

ESTIMATING CHILD LABOUR: SOME CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

A summary of a Centre for Studies in Economic Appraisal, Kolkata, and IREWOC study

1. Introduction: Child Labour and Child Work

There exists a difference between child work and child labour. We argue that a child's work as physical and mental involvement in a family or social activity 'can be a gradual initiation into adulthood and a positive element in the child's development. *Light work, properly structured and phased, is not child labour.* Work, which does not detract from other essential activities of children, namely leisure, play and education is not child labour. *Child labour is work which impairs the health and development of the children'* (*Child Labour*; Alec Fyfe, Cambridge Polity Press, 1989, pp.3-4). In our conceptual framework, a distinction is made between 'work' and 'labour' in the context of what Fyfe has noted as 'gradual initiation of child into adulthood'.

2. Methodological Issues

If Child Work is distinguished from Child Labour, the problem of estimating the population of Child Workers in a given area at a given point in time as also its distribution according to several characteristics of Work in which they are engaged for varying durations and their impact on Child Development involves a number of methodological issues. The involvement of children in Work could be assessed in terms of person rate as well as time rate of such work.

The Sampling Design in this context has to be somewhat non-conventional, since various features of the population to be sampled have to be considered.

Data capture also will not be easy. Getting access to children at workplaces and at homes and generating dependable responses from them may prove pretty difficult. Access can be through families, through children at work, through children in schools and even a combination of some or all these approaches.

To establish usual status of a child, a revisit may become a necessity—complicating the fieldwork. Frank responses may not come through—particularly from parents/guardians and employers to questions which possibly could embarrass them. In such situations, we may have to use Randomised Response Techniques.

Lastly, the problem of estimation comes in. We should initially decide on the parameters to be estimated in terms of possible segmentation of the total population of child-workers. The ultimate interest may lie in estimating both the person rate and the time rate of child work. The latter would need credible data on time disposition of children in different categories.

3. A Conceptual Framework

The child worker population, in turn, is defined to include the following categories of persons:

- Economically active children engaged in productive work, paid or unpaid in organized or in formal sector (excluding domestic work carried out in the child's own family)
- Children who carry out (household chores) domestic work for more than a certain number of hours per day on an average (that hinders or precludes their participation in schools)
- Children branded as child labour in terms of children beyond age twelve engaged in 14 hours of productive job in a week or children beyond age fourteen working at least 42 hours on productive jobs in a week.

Enumeration of child worker or child labour would also require a delimitation of the activity status of a child in an immediate or short run sense (daily or weekly status and in a longer run sense (usual status). ILO recommended the following two-level activity status classification to be adopted for the purpose of estimation of the child worker/ child labour population:



1. At work in economic activity
 - a. At work only
 - b. At work and at school
2. At school and not at work in economic and non-economic activities
3. Neither at work nor at school
 - a. Household chores
 - b. Other (viz., sick or disabled, at play or in informal education)

A boy (12 years) in the leather industry (Photograph: Kristoffel Lieten, March 2005)

4. Methodology for Estimation

To ascertain the number of children belonging to the above three categories, we can consider two different approaches and possibly combine findings from both. These approaches are as follows:

- A household survey conducted on middle income and low-income households to find out the status of each child present in every sample household, irrespective of whether a child is staying in the household or staying outside for work. Such a survey should directly provide an estimate of the total number of children belonging to each of categories mentioned earlier.
- A survey of children working in enterprises in organized or informal sector, conducted to collect information about the status of other children staying in the household of the sampled child.

Since most of the children involved in one of the three categories of work are expected to belong to low-income households, some kind of stratification for selecting sample households would be useful. The exact situation may be qualitatively different in urban and rural areas.

5. The Present Pilot Study

For the present pilot study, two questionnaires, one for the household and the other for the child worker has been designed on the line suggested by the IREWOC.

The household level questionnaire was canvassed among a limited number of urban and rural households respectively located in/around Kolkata. Information relating to participation in schools, domestic work and productive work, besides other relevant information, were collected from the sampled units.

6. Conclusion on Findings

Plausibility of the counts of working children obtained from pilot study presented above is an important issue. Since there are no other comparable estimates available and since the data collected under the Employment and Unemployment Surveys of the NSSO constitute the data base that may have conceptually the closest proximity to what has been gathered in the present pilot study, we have tried to derive estimate of percentage of working children for rural and urban India based on published NSS data

Let us briefly explain the manner in which we have tried to derive a broadly comparable estimate of percentage of child worker from the NSS data. NSS Report No. 484 on Household Consumer Expenditure and Employment and Unemployment Situation in India gives for the NSS 58th round period (July-December 2002) the estimates for all India rural and urban of percentage of children in the 5-14 year age-group who are usually employed (principal and subsidiary status). For future reference, let us call this A. The same report also gives the percentage of children having usual activity status 11-81 (viz., worked in household enterprises as self-employed, helper, regular salaried employee or worked as casual wage labour in public works, other types of work or did not work but sought/ available for work), 91 (attending school), 92 (attending domestic duties only) and 93 (attending domestic duties and was also engaged in free collection of goods and services (like sewing, tailoring, weaving etc.) for household use only. The

NSS 58th round data that we have made use of is given in the Annexure B. For future reference, let us call the sum total of estimated percentage of children having usual activity status 11-81, 92 and 93 and the percentage for activity status 91 B and C, respectively.

Consider now the children having activity status 91 (i.e., attending school). A fraction of these children would be doing regularly household chores. NSS Report No. 412 entitled Economic Activities and School Attendance by Children in India provides estimates of percentage of school attending children who helped in household chores by age-group for rural and urban India for the NSS 50th Round Period (July 1993-June 1994). Let us call this percentage P. For a given age-group, a reasonable estimate of percentage of children worker in total children will be $[A+ B +(C*P/100)]$.

Table 11: Estimate of percentage of child worker in children population based on NSS 58th Round data; All India Urban

Age-group	Percentage of children								Estimated percentage of working children**	
	Usually employed		Having usual activity status code				Of UAS code 91 who helped in hh chores*			
			(11-81,92,93)		91					
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
5 - 9	-	-	0.4	1.3	87.8	85.6	16.1	18.8	14.54	17.39
10 - 14	-	-	6.3	11	88.8	83.8	30.1	39.2	33.03	43.85
5 - 14	3.1	1.5	-	-	-	-	23.3	29.2	-	-

* Obtained from NSS 50th Round data vide NSS Report No. 412 *Economic Activities and School attendance by Children of India*

** to obtain the final estimate of percentage of child worker, one should add the percentage of usually employed (which is of the order of 1.5-5%) to the figures given in columns 10 and 11 of Table 11 and 12 .

In Table 11 and 12 we have presented the estimated percentage of child worker in child population for age groups 5-9 and 10-14 year age-group by sex for all India urban and rural, respectively, based on the procedure described above. For lack of data, pooled estimates for the 5-14 age-group could not be obtained. As the numbers presented in Table 11 and 12 suggest, the estimate of percentage of child worker in the age-group 10-14 is around 35% for male children and 50% for female children and the estimates for urban India is systematically a little lower than those for rural India. As is to be expected, the corresponding percentages for the 5-9 year age-group is around 15% in both the sectors, the rural sector figures being a little lower than the corresponding urban sector figure. Here also the incidence of work is higher for the female children. What is perhaps most important from the point of view of the present pilot study, the order of magnitude of incidence of child work as found in the pilot study does not appear to be way off from those obtained from the NSS data.

Table 12: Estimate of percentage of child worker in children population based on NSS 58th Round data; All India Rural

Age-group	Percentage of children								Estimated percentage of working children	
	Usually employed		Having usual activity status code				Of UAS code 91 who helped in hh chores*			
			(11-81,92,93)		91					
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
5 - 9	-	-	0.6	1.4	75.8	71.6	16.6	19.1	13.2	15.1
10 - 14	-	-	9.6	21.8	81.7	69.9	35.1	41.4	38.3	50.7
5 - 14	4.7	3.4	-	-	-	-	26	29.3	-	-

* Obtained from NSS 50th Round data vide NSS Report No. 412 *Economic Activities and School attendance by Children of India*

The NSS provides estimates for all India Rural and Urban percentage of children (5-14 age group) who are usually employed, but this includes *subsidiary status* as well, so that the ‘work’ in this category need not necessarily ‘impair the health and development of the child’. Again status 11-81, 92 and 93 do not have a matching information on ILO suggested time disposal cut off. The same is true for the estimation of the percentage of school students who helped in household chores (Report 412). The estimate of child worker in total children as given by $[A + B + (C *P/100)]$ would therefore over estimate the incidence of child workers in India, as per ILO definition.

This is a serious problem with the NSS estimates that needs to be addressed. The present work on methodology that attempts to estimate child worker, as expounded in one section of this paper, might help researchers overcome this limitation.

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