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An Analysis of Working Conditions and Impact of Work on Child Labor

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Abstract

The present paper is an attempt to analyze the terms of employment and working conditions of the child workers in the carpet weaving industry. Employer's consideration to employ child labor, area from where child workers are recruited and surety for employment after training is also included. In addition to the terms of work like monthly wages, hours of work, rest period, provision of leave, holidays etc. The data on the working conditions and the impact of the work on health, social behavior of the child labor, physical and welfare facilities have also been discussed in this paper. An attempt has been made to highlight the nature of supervision, grievance handling, job satisfaction and other allied aspects related with the work life of the child workers. The data has been collected from 162 child labors, 82 parents and 50 employers with the help interview schedules. Our analysis reveals that the conditions of child workers who had been working in their own family carpet weaving units were slightly better in comparison to the employed ones. By and large, employers preferred children from lower castes at cheaper rates. Children usually work 6 to 8 hours per day. Half of the child labors were earning ` 500 to ` 700 per month and the rest were earning below ` 500 per month.

Key words: working conditions, health, behavior, employers, parents, wages, carpet weaving.

1. Introduction

The terms of employment and working conditions are two important aspects which determine the employee - employer relationship at workplace. These aspects have important bearing on the mental state of mind of workers and their productivity. They further pave the way of personal satisfaction of the workers in terms of wages, conditions of employment, the availability of human and conducive conditions at work places. The terms of employment indicates various elements such as workers earning in the form of wages, working hours, leave holydays, medical benefits, housing etc. It also indicates other welfare and social security components linked with the employment. While the terms of work helps the workers to meet their personal and family needs, better working conditions help them to work effectively and efficiently. It is a well established fact that environment is

one of the two determinants of personality development of an individual. The work place equipped with proper and adequate facilities not only helps in shaping the social behavior of workers but also in determining the working norms as well as employee employer relationships. Of late, it has been realized that conducive working conditions have a greater impact on various aspects of the workers life. Uncongenial, undesirable and poor working conditions coerce the workers to keep away from the work places and result in disenchantment with work giving birth to problems like absenteeism, boredom, monotony fatigue, accidents, disobedience, occupational disease, ill health poor quality of work, non harmonious employer- employee relations and disturbances at the work place. It includes a wide variety of things and can be divided into two categories that are physical conditions and social conditions. Physical working conditions can be enlisted as: (1) Nature of work itself in terms of fatigue monotony and burden. (2) Safety measures. (3) Lighting. (4) Temperature and ventilation and other measures for industrial health and hygiene supervision, communication, bargaining trade unionism etc are the determinants of industrial relations or employee -employer relationships which may be called as social conditions. Various items enlisted above as terms of work and working conditions have been regulated through the statutory provisions under different state and central legislations, but the scope of these acts are limited to the organized sectors only. It is a matter of grave concern that conditions of work in the unorganized sectors like carpet industry and other small scale industry norms are still decided by the employers in an arbitrary manner and working conditions are so horrible and shocking that it becomes difficult to believe that workers can work in such conditions. (Singh 1990)

The present paper deals with the terms of employment and working conditions of the child workers in the carpet weaving industry. Employer's consideration to employ child labor, area from where child workers are recruited and surety for employment after training is also included. In addition to the terms of work like monthly wages, hours of work, rest period, provision of leave, holidays etc. The data on the working conditions and the impact of the work on health, social behavior of the child labor, physical and welfare facilities have also been discussed in this paper. An attempt has been made to highlight the nature of supervision, grievance handling, job satisfaction and other allied aspects related with the work life of the child workers.

2. Objectives

The specific objectives of the present study are:

- To study the terms of employment and working conditions of child labors.
- To analyze the level of earnings of child labor in the study area.
- To study the impact of work on the behavior of child.
- To analyze the impact of work on the health of child.

3. Methodology

In the present study, multistage sampling has been used. In the first stage Quimoh block was selected because of concentration of more carpet weaving units, employment of large number of children in the carpet weaving industry and easy accessibility. In the second stage it was decided to take the sample of 100 households from five villages (20% from each) which have higher concentration of child labor and where there is evidence of large scale carpet weaving at the village level. Hence with the help of key persons (village elders) a sample of five villages viz. Brazloo, Bachroo, Hum-Shale- Bug, Tangan and Badroo were selected in the present study. In the third stage a list of carpet weaving units/households from selected villages was prepared with the help of village leaders and others having knowledge about carpet weaving units in the village. Only those households were interviewed where there was at least one child in the age group of 6-14 years employed in the carpet weaving. Thus a sample of 162 child labors was taken for the present study. As per objectives of the study, besides child labors, information has been collected from 82 parents and 50 employers with the help of interview schedules as well.

In the various tables and figures presented and analyzed in this paper, where respondents gave more than two responses, only first two responses were taken for analysis purposes. It was done because psychologically the first two responses are considered to be more important as these are natural and respondent mentions them before other responses without any prompting or efforts.

4. Discussion and analysis

4.1 Consideration in Employing Children

The employers (50) were asked to mention their consideration that led them to employ children. A variety of multiple responses were obtained. Maximum of two responses from each respondent were taken for analysis purposes which are presented in table 1

Table 1: Reasons Governing Employers for Preferring Child Labor

S. No.	Reasons	Percentage
1	Child labor is cheaper	22.00
2	They work hard	25.00
3	They create less trouble	5.00
4	They work for longer hours	12.00
5	They can be controlled easily	8.00
6	They can be put to any job	17.00
7	Any other	11.00
	Total	100.00

Note: Maximum two responses from each respondent have been taken from analysis.

Source: Field Survey

The table 1 shows that 1/4th employers were preferring children in their looms because they are hardworking, more than 1/5th (22 percent) expressed that they are cheaper than adult workers, 17 percent found that it was easy to put them in any job, 8 percent liked them, because they were more disciplined and easy to handle, 12 percent preferred them because of their capacity to work for longer hours, 5 percent said that they created less trouble and rest 11 percent employed them due to some other reasons. The analysis of the table clearly shows that the child labor is cheaper, easily disciplinable and can be put to work beyond the prescribed working hours. This further confirms the presumption that the poor are exploited more by the rich.

4.2 Communities from Which Children Are Recruited

In the big factories and organizations recruitment is made at the state or the national level to get skillful, smart and hardworking workers. This is done either through advertisements or scouting methods. When the employers of the carpet weaving units were asked to express their preferences, if they had for any community, 11 employers said that they preferred the child labors from the lower communities and casts, 7 preferred from their own community whereas the majority of employers had no preference for any child worker. The reasons for preferring workers of their own or socio-economic lower communities may be the lack of social relationship between various communities in rural area. It is well documented fact that dominance is closely related to the caste structure of the rural communities. It is only because of this that employers prefer the child workers from the lower or from the same community. This pattern was not observed in more than half of the employers and this might be due to the recent changes and development in social relationships between the rural communities. As regards modalities of recruitment of the child workers, more than half (54 percent) employers responded that unemployed children and their parents approached them, 15 (30 percent) employers themselves want to hire child workers whereas 8 (16 percent) said that co-workers approached them for employment. This shows that in this occupation the mode of recruitment of children is direct. The data presented here shows that in cottage industries like carpet weaving scouting is the only method adopted by the employers to recruit child workers. This fact also reflects the informal recruitment method in village industries because of non-urbanized social relationship prevailing in the villages.

4.3 Medical Certificate

When the employers were asked whether their child workers were required to produce medical fitness certificate before they joined their jobs. It was found that all the employers (50) were neither aware of it nor could they

understand its need because they employed only physically as well as mentally healthy and efficient children for work. In case of accidents and injuries, kerosene oil and carpet wool were used as medicines and reported it cured their injuries. Similarly, the parents of the child workers were asked whether their children were medically examined before joining work. All the respondents (82) replied in the negative and also said that in case of injury, accidents and illness of the child workers, they had to go to private medical practitioners (shops) or to primary health centers. It clearly shows that neither parents nor employers of children had realized the importance of medical fitness probably because of their rural background with poor education, lack of legal awareness and neglect by the law enforcing agencies.

4.4 Furnishing of Surety/Security

In the unorganized sectors like carpet weaving units, employers behave in accordance with their whims. The researchers asked the parents whether they furnished any security/security to the employers for employment of their children. They replied in negative and added that most of the employers had provisions of advance money for payment to the parents of child workers for family needs. This advance money was to be repaid in terms of child labor and as such the children were bound to work with a particular employer till the full repayment of the advance money. Usually this advance is interest free and it remains so till they work with a particular employer. Interest is charged only when they leave the employer. Security money is not charged from them at any stage so long as the child workers work with the particular employer. This appears to be in conformity with the local, traditional and informal social relationship among the rural people. This particularly is in sharp contrast to the practice prevalent elsewhere in the country where employers seek security money from the apprentices along with bonds to serve their establishments.

4.5 Terms of Training

During the period of apprenticeship, although children waste raw materials, they help in production after learning the skills. They are assigned to work with adults in carpet weaving. They are paid in accordance to their efficiency and work. The rate of payment varies from unit to unit and from trainee to trainee in the same unit. In private carpet centers the rate varies from ` 50 to ` 200 per month on the basis of experience and in some cases trainee receives wages in kind like old clothes, shoes etc. Also it was observed from the field that those who were having some relationship with the employers receive more as compared to others. However in case of government run training centers we have observed the same rate of ` 100 per month, per trainee.

4.6 Preference for Present Job

The unemployment rate is usually found more in rural areas both for the educated and uneducated population. The well known reasons for it include small agricultural holding and the lack of industries in and around villages. Due to pressure of population, people migrate to cities and many look for some alternative mode of earning. In their search for alternative sources of income, they prefer carpet weaving industry available in the rural areas. Sampled parents of the child labor were asked to give reasons for sending their children to carpet units and these responses are presented in percentages in the figure 1

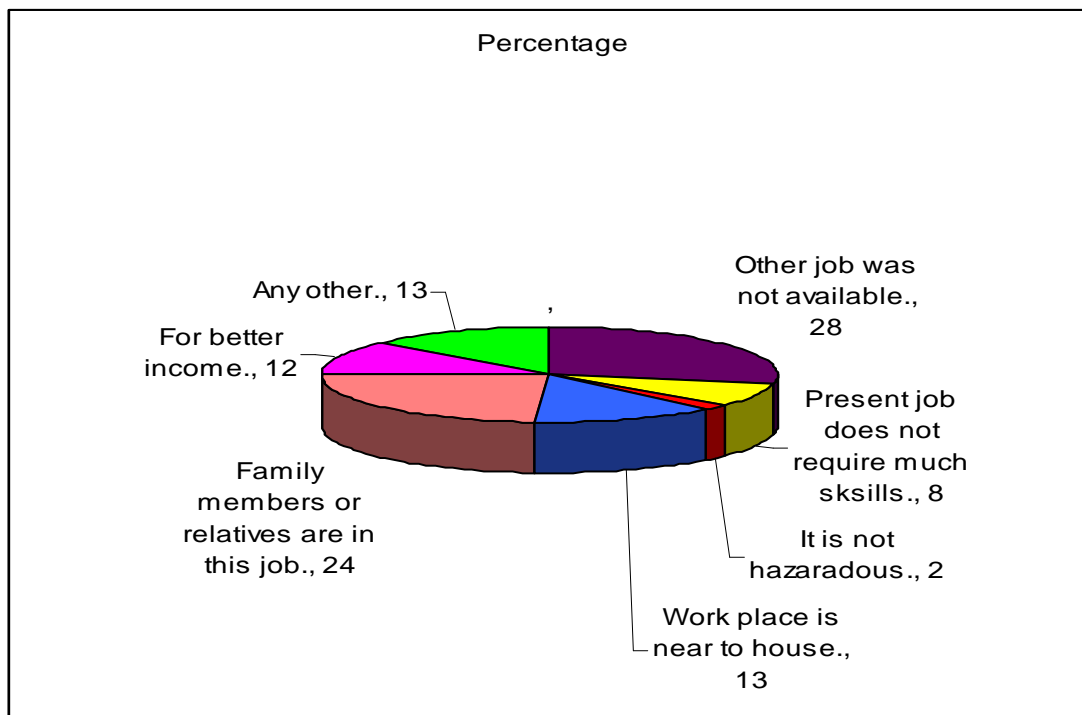


Fig. 1: A Reasons reported by parents of the child labor for preferring the present job

Note: Maximum two responses from each respondent have been taken for analysis

The figure 1 shows that 28 percent of the parents expressed their views that they send their children to the present job because other job was not available to them, 24 percent joined the job because their family members are in the job, 13 percent responded that they send them because these are nearer to their houses and 12 percent said that their children get better income in carpet units etc. In short one can infer from this data that the main reason for joining this occupation is non availability of alternative sources of income.

4.7 Duration of the Job and Working Hours

After knowing the reasons for preferring the present job, we wanted to know since how long these child labors were in the present job. It is clear from the responses of child labors that 32 percent were in the carpet units since last one month to one year, about 53 percent were in work from last one year to two years. A few amongst them were in the present job from three years and some even more than three years. Further with a view to collect factual information on the daily hours of work, we interviewed all the sampled child labors and the collected information reveals that nearly three-fourth (73 percent) of the child workers were working between six to eight hours every day. Some of them informed us that their working hours were flexible, whenever they wanted to earn more money, they used to work for longer time. On the other hand, those children who were working in carpet centers or at employers home were suffering some times in the sense that there working hours were neither fixed nor flexible. Even if they worked for longer hours, they were not paid extra for that. Despite all these factors majority of working children were having interest in carpet weaving due to socio-economic reasons. There were some who think otherwise because of their exploitation and future concern.

4.8 Rest during Work

In the work situation it becomes necessary to make provision for intervals so that the harmful effects of work on health caused by continuous work for long hours may be avoided and workers efficiency may be resorted and maintained. So for, as the rest period of working is concerned, it was found in the survey that self employed children in their family units, in most of cases, had no scheduled periods for rest. These children were at liberty to attend their personal or family needs with due permission from their family members working on carpets. In the

case of employed child workers their period of rest varied from season to season. During the summer season they were given rest for 2 hours (from 12-2 pm) while in rainy season as well as in the winter season, it was for one and a half hour as lunch break. In some of the carpet weaving units, workers began work after taking breakfast but in most of the cases, especially in summer season they started working earlier and were given half an hour for tea break at 10:00 am. Children were usually going to their houses for lunch and a very few brought their meals with them.

4.9 Holiday

Occasional leave enables the child workers to relax his/her mind from the drudgery of his /her work. Rigorous and continuous work causes frequent illness but they have no liberty to leave the work. However employers usually oblige them when they are sick and don't deduct the wages for that day. Almost all the sampled child labors responded that they get regular weekly holiday once a week usually at Friday. Some child labors remain off from work during sickness, marriage ceremony, death and/or some other social ceremony. Some other children remain off from work some times because of shortage of raw material, rain or due to some other problems. While talking about the activities they are involved in during off- days the respondents replied that, they do domestic or agriculture work and meet friends as well as play with other children of the locality.

4.10 Payment of Wages

The rate of payment is dependent upon various factors like nature of job, skilled or un-skilled, semi-skilled work, duration of working hours and hazardous environment. It further varies in case of casual, contract and regular employments and also in the case of children or adult. Though the legal provisions do not support all these variables for determining the rate of wages. Another important factor in determining the wages is the will of employers. This becomes clear when the wage structures of different organizations in the organized as well as unorganized sectors are compared.

In case of carpet weaving units, the structure of payment of stipends to trainees has already been discussed. Similar is the structure of wages in these units. There is no regular employment or monthly basis as it is found in the organized sector. They are employed and paid till the employer has work. In case they do not have work the workers are laid off and payment is done according to the output of each worker. Sometimes children are employed on monthly basis also but in that case they have to do domestic work of their employer.

4.11 Monthly Earnings

The approximate monthly income of the sampled child workers are shown in figure 2

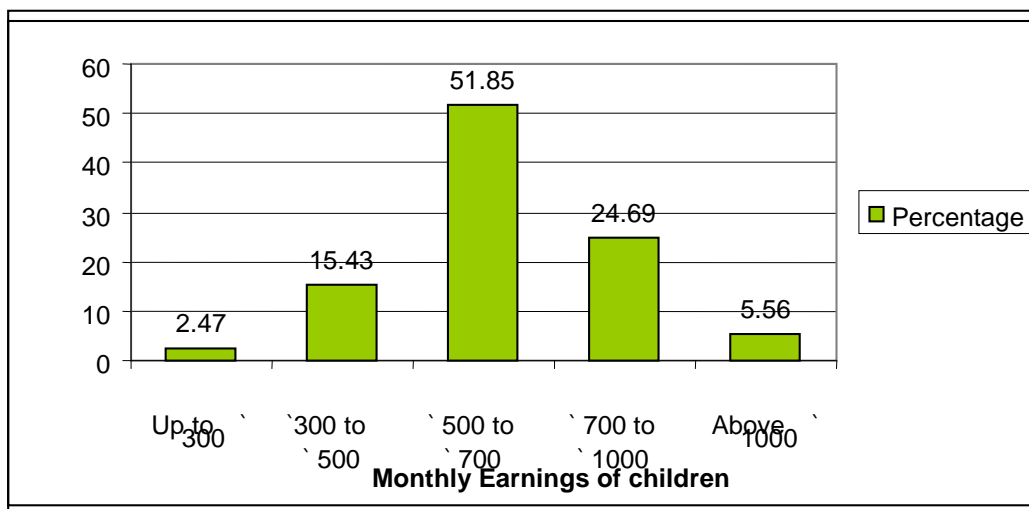


Fig. 2: Approximate monthly earnings of children (%)

The figure 2 shows that more than half (51.43) of the child laborers were earning between ` 500 to ` 700 per month, 17.90 percent were below ` 300, 24.69 percent were earning between ` 700 to ` 1000 and only 5.56 percent were earning above ` 1000 per month. Thus the monthly earnings of most of the child workers were very low and they earn more in the latter age when they became fully skilled in carpet weaving. Therefore as mentioned earlier the parents are forced to send their children to this work because of many socio-economic problems and also in the hope that their children will earn more when they will become the master of their art.

After knowing the monthly earnings of child laborers, an attempt has been made to know about their views regarding sufficiency of wages/earnings for fulfilling their need. Nearly 3/4th (74.30 percent) child workers responded that their earnings were sufficient enough to meet their personal needs and other were dissatisfied as their earnings were not enough to fulfill their personal needs. Further we asked them who receive their wages, more than half (54.47 percent) responded that they receive themselves, 32.09 percent child laborers wages were received by their parents and 15.43 percent by their siblings.

4.12 Grievance and Demands

The employers were asked to describe the common grievances and demands performed by the working children and their parents. Only first two responses from each were used for analysis purpose which are presented in table 2

Table 2: Grievances and demands by children and parents to employers

S. No.	Nature of demand and grievances	Percentage of responses
1	Low wages.	35.00
2	Refusal to give money in advance.	26.00
3	Irregular payment.	07.00
4	Long hours of work.	05.00
5	Poor learning of skills.	04.00
6	Threat of employers, adult workers.	04.00
7	Any other.	19.00
	Total	100.00

Source: Field Survey

The table 2 shows that more than 1/3rd (35 percent) respondents grievances were received by employers for payment of low wages to child workers, 26 percent were received for refusal to pay advance money, 7 percent for irregular payment of wages, 5 percent for long hours of work, 4 percent for poor learning of carpet skills by the child workers and another 4 percent regarding un healthy behavior by employers or co- workers, 19 percent for other reasons such as pocket money, leave with pay and welfare facilities. These facts confirm the impression that children are subjected to exploitation more because of the lack of any organized attempt through trade unions to solve their problems. This is quite common with the unorganized sector where there is no regular agency to approach the employers for redressed to their grievances.

4.13 Problematic Behavior of the Children at Work

The child is known to be immature and ignorant as compared to adults. When the sampled employers (50) were asked to describe the difficulties faced by them from the working children, they gave different reasons but only the first two responses were taken into account for data analysis which are presented in table 3

Table 3: Difficulties of the child workers at work (N=50)

S. No	Name of difficulties	Number	Percentage
1	They are irregular	38	38.00
2	They quarrel with each other.	33	33.00

3	They Smoke	12	12.00
4	They lack social awareness	11	11.00
5	Any other	6	6.00
	Total	100	100.00

Note: Maximum two responses from each have been taken for analysis

Source: Field survey

The above table shows that 38 percent employers said that they were irregular, 33 percent found that children quarreled with each other, 12 percent said that children smoked while at work, 11 percent told that they lack social awareness and did not behave properly and the rest 6 percent told some other difficulties like dishonesty, low production etc . To expect children not to quarrel and behave decently is somewhat un-natural because they are still in the process of getting socialized. They cannot be equated with adults. Smoking was perhaps the result of the imitation of the behavior of adult workers. The adult workers might also have induced them to these bad habits (like smoking) for their own pleasure.

4.14 Job Dissatisfaction

Job dissatisfaction of workers in any organization is based on several factors such as wages, hours of work, employers' behavior, regularity of payment and other facilities including welfare measures. Keeping these points in view, an attempt has been made to know the satisfaction level of the child workers. The child workers who were dissatisfied with their job were asked to express the reasons of their dissatisfaction. Information given by the child workers has been classified and presented in table 4

Table 4: Reasons of job dissatisfaction as reported by child workers

S. No.	Reasons	Number	Percentage
1	Low wages	37	44.04
2	Temporary job	16	19.04
3	Unhealthy work environment	14	16.67
4	Rude behaviour of employers	9	10.71
5	Long hours of work	6	7.14
6	No response	2	2.39
	Total	84	100.00

Note: 78 child workers showed job satisfaction, therefore, they have been excluded from this analysis.

Source: Field Survey

The table 4 shows that 37 (44.04 percent) respondents were dissatisfied because of the payment of low wages, 16(19.04 percent) were unhappy because of their temporary nature of jobs, 14(16.46 percent) because of unhealthy work environment, 9 (10.71 percent) because of rude behavior of their employers, 6 (7.14 percent) because of long hours of work and the rest 2 (2.23 percent) did not give any reason for their dissatisfaction. This shows that a little more than half of the child workers were dissatisfied with their jobs. This is quite natural as conditions were by no means satisfactory.

4.15 Impact of Work on the behavior of Child

The nature and quantum of work have their effects on physical as well as mental growth of the workers, especially the young ones. The parents (82) were asked whether they found any change in the behavior and habits of the child after he joined carpet weaving units. Only two responses from each were taken for analysis which is presented in table 5

Table 5: Changes in children after employment

S. No	Forms of change	Number	Percentage
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1	Smoking habit	38	23.17
2	Spends more money for pocket expenses	10	6.09
3	Have chosen bad company	14	8.54
4	Not aware about social behavior	6	3.65
5	Become more responsible	28	17.07
6	Don't obey parents	22	13.41
7	Work hard	18	10.97
8	Know skills better	10	6.09
9	No response	18	10.97
	Total	164	100.00

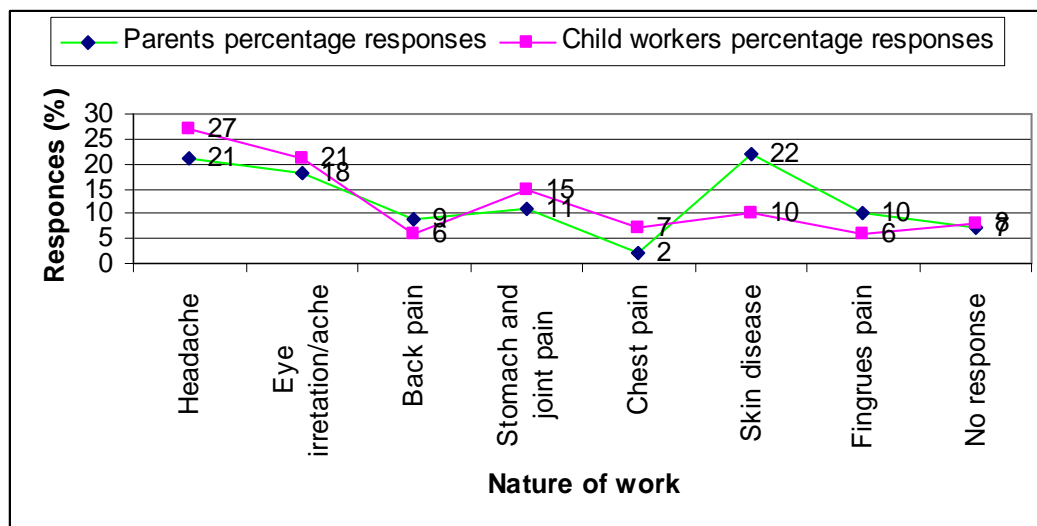
Note: More than two responses from each have been taken for analysis.

Source: Field survey

The table 5 shows that the respondents gave both negative as well as positive responses. Out of all the sampled respondents 23.17 percent reported that the child had developed smoking habits, 8.54 percent said that they had joined bad company, 3.41 percent reported that their children did not obey them, 6.09 percent said that they spend more for personal expenses, 3.65 percent complained for a lack of proper behavior. In contrast, 17.07 percent found that the child had become more responsible, 10.97 percent observed that they had become hard working, 6.09 percent said that they had developed working skills in them and 10.97 percent did not respond.

4.16 Impact of Work on the Health of Child

As for as the impact of labor on health of child is concerned, information from parents as well as children was collected which is presented in figure 3



Note: Maximum two responses have been taken for analysis

Source: Field survey

Fig. 3: Effect of work on Child Workers

The analysis of the figure 3 shows that against 21 percent cases of headache reported by parents, 27 percent cases of head -ache were found in children. Similarly, eye-aching, back pain, stomach and joint pain and pain in fingers

were respectively reported to be 18 percent, 9 percent, 11 percent, and 10 percent as against 21 percent, 6 percent, 15 percent and 6 percent were found in children. According to the children the most common diseases were head-ache, vision problems, stomach, joint pain and chest pain. Parents reported less of chest pains and more of finger pains of their children. The discrepancy between the information of two can be explained on the basis of factors like communication gap, lack of concern on the part of both parents and children.

Carpet weaving requires using fingers intensively for working with wool and cotton threads concentrating heavily on the fine knots used for weaving by sitting down for hours. In such situation aching of eyes, fingers, joint pain, stomach and chest pains caused by inhaling of cotton and wool dust can be said to be natural.

5. Conclusion

From various tables and figures analyzed above one can conclude that the conditions of child workers who had been working in their own family carpet weaving units were slightly better in comparison to the employed ones. By and large, employers preferred children from lower castes at cheaper rates. Children usually work 6 to 8 hours per day. Half of the child labors were earning ` 500 to ` 700 per month and the rest were earning below ` 500 per month. It indicates that parents are forced to send their children to this work because of many socio-economic problems and also in the hope that their children will earn more when they will become the master of their art.

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