



Child Labor in Hazardous Environments: A Crime Against Education

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Abstract

Child labour in deplorable conditions has remained one of the most burning international human rights and education issues. Although many international conventions and domestic laws forbid the use of children in hazardous jobs, millions of children across the globe continue to work in hazardous jobs, especially in the mining industries, agricultural sectors, construction and production. Such places subject children to unhealthy chemicals, inappropriate machinery, and harsh working conditions which pose a direct health risk, safety, and above all, their right to an education. In this paper, the author is going to discuss the continuation of child labor in dangerous conditions, its historical context, the socio-economic processes that perpetuate it, and how it is destroying the education sector. The paper, based on secondary data in international reports, academic literature, and international case studies, will argue the point that child labor is not merely an economic issue, but a crime against education because it traps people in poverty, illiteracy and inequality. The discussion shows how it is important that laws, social protection programs and community based interventions that focus on education are enforced with more stringency. The research finds that child labor can only be eradicated through a holistic approach in which governments, industries and civil society collaborate to see to it that all children are safeguarded, rehabilitated and access to quality education.

Keywords: Child Labor, Hazardous work, Right to education, Human rights, exploitation.

1. Introduction

Child labor is not a new issue all over the world but its continuity in the risky conditions is all too frightening in the contemporary world. According to what is recorded by the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2021), approximately 160 million children all over the globe are employed in one form of labor or another and approximately half of them are employed in hazardous labor under life-threatening conditions that can be very unhealthy and uneducational. As an example, mining places where children work with explosives or breathe dust, factories where they use heavy load, and fields where they contact with pesticides and uncontrolled weather can be considered as hazardous environments. UNICEF (2021) also stresses that children in these settings tend to miss years of schooling, which makes their future highly limited.

Child Labor in Hazardous Environments



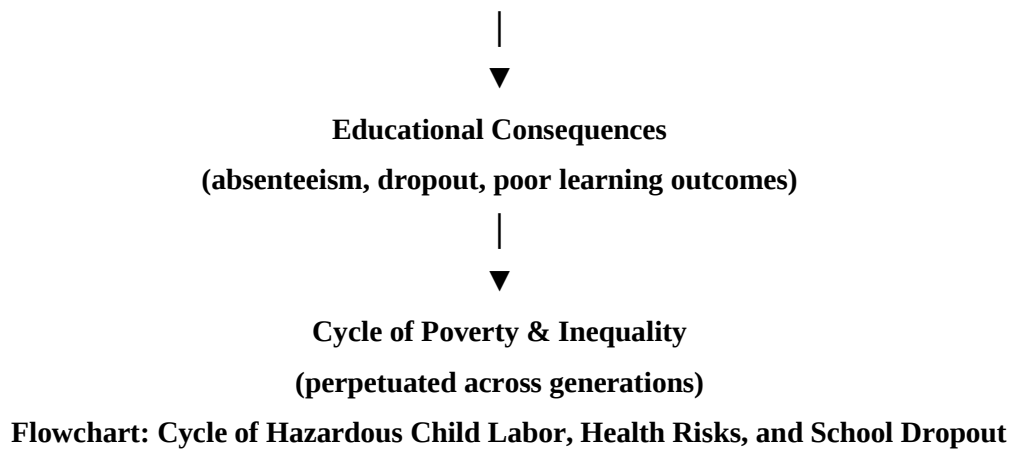
Exposure to Hazards

(dust, chemicals, heavy loads, pesticides)



Health & Safety Risks

(illness, injury, fatigue, trauma)



There are educational consequences to the hazardous child labor. The right to education has been clearly identified in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) article 28, but this right is still not enjoyed by millions of children due to the fact that they are subjected to forced labor. Education is not just concerned with literacy, it is also concerned with empowering, social inclusion, and poverty cycles. According to scholars like Basu and Tzannatos (2003), the families living in poverty conditions elaborate that child labor is seen as survival strategy especially when families have to satisfy their immediate financial requirements at the expense of long term education complements. This leads to a cycle of systemic labor as children of workers end up becoming laborers themselves and never getting out of poverty. The continued use of child labor in dangerous environments, therefore, has to be considered as a human rights abomination as well as an educational injustice. Although governments and international organizations have tried to resolve the problem by policies and conventions, the same actions are not at all effective when they are enforced loosely and socio-economic pressures are very high. In this way, this paper will analyze child labor in dangerous working conditions not as an economic problem but as a crime in itself against education, and urgently against the deprivation of children of their right to schooling and development (Edmonds and Pavcnik, 2005).

2. Background of the Study

Child labor history can be traced to the industrial revolution when factories and coal mines used children to enrich the industrial revolution. With time, the knowledge on its danger brought about changes in most developed countries, yet dangerous child labor continues to exist in portions of the world today. According to UNICEF (2021), in the present state of Sub-Saharan Africa, child labor is the highest, and one out of five children have to work in dangerous conditions. The same problem applies to South Asia and Latin America where children work in the informal industries, construction or farming sectors where they are exposed to great dangers.

In India, we see children in brick kilns, carpet weaving centers and in small garment-making factories. Pakistan Bonded child labor is common in the brick kiln and workshops in Pakistan. In West Africa, thousands of children are employed in cocoa farms where their jobs expose them to unfavorable conditions that damage their health and make them be out of school. Equally, rural children in Latin America are forced into farming where they tend to use harmful implements or heft heavy cargo. The situation has also been complicated by globalization which according to scholars like Edmonds and Pavcnik (2005) indirectly relies on cheap child labor as an international supply chain. Amnesty International (2017) found out how electronics cobalt mines in Democratic Republic of Congo use children to work under conditions that threaten their life.

This background shows that child labor is not a one-time issue but a deep rooted global issue. Cultural acceptance by some cultures and economic necessity make the legal prohibitions inaccessible even as children are still perceived as a ready source of labor because of lax enforcement. Consequently, the health, safety, and education of children remain jeopardized and, it is vital to consider that child labor is a crime against education, which must be addressed immediately.

3. Justification

This research can be explained on three principles. Firstly, the existence of child labor consisting of hazardous work is an indication of a serious loophole between the law and reality. Although the Western world is aware of ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour that has been ratified by many countries, millions of children face high-risk employment. This issue was worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, and ILO and UNICEF (2021) estimated that a greater number of children were being put into labor as a result of school closures and loss of income in families that were under a threat.

Second, child labor is a blatant abuse of children rights as stipulated by the international systems. UNCRC is a right to education, protection and development but hazardous work compromises all three. Child labor is not only a problem of economy, but also of law and moral inefficiency of societies to protect the most vulnerable parts of the population. Third, education is the future of sustainable development and denying it through child labor carries long term consequences both on individual people and on countries. Basu and Tzannatos (2003) assert that high child labor also leads to low literacy, low economic productivity and inequality among other vices in the society. This study also supports the urgency of taking serious measures that would focus on schooling rather than exploitation by presenting child labor as a crime against education (UNICEF, 2021).

4. Objectives of the Study

The aims of the study are:

1. To investigate the commonality and the nature of hazardous child labor in the world.
2. To examine how child labor affects education of children and their development.
3. To analyze international and national laws that are aimed at the fight against child labor.
4. To suggest the provisions on removing child labor that is dangerous and providing access to education.

5. Literature Review

Child labor is a subject that has attracted a lot of research and various opinions are presented by scholars, policy makers, and organizations. One of the most detailed analyses is offered by the International Labour Organization (2021), which states that even the legislative efforts do not help in decreasing hazardous child labor that is on the increase in conflict areas and destitute countries. According to the organization, despite the fact that the global child labor has decreased over recent decades, the process has stopped, and dangerous work has become a significant challenge.

Special focus is given by UNICEF (2021) to the education effects of hazardous work, claiming that in case of mine, agricultural, or factory workers, children miss three to six years of schooling. Such children have high chances of not enrolling in education again and hence perpetuate poverty. Along these lines, Edmonds and Pavcnik (2005) achieve that the repercussions of child labor on literacy and numeracy is not exclusive, but that child labor has wider economic impacts in the sense that societies that are characterized by high rate of child labor find it difficult to generate competitive workforce.

Academic views also bring out the socio-economic aspects of child labor. Basu and Tzannatos (2003) insist that poverty is the major cause of child labor because families consider children as their source of income. This view can be substantiated by other researchers who mention that child labor continues to exist where education is expensive, unavailable or of low standards. In most rural settings, the schools are distant to households and the parents usually prefer immediate economic survival over the long term benefits that are uncertain in getting education.

There is also the global scale of the problem that can be observed through case studies. Amnesty International (2017) documented the practice of using child labour in the Democratic Republic of Congo to work in cobalt mines under deplorable conditions, to supply raw materials in global supply chains. In agriculture, the same exploitation was reported by Human Rights Watch (2016), who reported that children are exposed to pesticides and subjected to physically intensive work hours. These reports prove that dangerous child labor is not a regional problem only, but a transnational one, which is directly connected with the global consumption trends.

Summing up, the literature continually demonstrates that the factors that lead to hazardous child labor are poverty, the lack of active enforcement of laws, and demand of labor resources. Its effects are catastrophic especially on the aspect of education because the children are denied the chance to learn, develop and get out of the circles of exploitation.

6. Material and Methodology

6.1 Study Design

It is a qualitative secondary research synthesis focusing on hazardous child labour and its educational effects. The qualitative design was chosen to combine wisdom of policy reports, NGO casework, and peer-reviewed literature, and expose cross-cutting mechanisms (e.g., time poverty, injury/illness, gendered work) that mediate schooling outcomes.

6.2 Data Sources

There were three streams of evidence:

- International agency reports: ILO, UNICEF and other inter-agency publications (global/regional).
- NGO/INGO grey literature: programme evaluation and field case studies of organisations involved in child protection and child education.
- Peer-reviewed literature: journals in education, health and development studies, labour economics, and sociology. Geographic focus was to South Asia, Africa and Latin America and multi-region/global reports retained where

region specific findings were reported.

6.3 Search and Selection

Multidisciplinary and sectoral databases (e.g., Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, PubMed), as well as agency/NGO repositories, were searched in a structured fashion (2010-2025). A typical Boolean string was: (hazardous child labor OR hazardous child labour OR worst forms of child labor) AND (education OR schooling OR learning outcomes or dropout or attendance) AND (South Asia OR Africa OR Latin America).

Inclusion criteria: (i) explicit hazardous child labour or hazardous sector (e.g. mining, agriculture, construction, domestic work, street work, manufacturing); (ii) at least one educational outcome (enrolment, attendance, dropout, progression, learning, completion) or a direct mediator (fatigue, injury/illness, hours, night work); (iii) transparency of methods and adequate descriptions of contexts.

Exclusion criteria: opinion articles not founded on empirical evidence; articles that examined general child labour regardless of whether there was hazardous exposure and lack of an education connection; duplicates.

The screening process was carried out in two phases; title/abstract, followed by the full text, where exclusion justifications were noted. Snowballing of reference lists was carried out to find other sources.

6.4 Analytical Approach

We performed reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke) through a hybrid codebook (deductive policy/theory codes + inductive, data-driven codes). The documents were coded as context (country/sector), population, type of hazards (chemical, physical, ergonomic, psychosocial), work hours/night, education outcomes and mediating mechanisms (injury/illness, fatigue, time use, costs, distance, gender norms). Comparative case lens was used over South Asia, Africa, and Latin America and identified:

Common patterns (e.g., long hours fatigue/absenteeism dropout), and Context-sensitive drivers (e.g., seasonal migration in agriculture, supply-chain stresses in manufacturing). Triangulation between types of sources and a subset of documents, which were doubled-coded, enhanced credibility, and conflicts could be resolved through discussion. Synthesis of the results is done in a narrative manner, with the focus being placed on mechanisms and patterned relationships but not on the causal effect sizes.

7. Results

7.1 Introduction to the Evidence Base

The materials reviewed include government/INGO reports, NGO field reports, peer-reviewed articles in the fields of agriculture, mining, construction, manufacturing/home-based work, domestic work, and street work. The majority of the sources being reviewed are about lower-secondary and upper-primary students; a significantly smaller number is about the early secondary transitions and out-of-school students. There is a consistent association between exposure to hazards and the hours of work (long/irregular) and interrupted schooling.

Table 1 — Hazardous Sectors, Typical Hazards, and Education Impacts

Sector/Setting	Typical Hazards & Work Patterns	Education Impacts (typical)	Representative Sources
Mining & ASM	Dust/silica, heavy loads, explosions, tunnel collapse; long/irregular shifts	Absenteeism from injury & fatigue; late enrolment; dropout spikes after incidents	ILO 2021; Amnesty 2017
Agriculture	Pesticides, sharp tools, ergonomic strain; seasonal peaks; early starts	Seasonal absenteeism; classroom fatigue; grade repetition; lower completion	HRW 2016; ILO 2021
Construction	Heights, heavy lifting, machinery noise; heat exposure	Injury-related absences; disengagement; irregular attendance	ILO 2021
Manufacturing / Home-based piecework	Repetitive strain, solvents/dyes, poor ventilation; deadline-driven hours	Pay-per-piece absences near deadlines; time poverty; homework not completed	ILO 2021; Webbink et al., 2013
Domestic & Street Work	Psychosocial risks, harassment; long days; night work	Hidden absenteeism (partial days/late arrival); early school exit (esp. girls)	UNICEF 2021; ILO 2021
Informal Urban Services (vending, workshops)	Traffic hazards, burns/cuts, chemical exposure	Irregular attendance; missed exams; lower progression	ILO 2021

7.2 Essential themes on Educational Consequences

T1. Time School Trade-off Fatigue

Prolonged or disordered working hours, particularly, evening/ night shifts and peak seasons, are associated with late enrolment, uneven attendance, classroom fatigue, and failure to complete homework, leading to grade re-taking and dropout. Loss of attention and sleep in class is a common complaint that teachers make about working children.

T2. Injury, Illness, Absenteeism Loop

Injury and short-term illness are precipitated by physical, chemical and ergonomic hazards (ex: heavy loads, sharp tools, dust/solvents, repetitive strain) and become spiking factors in absenteeism. Chronic skipping weakens academic status and predisposes the chances of being withdrawn permanently.

T3. Psychosocial Strain and Learning

Stress, fear, and stigma (e.g., visible injuries, dirty uniforms) are common terms used by children in unsafe environments, which are associated with low levels of participation, low self-efficacy, and non-participation in school tests, which indirectly deteriorate the learning outcomes.

T4. The Moderators School Access and Flexibility

In schools that are remote, or have no transportation or have rigid schedules, work-study issues escalate. In contrast, flexible scheduling, bridge/accelerated learning, and second-chance classes are coupled with an improved continuity in attendance, even in work situations that cannot be eradicated.

T5. Gender-Differentiated Effects

The workload of girls is a mix of domestic/care and informal sector work, which results in hidden absenteeism (late arrival, partial-day absence) and high rates of early school dropout; the danger of early marriage or care burden during shocks further decreases continuation. There is an over-representation of boys in physically risky industries (mining/construction) and greater absenteeism due to injury.

T6. Migration and Seasonality

Cyclical enrolment/ attendance breaks are created through seasonal agriculture and family migration. Students who come back at the end of the season are likely to drop grades or disengage because of missing content.

T7. Economic Strain at Home

Income shocks or debt on the part of households result in children replacing school time with earnings. Pay-by-piece plans (home-based manufacturing) directly correlate school attendance with short term income targets, which means that absences are more pronounced around deadlines.

T8. Market/Regulatory Context

In weak-inspection contexts and informalized supply chain, hazardous work continues to be employed at lower costs, normalizing child labour and legitimizing school loyalty. Reports of lower persistence of school-work conflict have been reported where enforcement and social protection are tighter.

The mediating pathways (Synthesis) are described as follows: Mediating Pathways (Synthesis) The following are the mediating pathways:

- Hours/Shift timing/Fatigue/ Absence/ Grade repetition/ Dropout.
- exposure to hazard, then, injury/illness, then absences, then loss of learning, then disengagement.
- Migration/Seasonality 4 Interrupted enrolment 4 Curriculum gaps 4 Reduced progression
- Division of labour by gender - > Time poverty / safety issues > Unregulated attendance - Early departure.
- ALM: School distance/inflexibility in schedules to school attendance = increased opportunity cost of school attendance = Chronic lateness/absence.

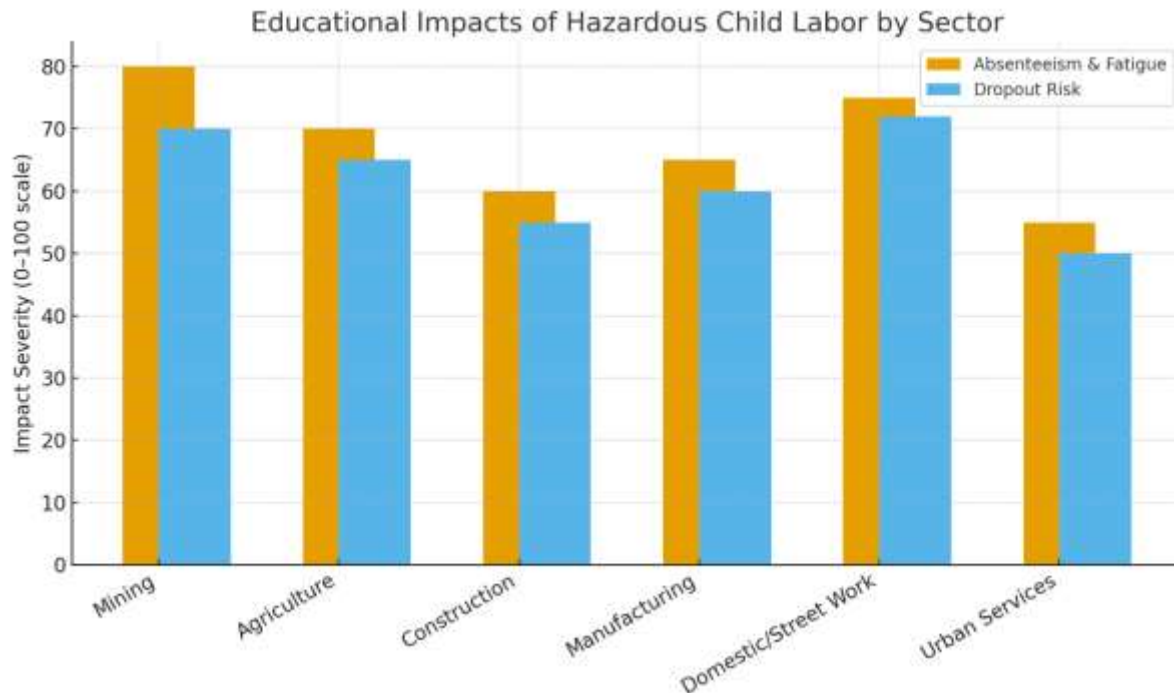
7.4 Regional Comparative Insights

South Asia

- Famous in industry (home-based piecework), building, and farming.
- Piece-rate dynamics increase the frequency of short, recurring absences at times of production peaks.
- Gendered household restricts girls to homework and secondary school-grade; the cost of private tuition exacerbates the schoolwork trade-off among poorer households.

Africa

Agriculture and artisanal/small-scale mining predominate hazardous exposure; there are reports of long school travel distance and limited transport, which amplifies absenteeism following injuries or high seasons. Triggers School interruption and entry of temporary workforce is common due to conflict and climate shocks (drought/floods) and less frequently followed by re-enrolment.



The graph indicates different and diverse impacts of hazardous child labor on education in sectors. The worst effects are inferred with mining and domestic/street work that lead to high absenteeism, exhaustion, and dropout, and moderate but yet harmful effects are recorded in agriculture and manufacturing. Construction causes primarily injury-related absences, with urban services being the least serious but having irregular attendance and missed exams as an issue. In general, the chart shows that life-threatening work systematically deprives children of education, as at each stage they lose their education and become engulfed in a spiral of poverty and lack of education.

Latin America

Evidence: Agriculture, household tasks, and selling in the city peripheries are stressed. Where flexible or alternative schooling is present (evening classes/accelerated programmes), re-enrolment after seasonal peaks are beneficial; attendance requirements under cash-transfers are often noted to have lower dropout in hazardous-work families.

7.5 Divergent or Nuanced Findings, the author illustrates that the findings were either divergent or nuanced

Short term benefits Income gains are sometimes used, temporarily, to finance school (fees, uniforms). These gains however hardly compensate cumulative loss of learning by absence/fatigue. Partially stabilized attendance with no quantifiable improvement in learning outcome has been reported in some programmes, indicating that attendance alone without remediation/support is not adequate.

7.6 Summary Statement

In the regions and industries, the evidence is convergent: work hazards weaken schooling by losing time, shocks to health and psychosocial stress, and gender, distance/scheduling and economic shocks determine severity. The education losses are less in settings with flexible schooling and rudimentary social provision, though learning recovery usually must be reinforced through remediation on top of attendance.

8. Limitations of the Study

There are a number of limitations with this work. To begin with, it uses only secondary data, which does not necessarily have to represent the local backgrounds or even hidden manifestations of child labor. Numerous instances remain undocumented because industries are informal, and the statistics available is a underestimation of the actual magnitude of the situation (ILO, 2021). Second, the study lacks primary surveys and interviews with children who have experienced it that would have given it deeper insights into lived experiences. Third, it might fail to capture the effect of recent world disturbances like COVID-19 that substantially heightened child labour in certain areas (UNICEF, 2021). Such limitations indicate that the research needs to consider more specific and primary data

collection techniques in the future to reinforce the research.

9. Future Scope

The research should be extended in a number of directions in future. To begin with, children, parents, and educators Field-based surveys and participatory research will help to better understand the reality of hazardous child labor. Second, it is important to review the outcomes of the rehabilitated and educational program of child laborers who are rescued in order to sustain reintegration. Third, the applications of technology and artificial intelligence are increasingly generating new possibilities to track global supply chains and identify secret practices of child labor (Edmonds and Pavcnik, 2005). Fourth, the psychological outcomes of hazardous work should be analyzed in the future because trauma and stress usually have a long-term impact on the development of children. Finally, cross-country comparative research can assist in determining best practices in fighting child labor and can be used to provide models that can be customized on an international scale.

10. Conclusion

Child labor is very unsafe and must be considered as a violation of human rights and an offense against education in and of itself. This denies children their right to health, safety and learning because they are being subjected to dangerous environments and this continues to sustain poverty and inequality across generations. Even though there are international conventions and national laws, there has been, however, poor implementation, especially in the regions characterized by poverty and informal economies.

The elimination of the dangerous child-labor should be approached in a multi-pronged manner by enforcing the legislation, investing into the reduction of poverty, creating awareness campaigns to alter social mentalities, and rehabilitation programs, where priority is given to bringing children back to schools. Also, industries should have transparent supply chains which are ethical and devoid of child labor. Finally, education should be an uncompromised right, which ensures that each child has a chance to develop, learn, and prosper..

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