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Attributes of Working Children in the Philippines

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Abstract

It is the right of every child to have a healthy environment, formal education, and a loving family. However, poverty forces a child to work even in dangerous streets. In the Philippines, the Child Protection Law defined children as persons below eighteen (18) years of age or those over but are unable to fully take care of themselves or protect themselves from abuse, neglect, cruelty, exploitation, or discrimination because of a physical or mental disability or condition. Despite the existing legislations in the country and with the United Nations declarations promoting the protection of children from exploitation, the problem in the country continues to exist. The paper aims to determine the extent of child labor in the country and describe the conditions of their work. The analysis of this paper made use of statistical data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA). Descriptive methods of analysis were utilized in analyzing the data. The results of the study showed that the continued pauperization in the countryside, especially in the urban centers brought about by population growth and capitalism, had increased the number of children joining the labor force. Although progress has been made in promoting and protecting the rights of these children in national legislation and policy, many remain unreached, especially children among the poorest families, who contribute significantly to family income. This limited access of children to basic services further put them into the life of drudgery that would impair their development, hence, their future in general.

Keywords: Child Labor, Poverty, Philippines

1. Introduction

Child labor is a social problem associated with the rise of industrial production and capitalism. It appeared in earlier ages in agricultural societies, but it became especially conspicuous and began to be opposed during the Industrial Revolution in the 18th century. Child labor continued to exist in the 19th century and became the biggest scandal when it spread to other countries as they industrialized (Cody, n.d.). The issue intensified when children, many younger than ten years old, were employed in factories and mines. They are forced to work long under dangerous conditions for little pay. Social reformers began to condemn child labor because of its detrimental effect on the health and welfare of children. Notably, among those helping to incite public opinion against it was Karl Max.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) defined child labor as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential, and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development. This work refers to mentally, physically, socially, or morally dangerous and harmful to children, and interferes with their schooling

by depriving them of the opportunity to attend school, obliging them to leave school prematurely or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work. In its most extreme forms, ILO (n.d.) defined child labor involves children being enslaved separated from their families, exposed to serious hazards and illnesses and/or left to fend for themselves on the streets of large cities – often at a very early age.

Today, with the occurrence of globalization, the exploitations seem to persist and perpetuate it as business capitalizes on these children in search for cheap labor. Children, in their tender stage of development, are easy to control, which makes it easy to extract from them cheaply. As a result, children become hapless victims of greed by businesses. More importantly, because of the pauperization of most families, especially in the countryside, tend to send their children to work and contribute to family income in order to survive. These conditions usually become more difficult for these children since they suffer psychological and physical abuses, which endanger their normal development.

Although child labor provides children with the opportunity to go to school, most of them end up being dropouts and repeaters because they could not focus on their studies. Some of them even suffer from malnutrition. According to IPEC-ILO Philippines, child workers are found in different sectors of the economy such as agriculture, garments industry, wood-based industry, food industry, metal and mining, handicraft industry, street-vending trade, and illegal trade such as prostitution.

Children engaged in farming are exposed to heavy loads, chemicals, and natural elements, while those in fishing suffer from ruptured eardrums, shark attacks, congested and unsanitary conditions and poor food. Furthermore, Factory child laborers are prone to accidents, back strain, hand cramps, eye strain, headaches, and allergies. They are also exploited by employers in terms of long hours of work, insufficient rest periods and extremely low wages. On the other hand, children in the informal sector suffer from sickness, vehicular accidents and molestation and harassment by peers, adult syndicates, and law enforcers (IPEC-ILO, Philippines).

Child labor also causes psycho-social effects such as distortion of values which leads to loss of dignity and self-confidence and exposes them to anti-social behavior. Due to long hours of work, their emotional and personal development is retarded, and their creative thinking limited. In terms of education, child workers have low grades, are always absent and late in their classes and usually drop out from school.

Child labor is a result of having unemployed parents which pushed their children to work to meet their basic needs. Cost of education in the country is high such that parents would prefer to send their children to work rather than to school. Finally, more employers are becoming interested in hiring child workers because children can be hired at lower wages.

Despite the different laws, policies and programs enacted by the Philippine government, the issue of child labor remains. Thus, this study was conducted to: (a) determine the extent of child labor in the country; (b) describe the characteristics of child labor in country; and (c) provide recommendations that will enhance the existing government policies and programs on child labor.

1.1 Definition of Child Labor

The Labor Code of the Philippines defines child labor as employment of children under any of the following circumstances: For children below 15 years old, where work is hazardous or deleterious in nature, hence exposing the worker to risk which constitute and imminent danger to his or her safety and health; For children below 15 years of age, where employment violates any of the two (2) exceptions to the general prohibition of RA 7610 as amended by RA 7658, and where such employment endangers the child's life, safety, health and morals, or impairs normal development. These exceptions are: (1) where a child works directly under the sole responsibility of his parents or legal guardian and where only members of the employer's family are employed; or (2) where a child's employment or participation in public entertainment or information through cinema, theater, radio or television is essential.

"Child labor" refers to any work or economic activity performed by a child that subjects him/her to any form of exploitation or is harmful to his/her health and safety or physical, mental or psychosocial development. According to the ILO, the term "child labor" is work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development.

On the other hand, "hazardous work" is work that debases, degrades, or demeans the intrinsic worth and dignity of a child as a human being; exposes the child to physical, emotional or sexual abuse, or is found to be highly stressful psychologically or may prejudice morals; is performed underground, underwater or at dangerous heights; and involves the use of dangerous machinery, equipment, and tools such as power-driven or explosive power-actuated tools; exposes the child to physical danger such as, but not limited to the dangerous feats of balancing, physical strength or contortion, or which requires the manual transport of heavy loads.

1.2 Issue

In 2000, the global child labor figure was at 246 million (International Labor Office, 2013). Despite a downward trend in worldwide child labor statistics, the number of child laborers has climbed substantially to 160 million for the first time in 20 years, an increase of 8.4 million in the last four years. In the case of the Philippines, the country was able to significantly reduce its number of child laborers from 5.492 million in 2011 to 872 thousand in 2020 (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2012; Philippine Statistics Authority, 2021). Although the number of child laborers have dramatically decreased, the International Labor Organization (ILO) and UNICEF have warned that the COVID-19 pandemic might force an estimate of nine million more children into child labor by the end of 2022 globally. According to a report by the Department of Labor and Employment (2020), children have become a "collateral damage from the pandemic," as their families force them to work in arduous and dangerous conditions. Based on the 2011 Survey on Children conducted by the Philippine National Statistics Office in collaboration with International Labor Organization (2011), there were 2.049 million child laborers toiling in the Philippines working in hazardous conditions. Hazardous child labor refers to employment in industries and occupations designated as hazardous under the country's occupational safety and health standards. Child laborers exposed to hazardous conditions could include those involved in the worst forms of child labor—the sex trade, drug trafficking, other illicit activities and armed conflict.

Millions of children in the Philippines are forced to work at young ages. Some children have jobs that place them in immediate physical danger. These risks include exposure to potentially harmful chemicals or sharp tools, and other dangers that may be less obvious but no less risky. Children are often forced to work long hours with few breaks, which takes a toll on their physical development. Others are abused by their employers, both physically and psychologically. As with many threats to children's development and well-being, poverty is a root cause of child labor. Families struggle to make ends meet and face hard decisions when it comes to sending their children to work. Without immediate action, the problem will continue to grow (Uy, 2012).

Del Rosario and Bonga (2000) concluded that poverty due to unemployment and underemployment had been the most major push factor in the occurrence of child labor. It was important to keep the macro perspective in view and to have a structural approach in tackling child labor. But those micro factors were crucial in the conceptualization and implementation of more feasible and relevant programs for child workers. Micro factors should include the child's personal and work profile; his/her household's profile; the employer's profile; the community situation; migration; age, gender, culture, values, and aspirations, etc.

Amat (2010) stated that child labor is closely related to youth labor market outcomes. Early experiences in the labor market can significantly influence lifetime patterns of employment, pay and unemployment. With low levels of human capital, former child laborers are at a particular disadvantage in terms of finding and maintaining a place in the adult labor force. He cited in his study the report of the National Economic Development Authority (NEDA) that states that in the Philippines, children leave schools to work in order to cushion the family from social shocks and ensure that the households survive during difficult times. The determinants of child labor at the household level are large family sizes and poverty, productive potential of members in domestic and market work, and substitution possibilities between child and parents' work.

2. Results and Discussion

2.1 Attributes of Working Children

In 2020, there were 31.17 million children in the country aged 5-17 years old. Out of 31.17 million children, approximately 872.3 thousand (2.8 percent) of these children are economically active.

Table 1: Percent Distribution of Working Children by Region in 2020

Region	Percent Distribution of Working Children
NCR	0.4
CAR	1.9
Ilocos Region	2.4
Cagayan Valley	2
Central Luzon	2.2
CALABARZON	1.9
MIMAROPA	4.7
Bicol Region	4.8
Western Visayas	2.1
Central Visayas	2.5
Eastern Visayas	3.4
Zamboanga Peninsula	2.9
Northern Mindanao	7.2
Davao Region	1.2
SOCCKSARGEN	4.4
CARAGA	5.8
BARMM	4.3
TOTAL	100.0

Note. The data are from “Working children and child labor situation” by Philippine Statistics Authority, 2021, (<https://psa.gov.ph/content/working-children-and-child-labor-situation>)

The highest percentage of working children came from Northern Mindanao (7.2% or 108 100), followed by Bicol Region (4.8% or 96 700) and CALABARZON (1.9% or 78 300).

2.1.1 Age Group

Majority of the working children (68.9% or 601 000) were aged 15 to 17 years old (Table 2). About 31.1 percent or 271 300 were aged 5 to 14 years old.

Table 2: Number of Working Children by Age Group in 2020

Age Group	Number (In thousands)	Percent to Total
5 - 14	271.3	31.1
15 - 17	601	68.9

TOTAL 872.3 100.0

Note. The data are from “Working children and child labor situation” by Philippine Statistics Authority, 2021, (<https://psa.gov.ph/content/working-children-and-child-labor-situation>)

2.1.2 Sex

Table 3 indicates that there were more male working children aged 5 to 17 years old (581.5 thousand or 66.7%) than female working children (290.8 thousand or 33.3%).

Table 3: Number of Working Children by Sex in 2020

Sex	Number (In thousands)	Percent to Total
Male	581.5	66.7
Female	290.8	33.3
TOTAL	872.3	100.0

Note. The data are from “Working children and child labor situation” by Philippine Statistics Authority, 2021, (<https://psa.gov.ph/content/working-children-and-child-labor-situation>)

2.1.3 Hours Worked

In 2020, the majority of working children, or almost half (53%), worked for 20 hours or less per week. Following that, 26.7 percent of all working children worked between 21 and 40 hours. Finally, 16.6 percent of respondents said they worked full-time for 41 to 60 hours each week.

Table 4: Hours Worked by Children in 2020

Hours Worked	Number (In thousands)	Percent to Total
With job, not at work	6.1	0.7
20 hours or less	462.1	53.0
21 to 40 hours	232.7	26.7
41 to 60 hours	144.6	16.6
More than 60 hours	26.8	3.1
TOTAL	872.3	100.0

Note. The data are from “Working children and child labor situation” by Philippine Statistics Authority, 2021, (<https://psa.gov.ph/content/working-children-and-child-labor-situation>)

2.1.4 Type of Work

Out of 872.3 thousand working children, 68.4 percent (596.9 thousand) were considered as in child labor, while 31.6 percent (275.4 thousand) were considered not in child labor (Table 5).

Table 5: Classification of Working Children in 2020

Classification of Working Children	Working Number (In thousands)	Percentage Distribution of Working Children
Child Labor	596.9	68.4
Not in Child Labor	275.4	31.6
TOTAL	872.3	100.0

Note. The data are from “Working children and child labor situation” by Philippine Statistics Authority, 2021, (<https://psa.gov.ph/content/working-children-and-child-labor-situation>)

2.2 Attributes of Children in Child Labor

2.2.1 Region

Northern Mindanao, with 13.1 percent of the total population, has the highest proportion of working children, according to Table 6. Northern Mindanao was home to 13 out of every 100 child laborers in the country in 2020, according to this figure. Bicol, with roughly 9 children, was the region with the second greatest number of child laborers (9.2 percent). The Cordillera Administrative Area (CAR), on the other hand, has the lowest number of child laborers at 1.9 percent, followed by the Davao region.

Table 6: Percentage Distribution of Child Laborer by Region in 2020

Region	Percentage Distribution of Child Laborers
NCR	1.9
CAR	1.6
Ilocos Region	4.1
Cagayan Valley	2.8
Central Luzon	5.4
CALABARZON	7.6
MIMAROPA	5.2
Bicol Region	9.2
Western Visayas	6.2
Central Visayas	8.2
Eastern Visayas	6.1
Zamboanga Peninsula	4.7
Northern Mindanao	13.1
Davao Region	2.2
SOCCSKSARGEN	6.9
CARAGA	5.8
BARMM	9.1
TOTAL	100

Note. The data are from “Working children and child labor situation” by Philippine Statistics Authority, 2021, (<https://psa.gov.ph/content/working-children-and-child-labor-situation>)

2.2.2 Sex and Age Group

Table 5 shows that there are about 596.9 thousand or 68.4 percent of the 872.3 thousand working children considered as child labor. Of those exposed children, 72.8 percent were male working children, 73.3 percent belonged to the age group 15 to 17 years old (Table 7).

Table 7: Characteristics of Working Children in Child labor by Sex and Age Group

Characteristics	Number (In thousands)	Percent
Sex		
Male	434.8	72.8
Female	162.1	27.2
TOTAL	596.9	100.0
Age Group		
5 - 14	159.3	26.7
15-17	437.7	73.3
TOTAL	596.9	100.0

Note. The data are from “Working children and child labor situation” by Philippine Statistics Authority, 2021, (<https://psa.gov.ph/content/working-children-and-child-labor-situation>)

2.2.3 Broad Industry Group

63.6 percent of the children engaged in child labor were working in the agriculture sector, 28.6 percent were in the services sector, and 7.9 percent worked in the industry sector (Table 8).

Table 8: Number of Children Engaged in Child Labor by Broad Industry Group

Broad Industry Group	Number (In thousands)	Percent
Agriculture	379.4	63.6
Industry	47.1	7.9
Services	170.5	28.6
TOTAL	596.9	100.0

Note. The data are from “Working children and child labor situation” by Philippine Statistics Authority, 2021, (<https://psa.gov.ph/content/working-children-and-child-labor-situation>)

2.2.4 Reason for Working

Main reasons for children to work in hazardous labor were to help in their own household-operated farm or business (1.264 million or 42.2%) and to supplement family income (0.898 million or 30.0%) as shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Number of Children in Hazardous Labor by Reason for Working

Children in Hazardous Labor by Reason for Working	Number (In thousands)	Percent
To gain experience or acquire training	269	9.0

To appreciate value of work	138	4.6
To supplement family income or important family well-being	898	30.0
To help pay family debts	30	1.0
To pay for own schooling	192	6.4
To help in own household-operated farm or business	1,264	42.2
To earn money to start own business	30	1.0
Others	173	5.8
TOTAL	2,993	100.0

Note. The data are from “2011 Survey on Children 5 to 17 years old” by National Statistics Office and International Labor Organization, 2011, (<https://psa.gov.ph/sites/default/files/2011%20Survey%20on%20Children%205%20to%2017%20Years%20Old%20%28Final%20Report%29.pdf>.)

2.3 Reasons Associated with Child Labor

Child labor is not only an economic exploitation damaging children. It also affects the physical and mental development of the child as well as its social interaction. In the Philippines, the rising number of child workers is due to the following reasons:

2.3.1 Poverty

Poverty is one of the greatest reasons why children work. Children work to ensure the survival of their family and themselves. Though children are not well paid, they still serve a major contribution to family income. Hence, the possible reason for parents to have children is because they can be profitable.

2.3.2 Education

School represents the most important means of drawing children away from the labor market; they provide children with guidance and the opportunity to understand their role in society. Without education, children are unable to break out of child labor. Furthermore, in the study conducted by ILO (1992), low enrollment is correlated with increased rates of child employment. Oftentimes, children seek employment simply because they have no access to school (distance, no school at all) and sometimes classrooms are overcrowded, inadequate books and lack of educators), especially in the rural areas.

2.3.3 Role of Children

Parents assign different roles to their children. This is called child specialization, and may increase the number of working children (Chernichovsky, 1985). This phenomenon involves siblings going to school while others work. It usually depends on the birth order where the oldest is the one who attends school. Child labor is a form of slave labor. In some poor families, parents have no choice but to send their children to work because they contribute a significant amount to the family income. Children in slums were sent out by parents as young 6 to 7 to earn their keep and contribute to the household income, they worked as scavengers, gathering salable trash-cinders, rope, and metal bottles.

2.3.4 Rural-Urban Migration

Rapid rural-to-urban migration is one of the causes in the increased rate of child labor in urban areas. Families leave the agricultural working conditions in order to search for economic opportunities in the cities.

3. Legislative and Policy Framework to Promote and Protect Children's Rights

In the country, the government has enacted complementary legal instruments to protect the rights of children. Among these are the Child and Youth Welfare Code (P.D. 603) of 1974, Labor Code, RA 7610 or the Protection of Children Against Child Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act, and RA 7658 or the Prohibition of the Employment of Children Below 15 Years Act, which amended the controversial provision of RA 7610 that legitimized employment of children below 15 years old. All provisions of this legal instrument are in consonant with the provision of ILO Conventions 138, which was ratified by the Philippine government in October 1997.

The Child and Youth Welfare Code, also known as the Magna Carta for children's rights defines rights and responsibilities of children, their parents, the family as a whole, the community, association, school, the Church and the State in ensuring the development of children. It outlines the administrative measures and programs for the care and treatment of special children such as dependent, abandoned, neglected and working children, mentally retarded, physically handicapped, emotionally disturbed and mentally ill children and youth offenders.

The Child and Youth Welfare Code created the Council for the Welfare of Children which was tasked to monitor the implementation of laws on child welfare and protection and to formulate an integrated national policy on child and youth welfare. It is supposed to design programs and services for children and to recommend their implementation to the President and other concerned agencies.

The Labor Code defines the minimum employable at age 15 years, except when the child works under the responsibility of his or her parents or guardian and the work does not interfere with his or her schooling. In addition, the Labor Code specifies the terms of employment, conditions, allowable hours of work the child may be engaged. The Code prohibits discrimination against children in terms of employment conditions.

The Barangay-Level Total Development and Protection of Children Act, also known as the Day Care Law, provides for the establishment of a day care center in every barangay and the setting up of a program for the total development of children 0 to 6 years old.

The Special Protection Act (R.A. 7610) provides protection for children in especially difficult circumstances, including those in situation of armed conflict, and those belonging to indigenous cultural minorities; it defines and penalizes child abuse, exploitative employment of children, prostitution and trafficking.

The national Manpower and Youth Council (NMYC), an attached agency of the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), operates 14 regional and 12 provincial manpower training centers which provide skills orientation, training and development, particularly to out-of-school youths. The Government has provided free secondary education in public schools. This must coincide with the provision of good nutrition to support the nutritional needs of children to sustain schooling.

On the other hand, in the international arena, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has declared that the child has the right to be protected from work that threatens his/her health, education and development. Each state shall have the minimum working ages along with regulating the conditions that children must work under.

The problem with this UNICEF's declaration is that often times the governments of countries who have problems with child labor exploitation are not able to give adequate funding for watching over the places where children work. Even when they do, the main exploiters of child labor are often large companies that not only give a lot of money to the country's economy, but they are also foreign owned. No less developed country wants to scare off any further industrialization, no matter how negative of effects it may have on its citizens, just because of a problem with foreign companies exploiting their children.

The International Labor Organization Convention 138 on Minimum Age for Employment (1973) declares that the minimum age for work shall not be less than the age for compulsory schooling and, in any case, shall not be less

than 15 years. Convention 138 allows countries whose economy and education facilities are insufficiently developed to initially specify a minimum age of 14 years and 12 years for light work.

The ILO forgot to mention at this convention what exactly constitutes light work. Not only did they forget to create an international definition of light labor, they did not specify which countries had insufficient developed economic and educational facilities. This would be such a problem if it were not for companies that come into countries specifically to exploit cheap labor markets. Nor would it be such a problem if the governments of these countries (and of the companies that exploit child labor) would take a stand and demand that the rights of people and especially children not be exploited.

In December 19, 2003, Republic Act No. 9231 otherwise known as “Special Protection of Children against Child Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act” was enacted. It is an act providing for the elimination of the worst forms of child labor and affording stronger protection for the working child, amending Republic Act No. 7610. The Act shall provide special protection to children from all forms of abuse, neglect, cruelty, exploitation and discrimination, and other conditions prejudicial to their development including child labor and its worst forms; provide sanctions for their commission and carry out a program for prevention and deterrence of and crisis intervention in situations of child abuse, exploitation and discrimination. The State shall intervene on behalf of the child when the parent, guardian, teacher or person having care or custody of the child fails or is unable to protect the child against abuse, exploitation and discrimination or when such acts against the child are committed by the said parent, guardian, teacher or person taking care or having custody.

In order to expand on existing laws such as the Anti-Child Pornography Act of 2009 (RA 9775), Special Protection of Children against Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Law (RA 7610), and the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act (RA 9208), the Special Protections Against Online Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Children (OSAEC) Law was passed. The bill aims to update existing laws to better safeguard children in the internet sphere from acts of sexual violence, abuse, and exploitation. The OSAEC provides law enforcers with new tools to investigate and prosecute Filipino and foreign abusers, as well as imposes new legal obligations for internet intermediaries to encourage them to implement systems that would help prevent, detect, block, and report child exploitation.

In January 11, 2013, the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) has approved the guidelines for the certification program for “child labor-free establishments.” The guidelines shall govern the procedure on the grant of Child-Labor Free Establishment/Zone Seal which aims to promote compliant and socially responsible business practices. “Child Labor Free Establishment (CLFE) certificate serves as a badge of honor that gives assurance to brand owners and consumers that the products or services are not tainted with child labor. Based on the guidelines, a certificate or marker of recognition will be given to businesses that get the seal as a child labor-free establishment/zone. They will also be given endorsement for participation of their employees in the DOLE’s livelihood programs and guaranteed booths in job fairs and exhibits. The child labor-free establishments will also be assured of slots for training courses conducted by the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA).

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Child labor is considered as a major economic and societal problem. The rising number of child workers is due to poverty, parental influence to work, inaccessibility of schooling, cheap labor policies, availability of jobs for children and inadequate economic opportunities.

The continued pauperization in the countryside especially in the urban centers brought about by population growth and capitalism had increased the number of children joining the labor force during the past years. Although much progress has been made in promoting and protecting the rights of these children in the area of national legislation and policy, many remain unreached, especially children among the poorest families, who contribute significantly to family income, and children who live on their own. This limited access of children to basic services further put them into the life of drudgery that would impair their development, hence, their future in general.

These children must be given priority by providing them with their basic needs such as education and a good environment for them to live a “normal life”. If we fail to educate the young generation, we fail to put an end to child labor. Poverty is often the result of an uneducated population, which leads to overpopulation and further leads to poverty. Poverty induced pressure on children to escape this plight.

Despite the enactment of laws, policies and programs on child labor, the number of child workers is still increasing. Considering the limited resources of the government, it cannot be solved overnight. Thus, in collaboration of different government agencies, the following measures are recommended to enhance the prevention of child labor:

- a) Massive educational campaign to improve the understanding on child labor problem.
- b) Provide quality education and opportunities for children in collaboration with government entities to encourage them to finish their education and realize its long-term benefits.
- c) Increase accessibility to basic education by building more schools and providing financial assistance
- d) Boost capacity of local government units to implement and coordinate programs against child labor.
- e) Intensify the role of barangay in eliminating child labor in their respective municipalities.

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