Child Labor Essay, Research Paper

Introduction

Child labor is a serious problem in many parts of the world, especially in developing countries. Labor is defined as physical or mental work especially of the hard or fatiguing kind. (Webster?s Dictionary) Child labor usually means work that is done by children under the age of 15, which restricts or damages their physical, emotional, intellectual, social, or spiritual growth as children. The International Labor organization estimates that there are 250 million children worldwide, between the ages of 5 and 14, who are now working.

?Africa and Asia together account for over 90 percent of total child employment? (Faraaz Siddiqi) Child labor is especially common in the rural areas of these countries. Usually there are no age requirements for schooling or for work. There are many reasons that these children work; poverty, lack of education, lack of knowledge of one?s rights and cultural tradition are all contributing factors. These children are often working in severe and hazardous conditions. These children are deprived and mistreated. They are often beat or severely punished for making even the slightest mistakes. They receive low wages and perform tasks that are usually the work of adults. The International Labour Office reports that children work the longest hours and are the worst paid of all laborers. These children can be found working on farms, in factories or mines, and even fighting in wars. ?Much of the nation?s farmland is worked by toddlers, yokes teams of three-, four-, and five-year-olds who plough, seed and glean fields from dawn to dusk.? (Jonathan Silvers)

Bonded Labor

Three types of bonded labor exist in practice around the world. The first type involves a child inheriting a debt carried by their parents. The enslaved parents find no alternative except to essentially turn over the rights of their child to their masters. Another form of bonded labor occurs with a child being used a collateral for a loan. A parent facing an unusually large or urgent expense would use this method of obtaining necessary money, for example the rebuilding of a home due to damages. A worker can also enter into bondage to their employer by requesting an advance on future wages they expect to earn. In all these cases the debt is consistently increased to a sum beyond the capacity of the worker. Expenses and interest consume all wag and also cause the debt to grow. The debt takes over takes the worker and remains indefinitely. (?Child Labour: The Situation)

Contributing Factors

There are many reasons that child labor is so prevalent in these countries as opposed to here in America. Though restrictions exist in many nations, children do work. Child labor is most concentrated in Asia and Africa, which together account for more than 90 percent of total employment. Though there are more child workers in Asia than anywhere else, a higher percentage of African children participate in the work force. Asia is led by India, which has 44 million child laborers, giving it the largest child work force in the world. In Pakistan, 10 percent of all workers are between the ages of 10 and 14 years. Nigeria has 12 million child workers. Child labor is also common in South America, there are 7 million children working in Brazil. (Siddiqi)

Children work for many different reasons. The most prevalent one being poverty. Children are sent to work to help support their families who might be in such desperate conditions that even the meager salary the children receive will help For example; minors in Paraguay contribute almost a quarter of the total family income. Children are often driven to work by their families. In some developing countries people often have children because they know that they can be profitable.

Schooling problems also contribute to child labor. Children seek employment because there is often no access to schools, whether it?s because of distance or because there are no schools at all. If there is access, the low quality of the school system often makes a working life more desirable than receiving an education. Schools in many of these under- developed countries are often overcrowded, have inadequate sanitation, and unskilled teachers. Parents would often rather see their children working than in a school where they feel they are wasting time. A major reason India has the largest juvenile workforce is because 82 million children are not in school. Only 41 percent of Indians over the age of 15 are literate. (Siddiqi)

Many times the lack of education by both the parents and the children are major contributors to the number of child workers. A non-educated parent doesn?t have the common knowledge to know that by forcing their children to work they are harming them. Even if laws restricting child labor do exist in these countries, the people are virtually unaware of their rights as well as their children?s rights.

Tradition also plays a major part in contributing to the number of child workers in these countries. The established female roles teach that women will not fit into society if

they are educated. Many families raise their daughters solely to take over the household duties in order to release the mother. In India, people of the lower caste system are expected to perform manual labor, and are therefore even less likely to attend school.

Another practice that is common in these countries is parents assigning different roles to their children. This has been called child specialization and is another contributing factor to child labor. (Siddiqi) This practice involves certain children going to school while others are designated to work, usually the oldest child is the one to attend school.

Child Labor in Pakistan

?Pakistan has recently passed laws greatly limiting child labor and indentured servitude- but those laws are universally ignored, and some 11 million children, aged four to fourteen, keep the country?s factories operating, often working in brutal and squalid conditions.? (Silvers)

Last year the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan estimated the number of worker Pakistani children to be ?realistically in the region of 11-12 million.? At least half of these children are under the age of 10. Even though restrictive laws were recently passed they have had almost no effect. Children in

Pakistan makes up a quarter of the unskilled work force and can be found in almost every factory, workshop, and field. In the rural areas of Pakistan, children are raised without health care, sanitation, or education. As soon as the children are old enough, their parents teach them that they are expected to pay their way and sacrifice for their family. Bonding is also a common practice in Pakistan and the children often regard it as a right of passage into adulthood.

Early in this decade the Pakistan National Assembly enacted two laws meant to curb such practices. The first, The Employment of Children Act of 1991, prohibited the use of child labor in hazardous occupations and environments. The second, the Bonded Labor Act of 1992, abolished indentured servitude and the peshgi system. As progressive as these laws were, the government failed to provide for their implementation and enforcement. It also neglected to inform the millions of working children and indentured servants that they were released from their debts. (Silvers)

A Foreign Concept

The concept of child labor is a somewhat foreign one on America. We Americans aren?t faced with many of these problems in this day and age. There is a greater level of education in

American and there are laws that require children to attend school. There are also laws that limit the age for working, usually anywhere from 14 to 16 years old. Unlike these under developed countries, employers who are found to have minors working for them can be in serious legal trouble. In America we have the welfare system that can help families in need rather than having their children work. In America we have an excellent public school system where children can receive a free education if they cant afford to pay for one. Levels of family income are higher in America than in other more under developed countries. Even if families are faced with a life of poverty they usually don?t resort to sending their children to work at such young ages.

Working Towards A Solution

There are many problem areas that need to be addressed when it comes to child labor. One possible solution can be found in education, of both children and adults, in the countries where child labor is prevalent. The more educated the population, the more aware they will be of what is going on around them and how they can make the necessary changes. Their needs to be some type of social awareness or activism in order for any changed to take place. There are many different organizations here in America that try to raise awareness about child labor. Some of these organizations are Free The Children and Child Labor Coalition.

? ?Child Labor in Pakistan,? Jonathan Silvers, The Atlantic Monthly, February 1996.

? Child Labour: The Situation, http://freethechildren.org/campaigns

? Child Labor: Issues, Causes and Interventions, Faraaz Siddiqi, http://www.worldbank.org/html