

CHILD LABOUR: EARLY WARNING SIGNALS

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Introduction:

Rehabilitation has been the strategy of choice when addressing the issue of Child Labour. Most initiatives in the field of Child Labour focus on the psychological, physical, educational and social deprivations that a child labourer suffers. The irreplaceable nature of the several losses that a child labourer accumulates makes a strong case for interventions that protect the child before they enter the labour market. The multiplying intervention costs for the continuously increasing numbers of children joining the labour market, is another spur in the hunt for strategies that look at alternatives to rehabilitative approaches. Preventative strategies for the elimination of Child Labour, is as yet a poorly addressed approach in the field of Anti-Child Labour research and practice. Prevention addresses issues many stages before the child enters the labour market. One of the strongest arguments for developing preventative strategies is captured in the old adage: 'Prevention is better than cure'.

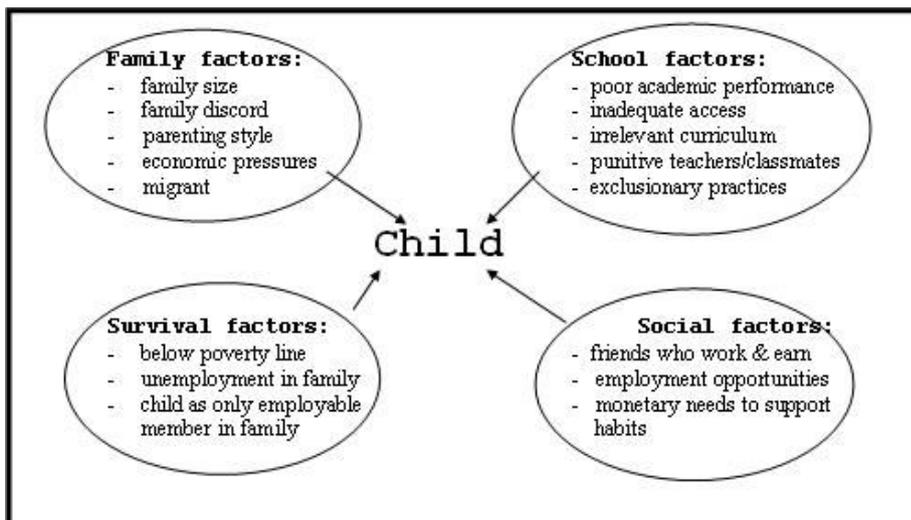
Preventative Strategies need to look at institutions and contexts that can promote and provide the psychological, physical, educational and social needs of the child, instead of driving them into activities that deprive them of these rights. The school is one such institution where steps can be taken to actively recognize a child who is at-risk for becoming a child labourer. The earlier the child at-risk is recognized, the lesser is the psychological damage. Earlier identification also implies that less intensive (and thus, more cost effective) interventions, can fight the forces that inexorably push the child to labour.

Children at-risk for Child Labour: A Framework

Looking closely at the life histories of persons who have entered the labour market in their childhood years, can give us clues of the processes that set a young child onto the trajectory of exploitation and labour. For example, experiences repeatedly documented across the country have begun to show a clear link between dropping out of the school system and entry into the labour market. Certain families and communities seem to be more vulnerable to sending their child to work, while others seem to have mechanisms that protect their children from becoming labourers. Analysis of the family and social characteristics of child labourers also gives us clues to what the pre-cursors to Child Labour may be.

Given below is a framework within which early identification of children at-risk to Child Labour may be identified. The framework has been developed based on a review of research in the field of Child Labour, an examination of several case studies maintained by NGOs across the country, interviews with both urban and rural child labourers and interviews with young adults who had entered the labour market as children. The framework has also drawn from The Promise Foundation's extensive survey's of school practices and family processes of children who drop out of school. Finally, the framework has drawn from family studies of children who run away from home (and become street children, and often child labourers).

A Framework for identifying Children at-risk for Child Labour



The above framework is a working model that can be used in the absence of validated models of the different pathways that lead to child labour. The Framework allows for a systematic review of the most likely factors that can push a child into Child Labour. The Framework also allows for periodic monitoring to ascertain the risk potential of a child over the age span from 3 to 15 years.

Prevention of Child Labour: In search of Early Warning Signals

One important preventive strategy for elimination of Child Labour would be to closely monitor the child and the forces that are in operation in his or her life. Looking for signs that warn us can help adults offer support and prevent the drift towards Child Labour.

Keeping in mind the above 'Children at-risk for Child Labour Framework' the following comments may be made:

- The at-risk factors identified in the framework can be translated as early warning signals.
- Significant adults in the child's life can be sensitised to identify children experiencing at-risk factors as outlined in the Framework above.
- Interventions can be tailored to address each of the factors in the Framework.
- Significant adults present in the child's life (like teachers, youth leaders, etc.) can be trained in these specific interventions.

Teacher Training for Early Warning Signals: Some Resources

The Promise Foundation has developed training modules that address issues linked with early warning signals and interventions to prevent child labour. Some of the key areas that The Foundation's training teams cover include:

- Protective vs. risk factors in the lives of children
- Life trajectories
- Specific skills to communicate to families with high at-risk factors
- Specific skills to protect children in schools with high at-risk factors
- Specific skills to protect children with high at-risk social environment

Some of the training materials used in these modules are appended.

Concluding Note:

There is an urgent need for systematic research on the various pathways to Child Labour. There are multiple factors that can push a child into the labour market. It is however essential, for purposes of both intervention development and outcome evaluation of various intervention models, that the most sensitive and robust indicators are identified.

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