

Causes and Consequences of Child Labour after Covid-19 Situation in Morigaon Town, Assam: A Study

¹Dr Parbin Sultana, ²Rupa Sarmah, ³Md. Wahidur Rahman,

1Assistant Professor, College of Education, Morigaon, Assam

2Assistant Professor, College of Education, Morigaon,

3Assistant Professor, College of Education, Morigaon, Assam,

Abstract

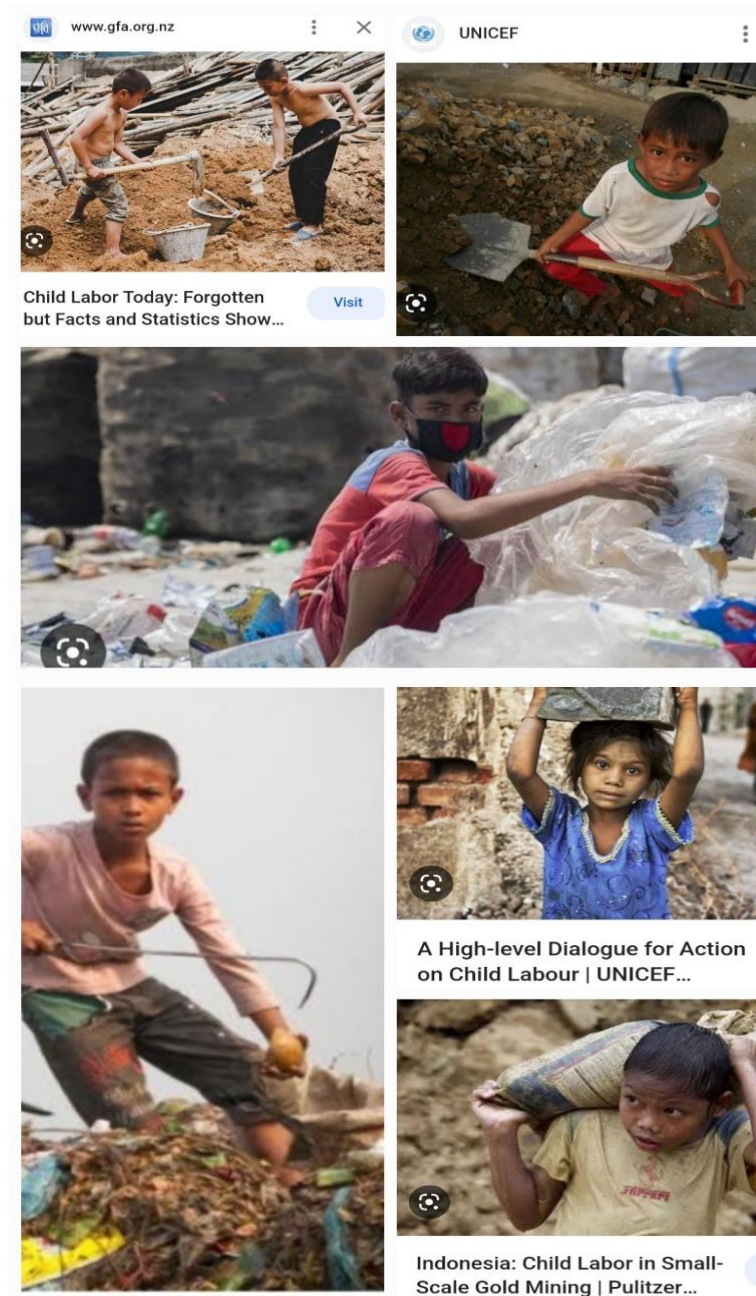
'Child Labour' being a risk factor all over the world now a day is considered an urgent matter of discussion. It needs to sort out various causes and consequences of child exploitation in any form and find immediate solutions to conduce a serene environment so that budding children can move freely, enjoy their childhood in fearless environment and grow mentally strong to become good human beings of the society. It is seen that child labour is increasing day by day at present due to the post effect of covid-19 and other causes like poverty, lack of education, societal negligence, addiction, illness, and so on. Thus, this paper aims to find out various causes and factors responsible for child labour in Morigaon Town, Assam, at present. For this, the data will be collected with the help of questionnaire from the In-Charge of District Child Protection Unit (DCPU), Morigaon, Assam, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Morigaon, Assam, the Secondary Schools of Morigaon Town, Assam, and by using observation and interaction method with the child-labourers and their parents belong to this central area, connected from different villages and mini towns. Moreover, many case reports of child-labour after covid-19 will be collected from the Advocates of Morigaon court, will be analysed.

Keywords: *Child Labour, Poverty, Illiteracy, Socio-Economic Condition*

Introduction

Children below the age of 18 years who are made to work is considered Child Labour according to the International Labour Organization (ILO). They work in various industries and households for meagre wages which is prevalent all over the world. Many studies explore that poverty, illiteracy and lack of education are the major issues for increasing Child Labour in the society which is a significant problem in many developing countries including India. The study made by the International Labour Organization (ILO), reveals that there are more than 152 million children who are involving in Child Labour world-wide at present. In India, 3.9% Child Labour cases are found who are aged in between 5 to 14 years. They violate the constitutional provisions like fundamental rights of Children and also harm to themselves physically, mentally and emotionally for the sake of unwanted burden imposed upon them.

Some Photographs of Child Labour Over the World shared by UNICEF



Brief History of Child Labour in India

‘Child Labour’ is not a new term in the Indian History. If we trace back, we will learn that Children were involving mainly in agricultural sector than to the industrial sector before colonial period. But with the advent of British in India, they used child labour in various industries like cotton mills, mines, spice factories, jute mills, wood mills, and so on. This exploitation however, did not stop even after the independence in 1947 in India. The Indian Government enacted various laws and regulations to protect Children below the age of 18 but in vain. They were not effectively implemented till date.

The Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act in India

Some of the important Acts are mentioned below:

1. The Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act, 1986: This act prohibits the labour of children below 14 years of age in hazardous activities like mining, explosives, brick-kilns etc. However, the act regulates the working condition of children in non-hazardous occupations like agriculture, manufacturing services etc, however there are some limitations in it i.e., not more than six hours a day (for the children 14-18 years of age). It has a provision of imposing penalty whoever breaks the rule with a fine of Rs. 50,000/ and imprisonment of two years.

2. The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2015: The provisions of this Act shall be applied to all matters concerning children in need of care and protection, and children in conflict with law, such as: apprehension, detention, prosecution, penalty or imprisonment, rehabilitation and social re-integration of children in conflict with law, along with procedures and decisions or orders.

3. Adoption Regulation, 2017: It has come into force on 16th January 2017. As per this law, any orphan or abandoned or surrendered child, who are declared legally free for adoption by the Child Welfare Committee is eligible to be adopted by parent/s, irrespective of he/she is married or unmarried (but as per gender regulation) and shall have physically, mentally and emotionally stable, and financially capable.

4. The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act 2021: This Act mandates equal rights for children and protection of children. It also fulfils the India's commitment as a signatory to United Nations Convention on the rights of the child. In this Act, the District Magistrate is empowered to deal with child protection and adoption process.

(Source: The Juvenile Justice Act, 2015 along with rules, 2022)

An Outlook on Child Labour and Covid-19 in India

'Child Labour' most probably is a frequently used term around the world soon after the Covid-19 epidemic slows down its devastating appearance with crores of death and unexpected cases. People become jobless and homeless due to continuous lockdown, and no means of living arrangement is set up for many. On 24th of March, 2020, the Prime Minister of India, Mr Narendra Modi announced lock down for 21 days which was followed by 14 hours curfew two days back, and again the lock down was extended until the virus spread minimizes (Covid-19 Report, 2020). The societal change is noticed due to this sole reason in degrading the status of living by not only the poor people but also the people from higher classes, educated classes, middle class, or any other class without justification of who they are. Many people have lost their job and migrated from working place to native place during that period. The mass movement of people at that time was described as the largest movement after the partition of India in 1947 (The Guardian, 30th March 2020). Many children lost their parents during travelling due to mass rush at the station or somewhere in the road and that later on bound the children to do work in a low wage to keep themselves alive (Covid-19 Report, 2020). Many children who become orphan have to be self-sufficient to earn money and to keep living. The parents allow their children to work and support the family due the socio-economic condition and poverty they face.

A study made by Reddy (June, 2020) reveals that the children of daily wage earners are worst affected by Covid-19. They have very little earnings, and their children have to remain hungry for another meal. The UNICEF of the United Nations have warned the world being child right crisis for Covid-19 which have also threatened India, having 472 million children, the largest child population in the world. The press has repeatedly reported that despite having many existing Child Labour Act in India, the children work tirelessly in the agriculture sector like paddy, vegetables, and other farms to continue their livelihood. In Assam, the press has reported that a large number of children (both male and female) have left their school education and joined Tea Garden, Brick yard, Masonry, Paddy Field, Fishing, and so on for earning to continue their living (The Assam Tribune, 5th Dec 2021).

In Morigaon District of Assam, population plays an important role in the entire process of socio-economic scenario. It had 776256 population in 2001 which is increased to 957423 in 2011 in the total area of 1551 sq. km. (Census of India, 2001 and Handbook of Assam, 2018/Nath, 12 Dec, 2019). It is a matter of fact that growth of human population occurs due to the lack of education. The literacy rate of Morigaon District is found 68.03 percent in 2011 census which demarcate it as under developed in the matter of business, trade, industry, culture,

education and so on in comparison to many other districts of Assam. The children of illiterate people are unsafe, become child labourer, child abuse victim, and they may also develop the habit of bad practice in the society like stealing, smuggling like: drugs, narcotics, women trafficking, spread HIV infected diseases and so on.

The Relevance of Covid-19 in Child Labour in India

The pandemic has caused a massive increase of child labour in the world as well as in the countries like India. It has pushed many children to work in worst form that has threatened the Child Right Organizations like Educo and the stakeholders in India. The Country Director of Educo, Mr Guruprasadsaya, “Among the various groups affected by the global pandemic, children remain one of the worst-hit across the globe. The pandemic has triggered a massive increase in the cases of abuse and violation faced by children in India as well. The condition of working children and children in forced or bonded labour in the country has only worsened in the light of Covid-19 pandemic” (News and Press Release, 5th July 2021).

The main cause of child labour in India due to covid-19 was recognised as economic crisis followed by lock downs, job-less, unsafe migration, closure of schools and cut down from various existing facilities. The country Director of Educo (Mr Guruprasad) also added that the child labour problem was not a new thing in India but after the crisis of pandemic it becomes prominent. So, we need to understand that unless the opportunities created for marginalised children to engage in meaningful developmental activities, the problem cannot be reduced significantly.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the paper are:

- To analyse the causes and consequences of Child Labour in post-covid-19 situation.
- To identify the elements that contribute to Child Labour in Morigaon Town.
- To find out recovery measures taken by the stakeholders to restore the Child Labour Cases.
- To forward some suggestions to develop present status of Child Labour if needed.

Research Design for the proposed study

As this work is in the nature of an analytical study, the researcher has adopted the following methodology for choosing the sample and collecting and analysing the relevant data:

a) **Sample:** the sample were collected from four sources:

- The District Child Protection Unit, Morigaon, Assam,
- The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Morigaon, Assam
- The Secondary Schools, and
- The Advocate dealing with Child Labour Case of Morigaon District.

From ‘The District Child Protection Unit’, Morigaon, Assam, the data were collected from the In-Charge of this office with the help of a Questionnaire containing 15 open-ended questions.

From ‘The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Morigaon, Assam, the data were collected from the In-Charge of this office with the help of Interaction method.

From the Secondary Schools (3 Govt schools randomly selected) of Morigaon Town, the data were collected from the restored children who were learning there, with the help of interaction and observation method. Again, some interactions were made with their parents. For this, Pre-fixed Pro-forma was used.

From the Morigaon Court, the data were collected from the Advocates dealing with Child Labour Cases of Morigaon District in Nagaon District Court. In Morigaon, no Child Labour Court is available at present. For this, a Questionnaire is used.

b) **Tools used:** For conducting the field study and collecting relevant data, following tools and techniques are used: Questionnaire, Observation and Interaction.

Delimitation of the Study

The Child Labour is a world-wide problem. Every society has greater responsibility to eradicate this problem as the children are the future of the society. A country will develop when the children are properly taken care of and nurtured properly. This type of study can help a society, stakeholders, govt. and non-govt. organizations and research scholars. However, due to time and cost constraints, the current study delimits to Morigaon Town only. But the study can be extended to wide range such as: Morigaon District, Assam, North East, India or the World.

Data Interpretation and Analysis

Table 1: Registered Child Labour Case in between Feb 2022 to Dec 2022 in Morigaon Town, Assam

Registered Child Labour	No. of case/s
Total no. of Male Child	35 (92.11%)
Total no. of Female Child	03 (7.89%)
Total Children apprehended	38

Source: DCPU (District Child Protection Unit, Morigaon, Assam)

The above table shows that in the year 2022, with the help of District Child Protection Unit, total 38 Child Labourers were apprehended, of which 35 were male child and 3 were female. They were registered under the Child Protection Act 2021 and restored with the permission of District Magistrate after proper counselling by them, as declared by the unit.

The analysis of data shows that in the year 2022, when Covid-19 pandemic was almost relaxed and people started their regular life again, the child labour cases came into notice. Among them, male child cases were higher than the females i.e., 92.11% of total population (child labour cases).

Table 2: Type of work selected by the apprehended Child Labourer in between Feb 2022 to Dec 2022

Type of work	Total no. of Children
Helper of vegetable vendor	02
Server in Tea Stalls	08
House Maid	02
Worker in Grocery Shop	01
Scraper under the Owner	04
Worker in Garage	01
Carrier in Brick Factory	17
Dry fish seller	03
Total no. of Child Labourer	38

Source: DCPU Source: DCPU (District Child Protection Unit, Morigaon, Assam)

As per the above Table (2), the types of work selected by the Child Labourer after covid-19 were helper, server, house maid, worker, scraper, carrier, seller and so on. The work they selected were hazardous and non-hazardous, both. These types of work generally do not pay much to the doer.

From the analysis of data, it can be assumed that they are from the lower socio-economic group and engaging themselves in low-paid work and may not properly support the family they belong to. As a result, no satisfaction is pursued from the work they do rigorously.

Table 3: Out of School Children (OOSC) during 2022-2023 (6-14 years age group)

Out of School Children	No. of Children
Boys	2122 (68.63%)
Girls	970 (31.37%)
Total OOSC	3092

Source: District Mission Coordinator of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Morigaon, Assam.

From the Table 3, it is known that during 2022-23, total 3092 students from the age group of 6-14 years have left the school. Of them, 2122 were male child and 970 were female.

The study finds out that in Morigaon District, the male drops out case is greater than the females i.e., 68.63% of total population (OOSC). The Table 1 also proves this fact where among the apprehended children, female case is lesser than the males i.e., 7.89% of total population (Registered child labour case).

From the analysis of data, we can assume that male child is taking more family responsibility than the females and they suspended themselves from the educational rights as well as child rights facilitated by the govt. or constitution of India.

Table 4: Out of School Children (OOSC) during 2022-2023 (15-17 years age group)

Out of School Children	No. of Children
Boys	274 (59.56%)
Girls	186 (40.43%)
Total OOSC	460

Source: District Mission Coordinator of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Morigaon, Assam.

In Table 4 also, we can see that drop out case in secondary level (the age group of students: 15-17 years), the no. of boys is larger than the girls. Here, among the 460 drop out students 274 are male and 186 are females.

The data can be analysed that among the dropout teenage students, males are more prone to continue work than back to education again. Some of the registered cases of these age group (15-17yrs) are also found involved in anti-social activities like drugs, sex abuse etc. (the data is not disclosed due to security purpose). Some of the female students are victim of child marriage also.

Table 5: A Comparison between child labour cases before and after covid-19 in Morigaon Town, Assam.

Registered Child Labour Case (2018) (Before Covid-19)		Registered Child Labour Case (2022) (After Covid-19)	
	Number		Number
Male	01	Male	35

Female	00	Female	03
Total no. of cases	01	Total no. of cases	38

Source: DCPU (District Child Protection Unit, Morigaon, Assam)

The above table shows that in the year 2018, the child labour case was found only one. On the other hand, in 2022, the case has increased to 38 numbers which is very significant.

From the analysis of data, it is clear that covid-19 has affected the people living in this place (Morigaon) and it has directly impacted many children who are bound to do work for their living. Though the child labour case was existed before the pandemic spread, that was very minimum. In 2018, only one such case was found which was however in 2022, just after the covid-19 was calm down found significantly high. So, it is a matter to be discussed and find out the solution to eradicate the problem.

Data Regarding Remedials/Initiatives taken by the DCPU

- A Leaflet is published yearly containing information regarding Child Labour.
- Arrange meetings between Headmaster of school and dropout students.
- Awareness programme is arranged.
- The Girl Child Labourers who are drop out for 2 years or more than that are given admission in Kasturba Gandhi School in Morigaon District, Assam.

Data Regarding Remedials/Initiatives taken by the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan

- The Govt. of Assam has recently given responsibility to Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan to track the drop out students and rehabilitate them.
- The Non-Residential Special Training Centre is established for Out of School Children. At present, 73 such centres under four Blocks are available in Morigaon District.

Data Analysis from the Interaction and Observation

During data collection, the researchers have interacted with the stakeholders (In-Charge, Officials, Advocates, etc.), the victim children and with their parents, and found different causes and consequences of child labour relating to the Covid-19. They are discussed below:

Main Causes found

- Despite Covid-19, other natural calamities like: rain, hail storm, flood, erosion, destruction of crops, and etc. during 2021-22.
- Parental death, disability, and ailment.
- Poverty: insufficient resources for living.
- Poor income: low wages after day long service.
- Big family: uncontrolled population, many members live together in a single roof. Suffocated.
- Lack of education: no understanding about quality life, no proper family planning, no proper investment, no literacy, little numerical ability.
- On-line education: incapable of purchasing android mobile, lack of technical skills, network issues and so on.
- Hike of essential commodity price: unbearable rate of daily using things.
- Jobless: common thing during covid-19 due to lock down and safety purpose.
- Unemployment: after investing in education no job guarantee, no proper job available in the society, struggle, etc.

Main Consequences found

- Physical: injured or suffered quite often while working.
- Emotional: lack of love and care from the family members, working place and from the society.

- c. Mental: fear, anxiety, depression etc. are common in them.
- d. Health Issues: respiratory disease, eye problem, ear problem, stomach problem, fever, etc.
- e. Deprivation of rights: fundamental rights of child.
- f. Deprivation of education: compulsory and free education, mid-day meal etc.

Findings

1. From the study it is found that Covid-19 affects the socio-economic condition of the people of Morigaon District, Assam. Due to lock down, many people lost their source of income, most of the cattle farm and poultry farm were being closed due to the unavailability of foods and decreasing of sell. Again, other natural calamities like heavy rain-fall, flood, erosion, destruction of crops and paddy fields, jute fields and vegetable fields etc. also affect people of Morigaon in the year 2020. Within next one year, i.e., in 2022-23, 3552 students are found out of school and engage themselves in various activities so that they could earn money and support their family.

2. It is significant that in comparison to total drop out cases (3552) in Morigaon District, only 38 child labours are apprehended or recovered by the District Child Protection Unit (DCPU) in the year 2022. That is only 0.01% of the total population(drop out students). The remaining 99.99% is untraced.

3. Though the Govt. of Assam in collaboration with Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) flags a mission to trace the drop out children but that is not satisfactory till now.

4. The study finds out that the number of boys' drop out are larger than the girls' in the year 2022. In the age group of 6-14 years, the percentage of boys' drop out is 68.63%, and in the age group of 15-17 years, the percentage of boys drop out is 59.56%. From the interaction, it is found that boys have to take more responsibility of their family for the reasons like: family population, poverty, poor livelihood, prolonged health issues of the elder family members, death of parent/s in covid-19, hike of essential commodity prices, and so on. Again, it is also significant that some of the drug cases and child marriage cases are from these teenage drop out groups.

5. The study also finds out that many students left their school during Covid-19 due to the online education method. Many poor students were unable to buy the Android Mobile phone to continue their study. Besides this, many students found it difficult to operate due to expertise in the technical issues of it. Therefore, they left the school and did not come back to school due to fear, shame, anxiety and year-loss.

6. The study finds out that some initiatives are taken by the District Child Protection Unit (DCPU) and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan to restore the child labour as:

- Publish leaflet
- Arrange meeting with Head Masters
- Conduct awareness programme occasionally
- Arrange special training, etc.

But in the real picture, these are useless for many.

7. The consequences of child labour are also found significant:

- i. 47.36% of the child labourer who worked in factories or garage were injured. Some of them became cripple, lost eye, cut hand or finger during machinery or hazardous work.
- ii. Cent percent of the child labourer wanted to live a free life without any responsibility. They are suffering from mental illness like fear, anxiety, depression etc. and live an unsatisfactory life.
- iii. 50% of the child labourer have suffered from the serious health issues like respiratory diseases, ear problem, eye problem, stomach problem, fever and etc.
- iv. Cent percent of the child labourer are deprived from child rights like: labour free life, free and compulsory education, mid-day meal, and other facilities provided by the Govt. of India.

Some Suggestions and Recommendations

- 1. Strict law should be enforced against child labour.
- 2. Access to education should be made easy for the sufferer/victim without considering their age and year

- loss.
3. More awareness camp should be organised in the society to aware the impact of child labour.
 4. Create easy income opportunities for elderly persons, weak persons, child bearing mothers, and so on.
 5. Utilization of free time in vocational or skill-based work like: soft toys making, craft work, tailoring, weaving, and so on.
 6. Provide financial assistance to the needy person to overcome from the situation.
 7. Improve social protection such as: health care, nutrition, sanitation, and so on.
 8. Emotional attachment and societal support for the weaker section of the society should be given.

Conclusion

Child labour in India is a significant problem. It requires a comprehensive approach to eradicate from the society. It needs involvement of stakeholders including the Govt. NGOs, communities, civil society, and other sectors. By working together, it can be possible to reduce prevalent child labour. Only then, future of the child will be saved and secured.

References

- [1] Census of India, (2001).
- [2] Covid report, March 25, (2020). News and Press Release.
- [3] DCPU (District Child Protection Unit, Morigaon, Assam) Document, (2022-2023).
- [4] District Mission Coordinator of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Morigaon.
- [5] Handbook of Assam, (2018).
- [6] International Labour Organization (ILO) Document, (2021).
- [7] Kumar, S., Pratibha B. and et. al. (2020). Impact of Coronavirus (Covid-19) on Indian Economy, *Agriculture and Food: e-Newsletter*, vol-2, issue-4, April 2020, ISSN: 2581-8317.
- [8] Nath, T. (2019). Status of Socio-Economic Condition of People in Morigaon District, Assam: A Geographical Analysis, *Thematic Journal of Geography*, vol-8, issue-12, Dec 2019, ISSN: 2277-2995.
- [9] News and Press Release (2021). Covid-19 has likely worsened the situation of Child labourers in India: Educo and Campaign Against Child Labour lead efforts to bring together stakeholders to help end child labour, 5th July 2021, informing humanitarian worldwide 24/7- a service provided by *OCHA*.
- [10] Reddy, R. V. (2020). Covid-19 & Child Labour: How the Covid-19 crisis is affecting child labour in India and recommendations for government action, *Respect*, M. V. Foundation, June, 2020.
- [11] The Assam Tribune (State Newspaper in English), 5th Dec 2021.
- [12] The Guardian (National Newspaper), 30th March (2020).
- [13] The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act, 2015 (2 Of 16) as amended by The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Amendment Act, 2021 (23 of 2021), alongwith Act 2000, Model Rules 2016, Adoption Regulation, 2017, published by Professional Book Publishers, Delhi, 2022.