio of 927 females to 1,000 males in the 20th century. There had been a secular decline in the sex ratio since 1901. Only in 1981 the sex ratio showed a slight upturn for females followed by an all-time low of 927 in 1991.<sup>39</sup>

There is another pervasive cultural perception: daughters are *paraya dhan*, another's property. Sons have economic value, perpetuate the family name and perform religious rites for the ancestors' souls after death - rites which girls cannot perform. 'May you be blessed with eight sons' is often intoned by elders when a girl prostrates at their feet on ceremonial occasions.

With son preference so strong, girls are an unwelcome burden. This is reinforced by the system of dowry, which maintains a strong hold despite legal prohibition since 1961. The spread of consumerism means that the savings of a lifetime can be wiped off by a daughter's wedding. The more attractive the man as a

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35. The State of the World's Children 2000, UNICEF.

36. United Nations Population Division, Too young to Die: Genes or gender?, ESA/P/WP.126 unedited version, December 1996.

37. The State of the World's Children 2000, UNICEF pp46

38. Jain Sharda, 'Save before they perish,' and Vaid, Sudarshan and Sharda Jain, 'Nipped in the bud,' both in Family Medicine, India, Vol. 3, No. 4, July-September 1999, pp7 and 9 respectively.

39. Gender and Governance in India, D Bandyopadhyay, EPW Commentary July 29-August 4, 2000.

prospective groom, the greater the demands made by his family. The result: heavy debts. And keeping a daughter unmarried is considered sinful and socially unacceptable.

*Nirmala is 13 and married to a 16 year old boy from Gorakpur. Her parents Kalicharan and Laxmi migrated to Delhi from Gorakpur, UP to Delhi 10 years ago. With no source of income other than the small piece of agricultural land which was catering to the needs of 10 members of the household, Kalicharan decided to move to Delhi in search of greener pastures. After initial struggle Kalicharan found work in a furniture shop in Munirka and was also able to find accommodation in the nearby Kusumpur Pahadi Basti in Vasant Vihar. Nirmala went to school in the nearby MCD school and has studied upto class 4. Last year when they went to visit their parents in the village they were approached by the neighbour for Nirmala hand in marriage. Since the family is well off in Gorakpur Kalicharan and Laxmi decided that it was okay if the child was engaged and married. Though aware that this is not legal Laxmi says that this is part of their tradition, " Girls are married when they are 10-12 and are sent to her Sasurlal only when she is 18-19. Nirmala will be sent to her Sasurlal (in-laws) in another 5-6 years". Nirmala's husband will be appearing for the 10<sup>th</sup> standard exam. While at home Nirmala accompanies her mother to work as a domestic help in 5 house holds in Munirka and between them they earn Rs 2500/. This money is being kept aside for Nirmala's Gauna (a ceremony which is performed when Nirmala will be sent to her Sasurlal).*

The 1980s saw increases in two dreadful manifestations of social prejudice against girls: female infanticide, and the use of tests on the unborn (amniocentesis) to determine sex and abort the female foetus.

In the Kallar community in Madurai, southern India, it became known that newborn girls were often fed poison berries to escape the ruinous effects of dowry. Of 640 families questioned, 51 per cent admitted to killing a girl baby within a week of birth. Villagers were reported as defending the custom: 'Better to snuff a life at birth than to suffer lifelong misery.' A local woman medical doctor agreed. 'These mothers have suffered so much, they don't want the pattern repeated in their own lives.'<sup>40</sup>

Even when girls do go to school they have already imbibed a set of roles as housekeepers and mothers, which will determine their future careers and their continuing belief in their limited capacities and capabilities. It is probably this strong cultural stereotyping, coupled with the often-poor quality of the school education provided, which causes many girl children to drop out of primary school. This marginalization is further compounded by poverty, which leaves women and girls little opportunity but to continue to accept their traditional roles in the home - or to seek work as domestic servants.

Child domestic labour should be seen as gender-based issue because domestic work is traditionally seen as the responsibility of the female members of the household. According to the world's estimates, the majority of child domestics are girls, putting the proportion to 90%.<sup>41</sup> This predominance of girls reflects a traditional attitude that household chores are 'women's work'.

40. Sakuntala Narasimban, 'The Unwanted Sex', New Internationalist Issue 240 – February 1993.

41. Smout, T., 'Improving the situation of Child Domestic Workers: ILO supported initiatives', ILO/IPEC, Geneva, for the International Seminar on Domestic Workers in Leuven, April 1997, ILO. 1997.

The practice, especially in the case of girls, is quite extensive as many cultures continue to view girls' work in the household as an essential part of their upbringing. Families in urban areas often recruit girls from rural villages through family, friends or contacts as they are considered more docile and obedient and are easily manageable as compared to boys. The view of some of the employers is that girls are preferred to boys because they are more silent and submissive and do not go away so often.

The above trends are further reflected in the 25 case studies, which were randomly undertaken. 23 out of 25 cases were girls. In the two areas undertaken for the case studies girls were predominantly found to be domestic workers. In a number of cases, it was also found that the wages of the girls were used for paying the fees of the male siblings attending school. It is found that the aspirations of the girl child are sacrificed for grooming the male child.

*All these factors are reflected in the tragic case of Kannama, who was so keen to study, but the parent's preference for the male child killed her aspirations. Kannama has been working as a domestic help since she was 10. Her father Palniappan is a migrant landless labourer from Salem Tamil Nadu, who migrated to Delhi 19 years ago. They settled in the Sukhpur Basti in Punjabi Bagh. They live in rented accommodation and pay Rs 1500 as house rent. All the children were born in Delhi. Palniappan works as a plumber in a private nursing home in Punjabi Bagh. With the passing years the family also grew and with more mouths to feed, it became necessary that other alternatives as sources of income were also sought at. Her mother, Pappa, works as a domestic help in the Punjabi Bagh area and earns about Rs 500/ per month. She has four daughters and one son. Kanama was pulled out of school when she was in 3<sup>rd</sup> standard to look after the other siblings and the household. Kannama recalls how she had pleaded with her father to let her continue studying and promised to look after the household, but she was not allowed to do so. Her sisters were also allowed to study till the 5<sup>th</sup> standard. But she says that this is not the case with Karthik, her brother. She feels that her father is very biased and considers daughters to be a burden and showers all his attention, love and affection on Karthik. "While Karthik goes to an English medium school in Ranibagh, we sisters are destined to remain as domestic helps", she states with sadness in her eyes. We are never given any money she further states, "all the money is spent on the running of the household and on paying Karthik's fees. It is not fair, but we are in no position to argue with father".*

### **Contribution of Child Domestic Labour to the growth of the city**

Overwhelming majority of the city's migrant population has found employment in the growing informal sector of the capital's economy. The growth and diversification of the informal sector, its flexibility and decentralized scale of operation, its capacity to absorb a large manpower, and its support to the formal sector, is a major contributing factor responsible for the high growth of GDP of Delhi. Domestic work falls under the vast informal sector and can be considered as a contributing factor in the economic growth of the city. Domestic child workers provide a wide range of services to major chunk of the upper and middle class households; one

cannot deny their contribution to keeping the city going. Child domestic workers help not only in the running of the households but, the household work they do directly or indirectly helps the employers to give more time to their business and office affairs.

*Saraswati started work with the Puri's when she was 13. The youngest child of Mani and Uppai residents of Sukhpur basti since the past 15 years, Mani and Uppai did not allow Saraswati to study after class 7. Mani works as a casual labourer in a factory in Punjabi Bagh and earns Rs 2000/, and her mother Uppai also works as a domestic help in four households in the Punjabi Bagh area and brings home Rs 1000 per month.*

*It was not due to financial restraint that Saraswati was not allowed to continue with her studies, but due the pressure of the community, who are of the strong belief that girls should only be able to read and write. There is no use of making her a scholar. As her destiny has already been decided by her parents Saraswati has come to terms with her present life.*

*“Infact I am quite happy with the place I work”, she says, Mrs Puri has a boutique and I am allowed to help her after I have finished the household chores. It is very nice to handle all the beautiful clothes as I help them to be packed and sent to the shops. I hope that I will also be able to learn how to make such beautiful dresses she wistfully says. Mrs Puri is also very happy with her work. In her interview she says, it is unfortunate that I am able to spare little time for Saraswati, for she is very sharp and it would have been nice to teach her how to stitch. But after she finishes work at my place she works with two other households, despite the fact that I pay her Rs 1500/, but her two brothers do not work and languish at home, it is a large family and she has to earn to contribute to the family income, also at the end of the day there is very little time and energy”. “She works quite independently in the house and I am able to devote more time at the boutique”.*

The data on the informal sector has been captured in the Economic Census of India. According to the Fourth Economic Census of India and Delhi<sup>42</sup>, 20 to 25% of the migrants were engaged in *petty trade and vending*, which included reriwala (movie kiosk selling fruit and vegetable and other eatables), feriwala (vendor selling clothes and other miscellaneous items on footpath), rag pickers and kabariwala (junk dealers), fish and meat vendors, tea stall owner and worker, hawkers, lottery broker, etc.

About 15 to 20% were engaged in various types of *domestic and non-domestic services*, such as maid servants, chowkidar (watchman), street cobbler and barber, darzi (cloth repairing), dhobi (washer man) and presswala (irons clothes), rickshaw and cycle repairing, porter, poojari (priest), private tutor etc. 10 to 15% were engaged in informal *manufacturing and construction activities* such as painter, plumber, construction labourer, electrician, carpenter, radio and TV repairer, blacksmith, locksmith etc. About 7% were engaged in daily wage labour without any specific activity. A number of persons were also engaged in *informal transport sector* such as rickshaw pulling, goods trolleying etc.<sup>42</sup>

42. Fourth Economic Census (1999), Provisional Results, Central Statistical Organisation and Report on Economic Census 1990 and 1998, National Capital Territory of Delhi, Directorate of Economics and Statistics.

43 Chakrabarti, P.G.Dhar Coping With Informality And Illegality In Human Settlements In Developing Cities Delhi's Ongoing Debate on Informal Settlements and Work Places Issues of Environmental Jurisprudence Leuven and Brussels, Belgium, 23-26 May 2001.

All these activities support the city system and the city economy. The industry, trade and transport of the city depend to a very large extent on the cheap labour of the migrant workers. The construction boom of the city in housing and infrastructure almost entirely depends on them. City's huge informal sector, which provides cheap services and comfort to the rich and also support the poor is entirely run by them. It is the poor and illiterate labour force from the villages, which keeps the city going.

*Sandhya (13) has for the past 1 year been working as a domestic help. Soon after her father's death two years ago, she was withdrawn from school, where she was studying in class 5. Her brothers Vijay and Ajay now 23 and 22 are also working, Vijay as a peon in an office and Ajay works as a phone attendant in a STD booth. Their parents had migrated from Salem Tamil Nadu and like the other migrants from Salem, they too were landless labourers. Despite the fact that both the brothers are earning Rs 1000/- each, Sandhya was still withdrawn from school. As she had learnt no other skill she started work as a domestic help and her main work is to look after Mrs and Mr Ravi Malhotra's baby. As Mr's Malhotra puts it, " if it had'nt been for the wonderful way our child is looked after by Sandhya , it would have been difficult for me to go out and help in the working of the factory". Her husband manufactures socks.*

*Sandhya is one amongst the many examples of domestic child workers, who have contributed directly or indirectly to their employers business or office.*

### **Employment and Working Conditions**

There are two specific kinds of domestic child labour:

1. The part time workers who work for specific hours or have tasks allotted to them and after work go home;
2. The 'live-in' help who work for 24 hrs and have to perform all sorts of tasks and are at the beck and call of the employer all the time.

According to the present case studies, regardless of the type of employment, children confirmed that their assigned duties go beyond their normal ability. Working hours are long with no regular days off. The study showed that the children worked long hours and those children that worked as live-in help worked upto 16-18 hours. In line with their duties, child domestics are expected to rise before the family and to continue "tidying up" after the evening meal. It is also not uncommon for the child domestic to "wait on their employers" through the night - sometimes woken from sleep to attend to one task or the other.

Part-time child domestic workers were found to be undertaking specifically one or two or a combination of the following tasks: cooking, washing clothes, washing utensils, cleaning house, looking after the employers children- including escorting them to and from school and carrying their bags.

The condition of the part-time child domestic worker is in no way better than the live in help. It is a common feature that the part-time worker has to work in several households to earn enough to support the family.

*Manju, like many other child domestic workers, works throughout the day moving from one*



house to another washing, cleaning, sweeping and mopping. She works in nine households! Her day starts at 7.30 am and she sets foot back in her house only at 6.30 pm. She earns 200-250 per household and earns between 1800-2000 per month. Manju the youngest among 6 children has been working since she was 8 years. Born to a poor landless agricultural labourer, Venkatachallam and Tai, Manju was born and brought up in Delhi. "Her parents had migrated from Salem, Tamil Nadu 23 years ago. My father was very lucky when he arrived in Delhi two of his cousins had also migrated and were working as construction workers in the Kidwai Nagar, South Delhi area", she says. The houses for government officials were being constructed. Venkatachallam and Tai both found work at the construction site. Shacks had been built for the workers on the site itself so finding accommodation was not a problem. Within two years the construction was complete and the family was lucky to find work as domestic helps in Kidwai Nagar itself. The attraction was the servants quarter was provided in this area. Tai and the eldest daughter Vijaya started work as domestic help. Her father in the meantime was given the job with the Municipal Corporation of Delhi as a white wash man. Vijaya never went to school as she was made to look after the siblings and also work in the house. Soon Chitra, Sonu and Ravi were admitted to school, Manju was still a toddler. Manju was admitted to school when she was six, but by this time the family situation had deteriorated. Her father had taken to drink excessively and was also becoming mentally unstable. Beating, drinking and shouting at both wife and children were the scenes enacted most evenings. Due to his mental condition, he stopped going to work and soon Chitra and Manju were also asked to work as domestic help in the other households in the area to contribute to the dwindling family funds. Her brothers have never contributed to the family kitty and have never taken up any work

Manju was up early as she would first go to school and then come home and go for work in the afternoon. In the evening she would help her sister and mother with the household chores and cooking the evening meal. This pattern continued till several years and Manju stopped going to school once she passed standard 5.

Today, the family has shifted to the Sukhpur Basti in Punjabi Bagh and Manju works from morning to evening for 10-11 hours per day.. She proudly says, I am saving for my wedding and have also applied for a telephone connection. She has also started saving money in a chit fund. Whatever is left she gives to her mother for safe keeping. Most days she is so tired that the moment she steps foot in the house she goes to bed too tired even to interact with the rest of the family.

The part time child domestic workers perform specific tasks. Some of them work for an average 8-9 hrs a day without any leave or holidays. In some cases daily wages were cut if the child failed to show up for work.

As Kavita puts it, "it is not easy to work as a domestic servant, my day starts at 7.30 am and I am home at 4.30 pm. Sometimes I think that it is even more difficult to look after someone else's children especially as you are treated below them". "Manu and Ashu the two children I

*look after” she narrates, “ sometimes kick and abuse me on some pretext or the other. I have to finish cooking, sweeping, mopping and washing the clothes before going to pick them up from the bus stop on their return from school. Aunty (as she addresses her employer) always deducts Rs 40 from my wages, despite the fact that the next day I go to work I always find the previous days clothes, utensils waiting to be washed. When I return home I am so exhausted but I do have to help with the preparation of the evening meal as well. Kavita like many of her counter parts has also studied upto class 5. Her father Chalamuttu and mother Papathi migrated from Salem Tamil Nadu in early 1989. Her sisters Meera and Meena have also studied till class 5 and also work as domestic help in the Lawrence road neighbourhood . Her brother Krishnamurthy studied upto class 10 but has not taken up any job. Meera and Meena also have similar stories to report. Their employers also never give them leave and when ever they go on leave they are threatened that they will be asked to leave the work. “In such circumstances it is difficult to work but we do not have any alternative”, they narrate. “Where will we go if we do not earn and provide for the family”.*

This is quite a common feature that the domestic child worker is also expected to help with her own household chores despite the fact that the child is so exhausted at the end of the day that there is very little energy left. In such situations accidents are common. There are also hazards associated with cooking, cutting vegetables. In case of breakages the child is severely scolded and money cut from the wages as compensation towards the breakages.

In cases where the child is forced to take several days off for looking after an ailing parent, the child finds that the employer has already recruited someone else in her place. As happens in the case of Manoj Kumar Dolia a live-in child domestic worker:

*Manoj Kumar Dolia was shocked when he came back from a short trip to his mother's house in village Aria, Balasore Orissa. His employer Shanti Lal of Greater Kailash had already recruited someone else in his place. After pleading his case with the employer he was still unable to convince him to take him back. He is very upset as he is now unable to send any money to his mother who has no source of income. His father had left them when he was two. He had come to Delhi with his maternal uncle in search of employment to be able to send money to his mother. At the moment he lives with his maternal uncle and is desperately trying to find some work. He is aware of the responsibility that lies on his young shoulders, he is the sole bread earner and his mother depends completely on him for money.*

As a **'live-in' help** Manoj had to work for 24 hrs and have to perform all sorts of tasks and was always at the beck and call of the employer all the time.

*As Manoj recalls, the first chore, which he had to perform was to take the Dog out for a morning walk, collect the Newspaper from the veranda and make the morning tea. Uncle (as he would call his employer) would like me to cook the food , as well besides cleaning the house and washing the utensils. I had been taught how to use the washing-machine, so washing clothes was very easy. Aunty had died many years ago and the children were all*

*married and settled. Uncle was all alone and looked after his business. It was very easy to live with him as I had a separate room and it was very nice. I was paid Rs 1500/ and Uncle had also opened an account for me in the bank. The only draw back was that I never had any time for myself. I was on call 24 hours of the day. When my maternal uncle would come and meet me Uncle did not like it and my Uncle's visits were also became very rare. Then my mother fell ill and I was to go to Orissa to see her. Uncle was not at all pleased but I had very little option but to go. On my return to Delhi after three weeks I found that Uncle had asked someone else to do the work. Now I am finding work and have no money to send to my mother .*

In such situations what can the domestic helps do. There are no service conditions, no court of law they can turn to for justice. The child domestic are completely dependent on the employing family for their survival.

### **Earnings and Wage pattern**

What is apparent is the fact that child domestic labourers are lowly paid as is clear from the wages that they receive. For the same type of work, studies show that children are paid less than their adult counterparts. Table 5 shows a comparison of child wages to adult wages obtained by a study of child workers in the Delhi region of India. Although 39.5% of employers said that child workers earn wages equal to adults, if the percentage of employers admitting that wages are lower for children are added up, a figure of 35.9% is found. This figure is significant when taking the bias of employers into account. Employers would have been likely to defend their wages for child workers, by saying that children earn the same wages as adults. The fact that no employers stated children earned more than adults, should be also be noted.<sup>44</sup> Other studies have also concluded that "children's earnings are consistently lower than those of adults, even where there two groups are engaged in the same tasks".<sup>45</sup> Several studies undertaken in the cases of live-in help, throw light on the wage pattern. In Bangladesh, a 1998 survey of child domestic identified 45% as not receiving any wages, which were given either to the parents or the guardians; about 25% did not receive any wages at all; only 30% received wages in hand.<sup>46</sup> In Kenya, 78% of the child domestic workers, in one survey, were only paid in kind.<sup>47</sup> In Nepal, it is not uncommon for employers to 'look after' the child's wages, promising to convert them into gold or jewellery as a wedding dowry. The child may never see the money.<sup>48</sup>

The same conditions are also reflected in many parts of India. The child may never see the money as is the case when the child accompanies the mother to work in the household or the parent comes to collect the wages.

In all the cases undertaken in the case-study the child domestic workers who are part-time domestic help were paid in cash. The wages range from Rs. 250 to Rs 300 per household. Interestingly, the upper middle class families paid more as compared to the middle class families.

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44. Chakrabarti, PG.Dhar Coping With Informality And Illegality In Human Settlements In Developing Cities Delhi's Ongoing Debate on Informal Settlements and Work Places Issues of Environmental Jurisprudence Leuven and Brussels, Belgium, 23-26 May 2001

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*Neeraj daughter of Bharampal and Veervati is a resident of the Kusumpur Pahadi Basti in Vasant Vihar. Neeraj's parents migrated from Badaiun, UP to Delhi in 1990. Though the bright lights of Delhi had lured Bharampal to the City in search for better job opportunity, the fact that he was only 5<sup>th</sup> pass proved to be a hindrance in finding a job in an office. But after a few months, he was able to get work in a Guest House in Vasant Vihar. Here he receive Rs 2000 per month as a Chowkidar. Neeraj started work as a domestic worker when she was 12. Though it is nearly 3 years since she has been working, Neeraj is earning Rs350 and she works in 2 households. She feels that this amount is very little, as some girls in her Basti who are working in the big kothis in Vasant Vihar get upto Rs 500/- Rs1000/. The work is the same, the only difference is that she works in a middle class colony.*

*Whatever money she earns she gives to her mother for the running of the household. She does not mind this, because the family is very large. "We are 7 brother's and sisters and to clothe and feed all we do need the money. "*

*Similar is the case of Babli (19) who works in 4 houses and earns Rs 800/. She too gives her wages to her mother, the money is used for running of the household . Her father, Subramanium does no work , and spends most of his time lounging in front of the house and in the evenings getting together with his friends and drinking. A common sight in Sukhpur basti. Her mother, Parvati, works as a domestic help. She has 4 siblings all of them girls. Since the financial situation of the family is not good both she and her sister Dhanlaxmi( 13) work as domestic help in Ranibagh.*

*Babli started work as a domestic help, when she was 10 years old, she has passed class 4, but was never given a chance to study further, as her father had quit his job as a 'mistri' in the nearby Punjabi Bagh construction site. She says, "all the money we earn is spent on the household. The day we receive our wages we give them to our mother. When we need some spending money we have to ask for it, if we are lucky we do get it sometimes".*

### **Children as major contributors to the family income**

Children not only work to supplement the family income, and reduce the economic burden faced by their parents, but are in some cases the major contributors to the family income. In many cases the children are contributing more than 75% of the family income.

There are also a few cases where the entire burden of running the family is on the shoulders of the child worker. Child labour is a source of income for poor families. A study conducted by the ILO Bureau of Statistics found that "Children's work was considered essential to maintaining the economic level of households, either in the form of work for wages, of help in household enterprises or of household chores in order to free adult household members for economic activity elsewhere".<sup>49</sup> In some cases, the study found that a child's income accounted for between 34 and 37 percent of the total household income. The present study also establishes the fact that a domestic child labourer's income is important to the livelihood of a poor family. As is clear from the cases of Rekha, Seema and Manoj discussed earlier;

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49. Mehra-Kerpelman 1996, 8.

*Rekha has been supporting the family and meets the demand of all the siblings including those of her father's. She works in eight households and earns Rs 200/ from each household.*

*So was the case of Manoj, who was the bread-earner of the family, his mother solely depended on him for their livelihood.*

*Seema who has 9 brothers and sisters, but at present she lives alone with her mother. All the other children are married and the responsibility of her mother and herself lies solely on her shoulders.*

### **Employer employee relation**

In case of a full-time employment, the child has to bear the brunt of all the whims and fancies of all the members of the family, but the part-time worker generally interacts only with the lady of the house, with little or no interaction with the children of the employer, or the man of the house.

Sometimes the domestic workers are lucky to have found work in households, who are not only cordial to them but also very affectionate.

*Mamta (15) has been working with Mrs Jagjit Singh for the past 4 years. Her parents Rambeer and Sumitra are migrants from Paharpur, Bulundashahr in UP. Her father did not have a permanent job, and as Delhi was close, he was always able to get a job as a daily wager. He finally got a job with the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in 1992 and they all moved to Delhi. He feeds the rats and monkeys which are used for experiments, and earns Rs 3,500/- per month. Earlier, they stayed in the Gautam Nagar Basti, but the basti has been relocated to Sarita Vihar. Now Mamta and her sister both commute to their work place by chartered bus. Her day starts early, as she has to reach her work place by 8.30am . Her average income is Rs1100/.*

*When they were in the village, the school was very far, and she and her sister never put foot in the school. Once in Delhi they were so all busy trying to meet ends as they are a very large family. "We are seven brothers and sisters, my elder brothers are married and they have moved out of the juggi . They have their own homes and rarely come to visit us. My youngest brother has been admitted to school". She says with a laugh, "Aunty was shocked when she came to know that me and my sister were both illiterate and persuaded us to spend our lunch time with her. She bought us Work Books and pencils and today after four years of coaching we are able to read and write. After our lunch break, we finish cleaning the lunch utensils and leave for home at about 3.00pm."*

*Mamta says that she is lucky that she is working in the households of very nice people. She*

# Conclusion

On the basis of the above case studies of Child Domestic Workers, the following insights can be drawn:

- In India, a broad range of Constitutional and Legislative provisions exists for the protection of Children's Rights, but the need of the hour is to ensure the effective implementation of the existing constitutional and legislative provisions. Presently, The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 and the National Policy on Child Labour provides the framework for the intervention on child labour issues. But the law is limited only to the employment of children in certain listed hazardous industries and provides regulation of employment of children in other industries (applicable only to factory sector or registered units). The domestic labour is not in the legal framework of the Act. As an immediate step, Child Domestic Labour should be listed as a hazardous activity. There is an urgent need to amend the legislation on Child labour.
- Nearly two hundred thousand people are migrating to Delhi every year in search of livelihood. The city's huge informal sector provides cheap services and comfort to the rich and is a major force which has kept the city growing and going. Neither the Slum Areas Act, nor the City Master Plans have been properly implemented. The problems of slum-dwellers have taken by now a different magnitude, and they further aggravate due to the intense migration and deterioration of living conditions in these localities. Poverty, poor living conditions, the rising trend of 'survival of the fittest' has increased the numbers of domestic child labour.
- The ability to claim and enjoy the rights of an informed and responsible citizen rests squarely upon a child's access to a good basic education. The fulfillment of a child's right to education offers protection from multitude of hazards such as a life consigned to poverty, bonded labour in agriculture, industry or domestic labour, commercial sexual exploitation or recruitment into armed conflict. Gender discrimination has come forth as the key issue for the lack of education of the girl child. This has also been seen as one of the major causes for the overwhelming majority of domestic child workers being girls. The government should seriously consider the enactment of the 93<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Bill on compulsory education for all children up to the age of 14 years, removing educational disparities, and strengthening the quality of education.
- Child domestic workers contribution to the family income is considerable. In some cases they support their family single-handedly. Therefore, employment schemes for adults should be intensified and strictly carried out. Poor socio-economic parental background is one of the important causes for the rise in child domestic labour.
- Public education campaigns are the need of the hour; they have to bring about attitudinal change of parents, as well of employers. This can only be done through collecting data on the conditions of child domestic workers and disseminating information about the findings. Often, people are unaware of the damage they are causing by employing a child as a domestic help. Convincing evidence on this issue is needed for a persuasive campaign. As it was obvious during the above studies, it was an uphill task to speak with some of the employers of the child domestic workers. Therefore, building a rapport with employers is required before lobbying with them.
- Studies undertaken in the past few years have enabled us to develop a profile of the child domestic worker, but there is still little information available on various the trends regarding child domestic work, and impacts of this form of employment on childrens' lives. The present study is a modest attempt in this direction. However, there is a need for further in-depth studies in this area.

# Annexure

## TABLES

<i>Table 1</i>		
<b>Growth of Population of Delhi</b>		
<b>Year</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Decennial Growth rate</b>
1901	405,809	-
1911	413,851	2.0
1921	488,452	18.0
1931	636,246	30.3
1941	917,939	44.3
1951	1,744,072	90.0
1961	2,658,612	52.4
1971	4,065,698	52.9
1981	6,220,406	53.0
1991	9,420,644	51.5
2001	13,782,976	46.3

**Source: Census of India, Registrar General of India**

<i>Table 2</i>			
<b>Growth of Delhi vis-à-vis Kolkata and Mumbai</b>			
<b>Year</b>	<b>Delhi</b>	<b>Kolkata</b>	<b>Mumbai</b>
1951	1,744,072 (-)	4,669,559 (-)	2,966,902 (-)
1961	2,658,612 (52.4)	5,983,669 (28.1)	4,152,056 (39.9)
1971	4,065,698 (52.9)	7,420,300 (24.0)	5,970,575 (43.7)
1981	6,220,406 (53.0)	9,194,018 (23.9)	8,243,805 (38.07)
1991	9,420,644 (51.45)	11,021,918 (19.8)	12,439,901 (50.09)
2001	13,782,976 (46.31)	*	*

• Census Figure of 2001 for Kolkata and Mumbai have not been published as yet.

**Note:** The bracketed portion indicate the decennial growth rate

Source: Census of India, Registrar General of India

**Table 3**

Volume of Net Migration to Delhi (in, 000)

Year	Net Migration to Delhi
1961- 1971	633
1971- 1981	952
1981- 1991	1306
1991- 2001	1600

Source: Census of India, Registrar General of India

**Table 4**

Growth of Squatter Settlement in Delhi

Year	No. of Squatter families
1951	12,749
1956	22,415
1961	42,815
1966	42,668
1971	62,594
1973	98,438
1976	20,000
1981	98,709
1983	1,29,000
1985	1,50,000
1987	1,71,000
1988	2,10,000
1991	2,59,344
1994	4,80,000

Source: Slum Department and JJ Department, Delhi Slum Improvement Board, Municipal Corporation of Delhi (Based on record of Food and Supplies Department).

**Table 5**

**Comparison of Child Wages and Adult Wages for the Same Type of Job.**  
(Child Workers of Delhi Region -- Sample Study, 1983 Cited in Nangia 1987, 1988).

	Child wages compared to adult wages					
	Equal	Equal to Half	Half to One-third	One-third to One-quarter	Less than One-quarter	Uncertain
Percent according to employers' response	39.5	19.1	7.0	3.7	6.1	24.7

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