

STATUS OF CHILD LABOURERS IN JORHAT MUNICIPAL AREA

Minakshi Phookan Hazarika

Child labour refers to the employment of children in different activities for earning money. This practice is considered exploitative by International Organizations and is illegal in many countries. Though there is a ban on child labour, they are found in large numbers in different sectors. The incidence of child labour in the world decreased from 25% to 10% between 1960 and 2003, according to the World Bank (Norberg: 2007: 58). In its Global Report on child labour, the ILO has said that the global number of child labourers had declined from 222 million to 215 million, or roughly 3 per cent, over the period 2004 to 2008 (Global Report, ILO: 2010: 5). India accounts for the second highest number where child labour in the world is concerned (after Africa). And across the length and breadth of the nation, these children are in a pathetic condition. The situation of child labourers in India is desperate, where children work for 8 hours at a stretch with only a small break for meals. The meals are also frugal and the children are mal nourished. This system of child labour deprives childhood from them, disrupting their growth and intellectual development. They remain illiterate and are unable to contribute to the developmental process of the country & thus remain as the weaker sections of society.

In this paper, an attempt has been made to assess the status of child labour in terms of health & education in Jorhat Municipal Area, and also to make a comparison to other states in India. The study has been done through primary as well as secondary survey. The significance of such studies would definitely help eliminate child labour by bringing about awareness to the concerned families with the provision of accessibility to education and a much deserved childhood.

Introduction

Children are the future of a country. They are the future human resources on which a country's developmental processes depends. The child labour system, especially in the developing countries destroys these future human resources. The term child labour refers to the employment of children in between the age group of 5 – 14 in different activities for earning money. This system interferes in the child's education and health and deprives them of their normal childhood. UNICEF estimates that India with its larger population, has the highest number of labourers in the world under 14 years of age, while sub-saharan African countries have the highest percentage of children who are deployed as child labour (Wikipedia: Child Labour in India).

The problem of child labour exploitation is a major challenge to the progress of developing countries. Children work at the cost of their right to education which leaves them permanently trapped in the poverty cycle, sadly without the education and literacy required for better-paying jobs. The 2001 national census of India

Address for communication: **Minakshi Phookan Hazarika**, Associate Professor, Jagannath Barooah College, Jorhat, Assam - 785001, *E-mail:* Minakshi_gse3240@yahoo.in

estimated the total number of child labour, aged 5–14, to be at 12.6 million, out of a total child population of 253 million in 5-14 age group (Wikipedia: Child Labour in India).

Children's work needs to be seen as happening along a continuum, with destructive or exploitative work at one end and beneficial work - promoting or enhancing children's development without interfering with their schooling, recreation and rest - at the other. And between these two poles are vast areas of work that need not negatively affect a child's development (UNICEF: 1997: 24). Not all work is bad for children. Some social scientists point out that some kinds of work may be completely unobjectionable — a child who delivers newspapers before school might actually benefit from learning how to work, gaining responsibility, and earn a bit of money. But what if the child is not paid? Then he or she is being exploited. So if our future generation is subject to exploitation and in some cases through hazardous jobs, then where is our future?

Statement of Problem

Childhood is the best time in a person's life and its meant to be enjoyed by playing, going to school, being loved and letting the child grow up in an amiable environment, so as to make them the best future citizens of their country. Though there is a ban on child labour but still they are found in large numbers. The persistence of child labour is the biggest failure of developmental efforts (Global Report: ILO 2010: ix). This study attempts to assess the status of child labourers in terms of their health & education in Jorhat municipal area and also to make a comparison to other states in India. It tries to give focus to the girl child labour as the drop-out rates from school shows more number of girls than boys.

Study Area

This study is conducted in Jorhat municipal area in Jorhat city. Jorhat district is located on the upper Brahmaputra valley in Assam with an extension of 24° N to 26°5'N latitude and 93°E to 94°5'East longitude. The district was a part of the undivided Sibsagar district from which it was carved out as a separate district in 1983. The Brahmaputra forms its northern boundary and the Naga hills form the southern boundary. In the east, the river Jhanji and on the west, the river Kakadonga forms its western boundary.

Jorhat was the last capital of the ancient Ahom kingdom since 1794, when they shifted their capital to this town. The town began to grow as an important urban centre along with the development of road, rail and water transport. Ahom kings had a technique by which they dug ponds for water supply and the water level of such ponds always remains the same. Jorhat has tropical monsoon climate with relatively dry winters, but such ponds could fulfill the water supply needs of the people. Moreover, the river Disai as it flows down from the Naga Hills was

diverted to Jorhat. They offered Bhog (i.e. Prasad) to the river and so it was named Bhogdoi, which flows through the city of Jorhat.

The district has a population of 1,091,295 with a sex ratio of 956 according to 2011 census. Its literacy is 83.42% (highest in the state) with 88.4% male and 78.2% female literacy as compared to the national average of 74.04% & 73.18% total literacy. Male literacy respectively for national and state averages are 82.14 & 78.8% and 65.5% & 67.3% for females.

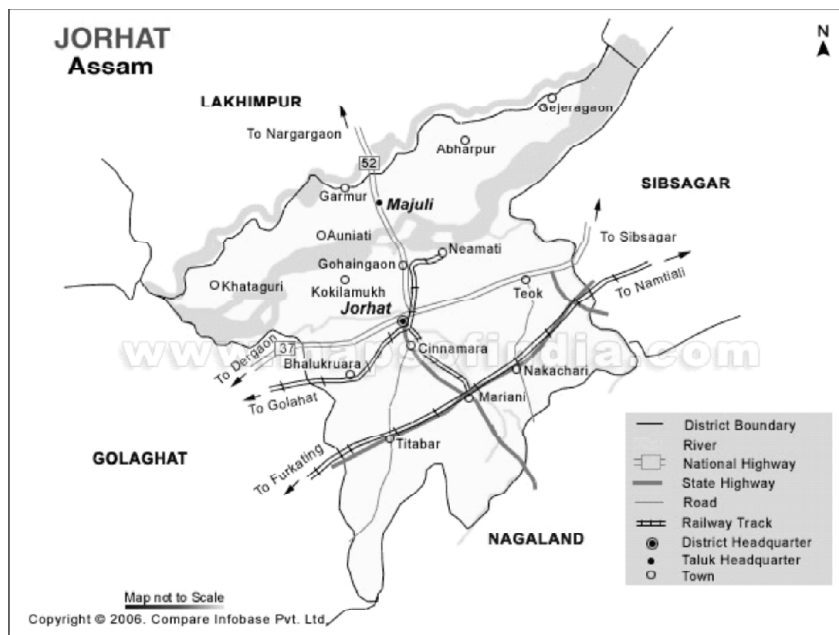


Figure 1: Map of Jorhat District

The density of population is 383 persons per square km with a natural growth rate of 9.2%. Today Jorhat has grown into a thriving cosmopolitan city with a strong sense of character and identity. It is laid out with broad roads cutting each other at right angles. The population of the municipal area is 85,000 persons according to 2011 census. The Master Plan of Jorhat covers an area of 72.8 sq.km and Jorhat municipal area consists of 19wards. Jorhat is also known as the cultural capital as well as the tea hub of Assam.

Methodology

This study is conducted within Jorhat municipal area and out of 19 wards 3 wards have been chosen, two from the central region of the city and one from the western part of the municipal area, and as such Ward IV, VIII, XV have been taken. Ward

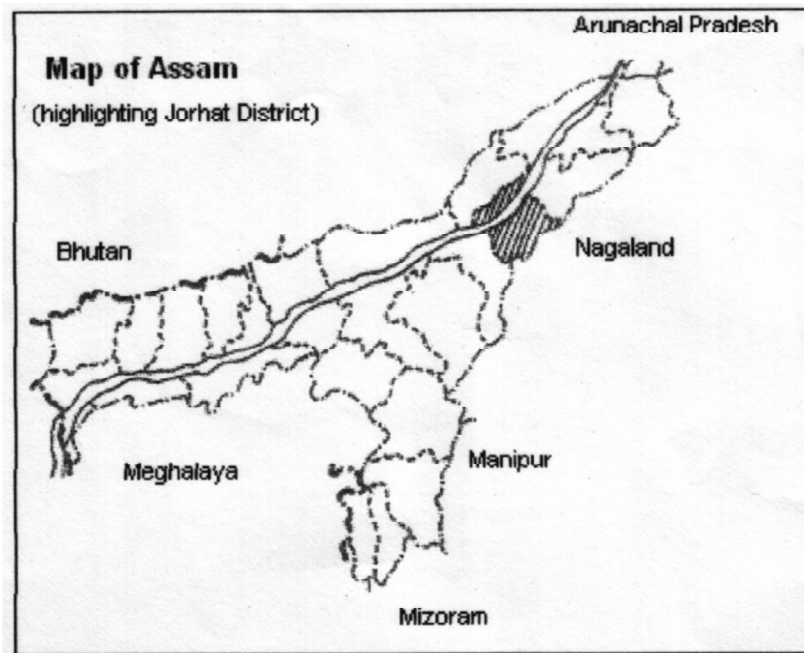


Figure 2: Map of the Study Area

IV & VIII has been chosen as they are the most congested part of the city at the centre and ward XV has been chosen as it is located on the periphery of the city. Primary data has been collected through random sampling from the three wards and a total of 100 samples have been collected. Secondary data has been collected through various books and journals, Statistical Handbook of Assam and the Censuses. In the post field study, the primary data is processed and an analysis is presented supported by diagrams wherever possible.

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the status of child labourers in terms of educational, health and environmental parameters.
2. To elucidate reasons – social, economic or any other, this compels them to become a child labour.
3. To suggest measures to improve their condition.

Hypothesis

1. Child labour is always an outcome of economic compulsion, in which the child has no say in the matter and is forced to do work.

2. In most cases, child labourers are exploited by their employers.

Child labourers are seen to be engaged in the following sectors –

- (a) The Agricultural sector – The children here are generally sold to the rich moneylenders from whom money has been borrowed and could not be returned.
- (b) Street Children – These children work as beggars, or are rag pickers, instead of going to school.
- (c) Children at the Industrial sector – In this sector too quite a large number of children are engaged and are made to work under extreme conditions of heat and sometimes work for more than 12 hours a day.



Figure 3: Children Working in the Industrial Sector

Source: In ASSAM TIMES, by Anup Biswas dt.2nd aug. 2011

Residential Bridge Course under Sarba Siksha Abhijan

SSA has successfully conducted child labour release operation in all the districts having RBC centres during July to October, 2008-09. The children are brought to the Residential Bridge Course Centres of the respective districts. SSA have



Figure 4: Child Labours' Working in a Coal Field

successfully conducted this child labour release programme with the active participation and support of district administration. District wise performance of RBC shows that there are 2 centres in Jorhat and a total of 150 children were enrolled out of which 100 are girl child and 50 are boys.

Analysis

As of 2001 India census, Jorhat municipal area has a population of 85,000 of which males constitute 55% and females 45% with a density of 383 persons per sq.km over an area of 2851 sq.km. The sex ratio of the district is 956 and it has a decadal growth rate of 9.2% as already mentioned.



Figure 5: Child Labours' Working in a Brick Kiln

Decadal Population growth chart shows of the Municipal area shows that there is quite a high growth of population. (See Fig. 6)

The religious composition shows that 92.8% of Jorhat’s population comprise of Hindus, followed by Muslims (4.8%), Christians (1.9%), Sikhs, Buddhists & Jains each comprising less than 1%.

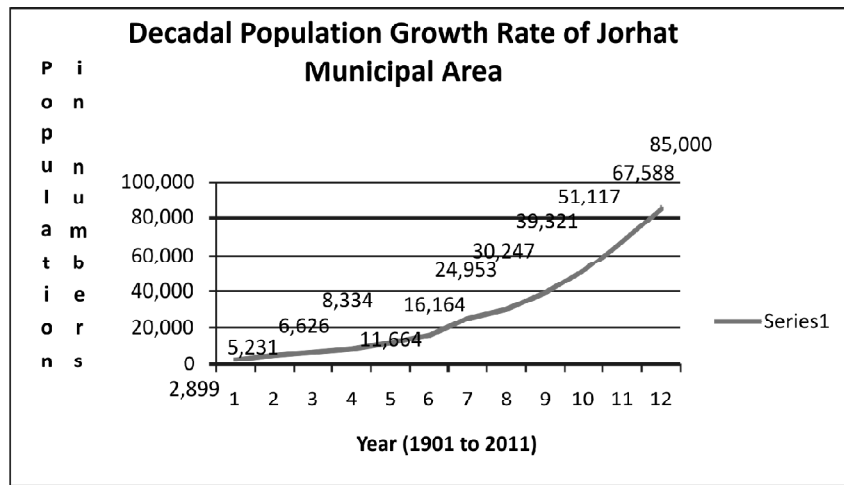


Figure 6: Decadal Population Growth rate of Jorhat Municipal Area

Literacy Rates

District wise literacy rates show that Jorhat has been faring pretty well in terms of literacy being the most literate district in both 1991 and 2001 and also 2011 with 65.5% and 77.9% and 83.42% average literacy. It is much higher than the state average as well as the nation’s average of 73.04% & 73.82% for 2011. There has been an overall reduction in illiteracy but the gender gap in literacy however persists. So, Jorhat district stands out much higher in literacy performance. The role of literacy is to bring about a demographic transition and better health outcomes with better quality of life.

Surveys indicate that the majority of school dropouts belong to the poorest and the least developed areas. They are usually from SC/ST communities, backward rural areas and urban slums. The factors responsible for dropouts range from economic to cultural reasons. Children are pulled out of school due to economic reasons- they have to earn livelihood for their family. Lack of access to a school in the vicinity of their home is another reason why children dropout. Gender discrimination against girl child is a major cultural issue. Since girls are made to do domestic chores they are left with very little time for learning.



Figure 7: District wise Percentage of Literates in Assam

The drop-out rate among girl students at the primary level in schools is 42%. It is 72% and 75% at the middle and high school level respectively.

The average drop-out rates is seen to increase in Assam from 65.1% in 1981-82 to 75% in 1998-99, whereas at the all India level drop-out rates has decreased from 82.3% to 67.4% during the same period (NHDR 2002).

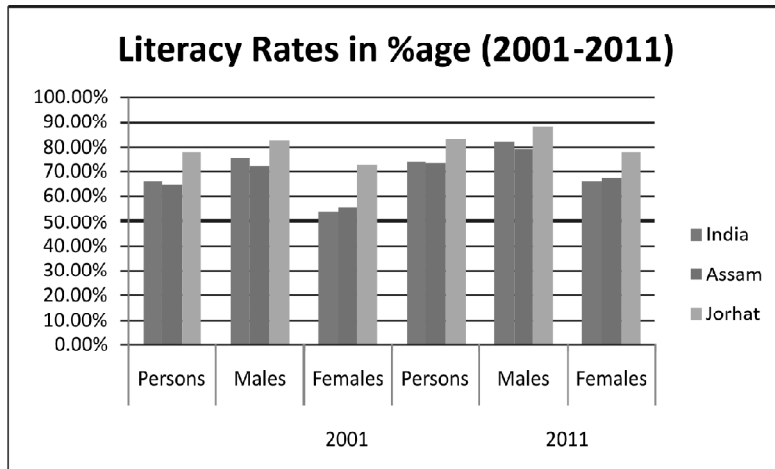


Figure 8: Comparative Literacy rates of Jorhat, Assam & India(Refer Table No. 1, App I)

From this bar diagram, it is clear that literacy in Jorhat district is much higher than both state and national average in both 2001 as well as 2011. Male literacy is slightly lower than the national average in Assam in both decades but in Jorhat it is always higher. In case of females, literacy is at highest level in both 2001 and 2011 than the state and national average. In order to know the background of the population of Jorhat households with basic amenities is taken into consideration.

The condition of households can be seen from figure 9 and Table No. 2. It is seen that the total households with all three basic amenities in the district is still very less (10.5%), where the scenario for urban areas is much better. In case of just one facility among the three, i.e. electricity, toilet and drinking water, toilet facilities are seen to be highest in Jorhat urban area (77%) while electricity is minimum with just 25% households in the entire district.

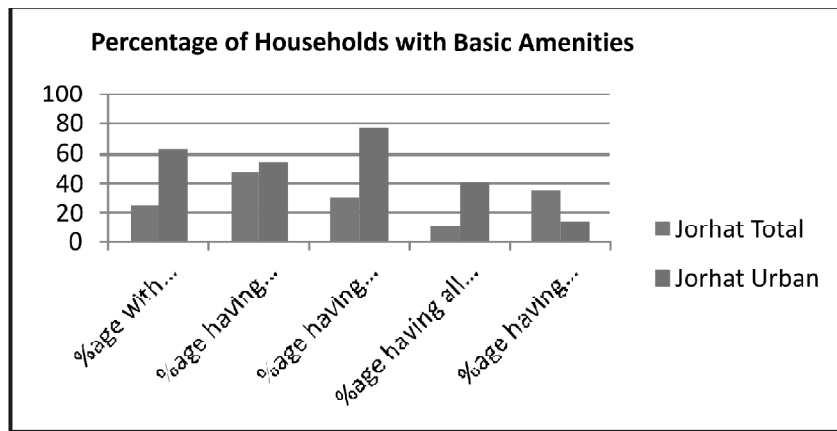


Figure 9: Households with Basic Amenities (Refer to Table No.2, App. I)

In this backdrop of Jorhat district, this study has been carried out on child labourers in Jorhat Municipal Area by carrying primary survey with a sampled population of 100.

Sampled Population Composition

The total number of child labourers is 100 out of which 53% are male and 47% female. It indicates that both male and female children are equally engaged in this activity. Although the number of child labour in the lower age (below 8 years) category is less, they still wanted to attend school. However, the upper age (above 12 years) group children are no longer willing to go to school as most of them are more interested in earning money. Their willingness or unwillingness to work as a child shows that 55% were unwilling to work as a labourer when asked and the rest 45% says that they are working willingly. The age wise composition of child

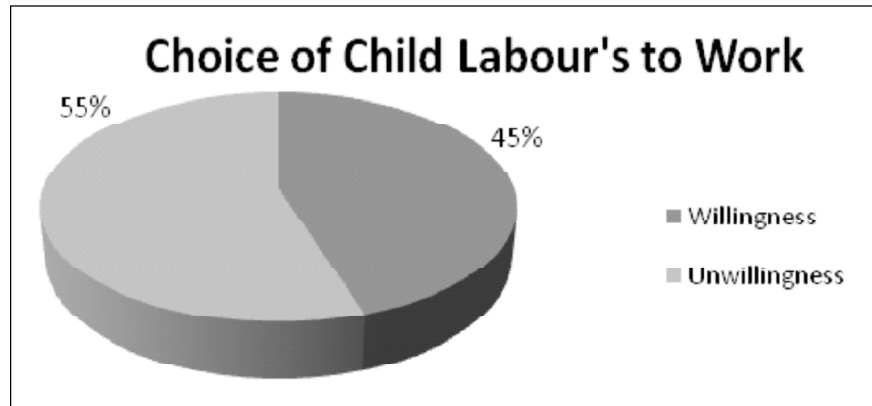


Figure 10: Willingness of Child Labour to Work

labour's show that majority of them (38%) come from the age group of 10-12 years, followed by 30% in the 12-14 age group. This also reflects the fact that 45% of these child labours are working willingly and they have this taste of independence and earning money.

The religious composition of the sampled population shows that there is a more or less equal number of Hindus and Muslim child labourers (50% & 43%) but the number of Christians are only 7%. The general population composition in Jorhat shows a similar trend with a majority of Hindus, followed by Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jains & Buddhists.

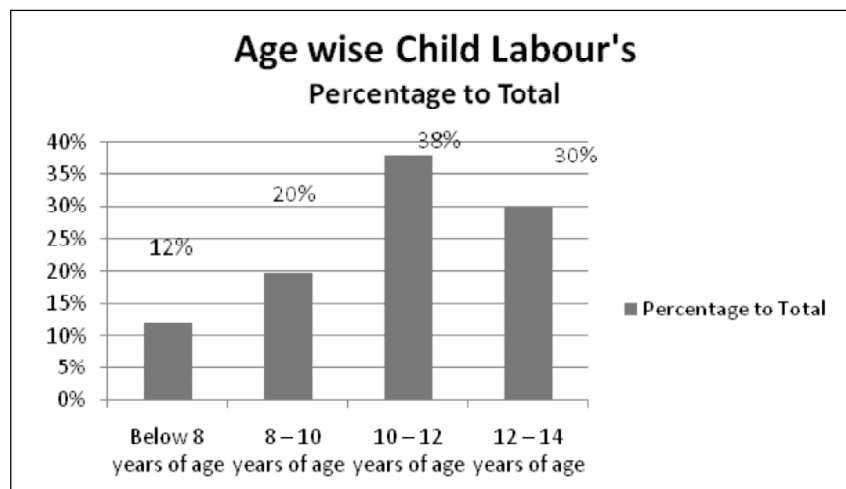


Figure 11: Age Wise Child Labour

Migrants Labourers

Among the origin of the samples, it shows that 70% of them are migrants and only 30% child labourers are from the local population. The migrants can be further classified into those who have migrated from within Assam and those who have migrated from outside Assam.

Those from the different districts of Assam shows that majority (20%) have come from Nagaon district. This district has a high rate of immigrant population, working in agricultural fields or as daily wage labourers, mostly from Bangladesh. They have infiltrated to other districts of Assam in search of employment etc. There are also a considerable number of immigrants from Lakhimpur district, the reason behind is the occurrence of frequent floods, so the landless people prefer to move to drier parts. There are instances of people migrating in groups to the districts south of river Brahmaputra and Jorhat being one of them, so the reason.

The migrants from outside the state shows that majority (29%) of them comes from the state of Bihar.

Place of Residence

The samples show that 80% of them live at the place they work and 20 % commute daily from their parents’ place where they live. The quality of sleeping place, toilets provided to these children is very pathetic.

They sleep in dingy rooms sharing it with the other workers and the toilets are also on shared basis. They do not have running water and water is taken from outside either a tube well or a dug well. Mostly they don’t get much free time and they lie exhausted in their beds at night.

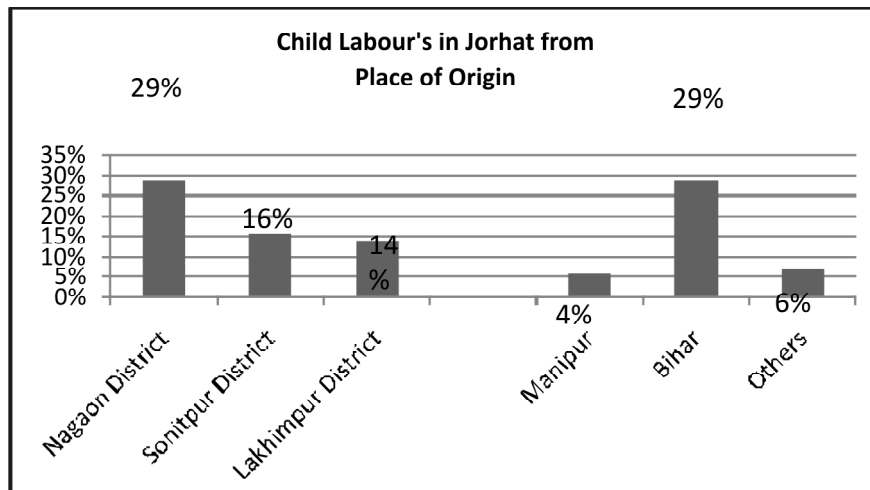


Figure 12: Place of Origin of Child Labour (Refer to Table 3, App. I)

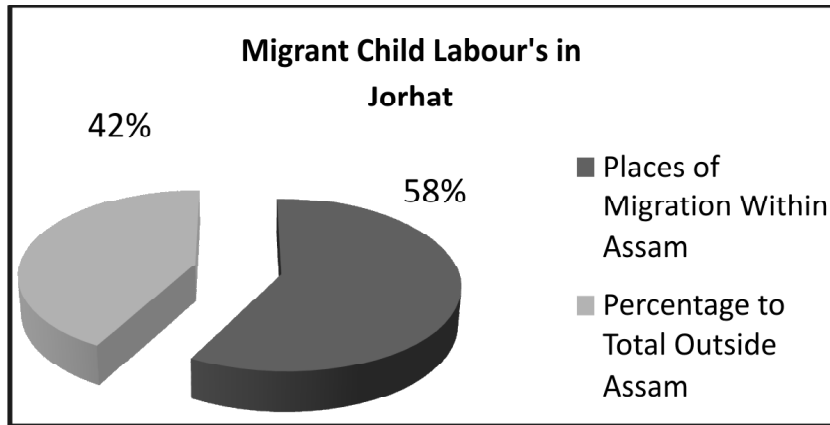


Figure 13: Migrant Child Labour in Jorhat

Educational Status

More than half of the child labourers (57%) are deprived of their right to education. Although government provides free education for all children upto the age of 14, this survey suggests that there exists a big gap. The rest 43% educated children shows that 27% are educated up to the primary level, 10% upto the middle level school and 6% upto high school level.

The type of activity of these child labourers show that 55% of them are engaged in household activity, which means a slightly better environment for the child, as compared to children engaged in industries. But there are still about 24% child

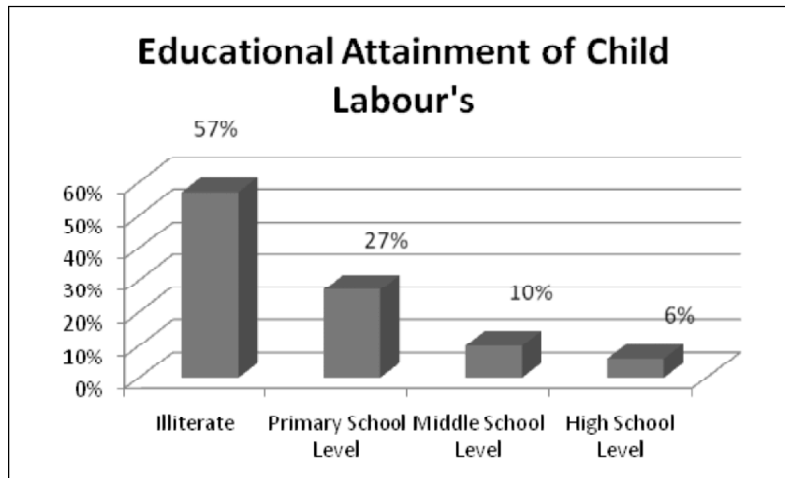


Figure 14: Educational Attainment of Child Labour

labourers engaged in restaurant's as helpers doing the dishes and cleaning. Another 15% are working as helpers in retail shops doing the endless errands. The rest comprising of others are found to be rag pickers, fumbling dangerously through garbage, along roadsides in the hope of getting some re-saleable products which will give them money.

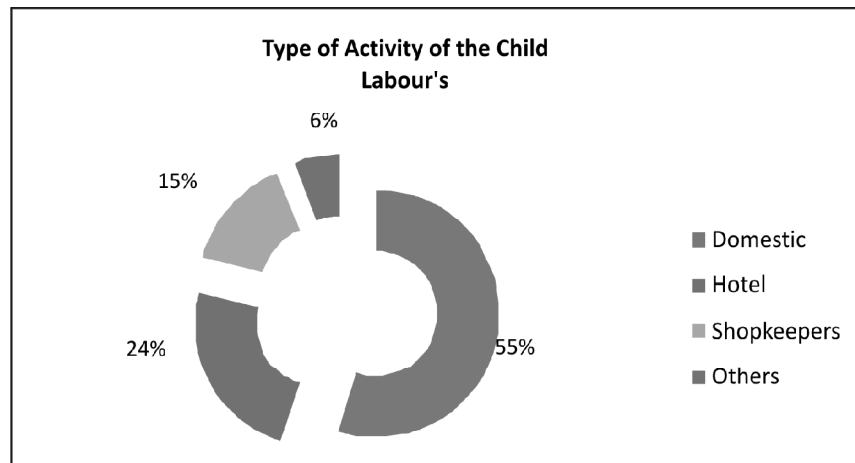


Figure 15: Activity of Child Labour

The rag pickers job is found to be most hazardous, as they rummage through garbage of all sorts which are disposed at the collection points of JMC. In fact they roam about barefoot and search for plastic bottles, cardboards, tins etc with their hands. As a result, chances of them getting injured & getting septic, through any of these is high. The only thing good about the rag pickers is that they are independent and are free to use their time as they want, as they are also seen playing in between.

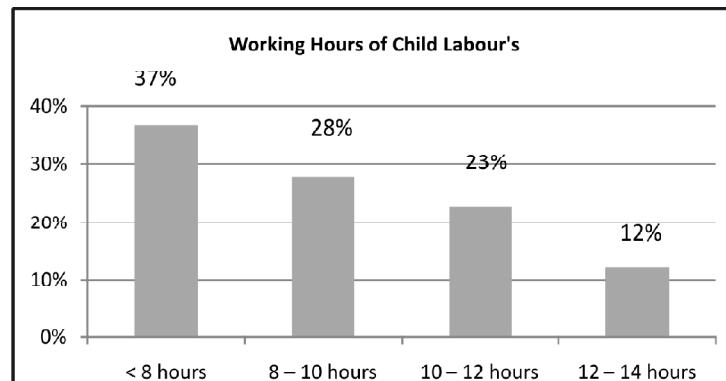


Figure 16: Working hours of Child Labour

The table above reveals that duration of working hours for children is quite gruesome, which is injurious to their health. 12% child labourers are seen to work for about 14 hours and 23% of them are working for 10-12 hours. Moreover regarding their food consumption, it is seen that their intake of carbohydrate is much more and intake of other nutrients like protein, fats, vitamins etc. is very less. In some cases, some of them do not get adequate food to even fulfill their hunger. So it is clear that child labourers are exploited by their employers.

What is amazing is that 16% of the child labourers are not getting any wages for their work. It is taken for granted that their employer provides these children with food, lodging and clothes, so they have to server their masters for free. The maximum number of child labourers (44%) are getting less than Rs. 500 as their monthly income and that too at today's age & increasing prices of all essential commodities.

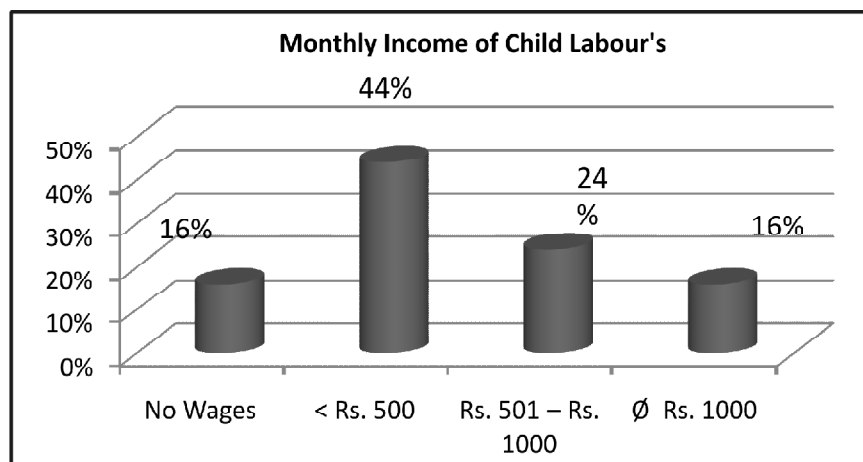


Figure 17: Monthly Income of Child Labour

It is heartening to see that 16% of the child labourers are getting more than Rs. 1000 per month but regularity in payment of their salaries is yet another concern. Most of the earnings of the child are taken by the parents as they are contributing the extra income to support the household. Almost 30% of child labour's are physically tortured by their employers.

Food Intake Among the sampled population, it is seen that 20% of them do not get sufficient food to fulfil their hunger, let alone a balanced meal. They do not get food on time. So these children are also facing problem of malnutrition.

Recreational Time Available An equal amount of children do not get free time to play from work, which is a very important part of childhood and growing up.

In fact, one employer of a hotel in this field study didn't allow me to take his interview, saying that he is more than 14 years of age and most of the employers were very apprehensive of this study. They didn't want bad publicity of their image and ensured their presence while the interview was conducted.

So the first hypothesis has been proved that poverty is the cause of child labour. But the second hypothesis is only partially proved with 30% child labour's physically tortured by their employers. The rest 70% are not tortured by their employer's and are not ill treated.

Findings

1. This study carried out in Jorhat district reveals a more or less equal number of male and female child labourers. Male (53%) and female (47%).
2. The age group analysis of child labourers show that majority 38% comes from the age group of 10-12 years of age followed by 30% from 12-14 years of age and the least comes from the age group of less than 8 years.
3. It is observed that less than half (43%) of these children had some form of education, of which majority (27%) has done only primary education and just 6% has done up to high school level.
4. Most of the child labourers (55%) are working against their will and only 45% are working willingly, of which the majority comes from the older age group bracket, who have become fond of their independence.
5. The religious composition shows that 50% of the child labourers are Hindus, followed by Muslims (43%) and Christians (7%), since in the district 92.8% are Hindus, so we see a large number of Muslim child labourers.
6. The scenario of child labour in Jorhat shows that there are more migrants than indigenous children in their composition. 70% are migrant labourers and they come from both within Assam and outside Assam. The migrant labourers from the different districts of Assam comprise 41% and from states like Bihar & Manipur comprise 29%.
7. The type of activity of these child labourers show that 55% of them are engaged in household activity followed by 24% working in hotels and 15% working as shopkeepers. The rag pickers constitute the rest 6% of the child labourers.
8. The maximum number of child labourers (44%) are getting less than Rs. 500 as their monthly income and 16% of the child labourers are not getting any wages for their work.
9. The earnings of these children are spent by their parents (53%) and the rest is shared between the child and his/her parents household.
10. Child labours are living in unhygienic conditions (16%). They do not have the habit of taking regular bath and don't wash their hands before eating. Their

nails were found dirty and they do not have mosquito nets or mattresses to sleep.

Suggestions

1. **Better access to education:** All children should get education and the administration should take necessary steps in remote and inaccessible areas to ensure children's enrolment. Education is a fundamental right to all and without which a society cannot be developed. The role of SSA is commendable in trying to provide education to the street children but the loopholes has to be reduced.
2. **Increase Social Awareness:** Child labour is the problem of our society. The people should be aware of this and take necessary steps to assert our childrens' right to live properly and grow up normally.
3. **Proper Enforcement of Child Labour Laws:** The Government of India's Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 should be enforced strictly.
4. **Reduction of Poverty:** Poverty is the main underlying cause behind Child Labour. Poor parents depend on their children to support the household income. So adequate steps should be taken to alleviate poverty and ensure a minimum level of subsistence to all amidst difficulties.
5. **Reduction of Fertility Rates:** Usually the number of children is more in poor families, so parents are unable to look after them. So they send them to work. Thus introduction of family planning measures for quality living should reach one and all including the illiterate people.

Conclusion

Employment of children is a social evil. They are our little buds who will blossom for making the future of our country. So it is our duty to see that they develop healthily both in body and mind. It is true that the government is taking necessary steps to rehabilitate them but lack of proper information and accessibility has made this evil still persist in our society. We cannot abandon our responsibility of these children for whom child labour is a matter of survival.

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- (ii) Jump up^ Age Structure And Marital Status India Census 2001.

APPENDIX I

TABLE 1: LITERACY RATES IN JORHAT, ASSAM & INDIA.

<i>Literacy Rate</i>	<i>1991</i>			<i>2001</i>			<i>2011</i>		
	<i>Persons</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Persons</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Persons</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>
India	51.6	64.1	39.3	65.4	75.9	54.3	73.82%	82.14	65.5%
Assam	52.89	61.87	43.03	64.28	71.93	56.03	73.04%	78.8%	67.3%
Jorhat	65.51	73.29	56.88	77.91	82.76	72.54	83.42%	88.4%	78.2%

Source: Census of India

TABLE 2: PERCENTAGE OF HOUSEHOLDS WITH BASIC AMENITIES IN JORHAT

<i>Categories</i>	<i>% age with electricity</i>	<i>% age having safe drinking water</i>	<i>% age having toilet</i>	<i>% age having all facilities</i>	<i>% age having none</i>
Jorhat Total	25.2	47.3	29.8	10.5	35.0
Jorhat Urban	63.5	55.4	77.8	40.0	14.5
Assam Total	24.9	58.8	51.5		
Assam Urban	74.3	70.0			
India Total	55.9	77.9	63.6		
India Urban	87.6	90.0			

Source: Census of India: Assam State. Census of India, RGI.

Source: Central Electricity Authority of India, 2001 Census.

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Source: Govt. of India, National Building Organization, Ministry of Urban Affairs & Employment, 1997.

TABLE 3: MIGRANT CHILD LABOUR

<i>Places of Migration (Within Assam)</i>	<i>No of Child Labourers</i>	<i>Percentage to Total</i>
Nagaon District	20	29%
Sonitpur District	11	16%
Lakhimpur District	10	14%
Total	41	58%
<i>(Outside Assam)</i>	<i>No of Child Labourers</i>	<i>Percentage to Total</i>
Manipur	4	6%
Bihar	20	29%
Others	5	7%
Total	29	42%

Source: Data collected by Researcher