

CHILD LABOUR AND ITS LONG-TERM IMPACT ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: AN ANALYSIS OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELL-BEING

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Abstract: *This paper explores the issue of child labour and its profound impact on health, education, and social development, with a focus on Malaysia. Using a qualitative analysis approach, it examines the root causes, effects, and systemic challenges, such as poverty, cultural norms, and weak enforcement of labour laws. Key findings reveal that child labour perpetuates cycles of poverty, denies children access to education, and endangers their physical and mental well-being. Refugee and stateless children are especially vulnerable, facing barriers to legal protection and education. The study highlights the need for comprehensive strategies, including poverty alleviation programs, improved enforcement of labour regulations, and enhanced educational opportunities for marginalized children. By addressing these issues, this paper contributes to the global dialogue on eliminating child labour, emphasizing its role in fostering sustainable development and equitable societies.*

Keywords: *Child labour, social development and education access*

Introduction

Society's problem of child labour becomes a concern in the present and the future insofar as children's well-being, education, and opportunities for the future are in jeopardy all over the world (Alemayehu & Fekadu, 2019). As work that is hazardous to children's health, education, social development or moral character as defined by the United Nations, it remains an obstacle to social and economic development. The International Labour Organization (ILO) established that there are about 160 million children that are engaged in child labour in 2020, out of which 79 million are practicing the worst forms of child labour (Claudia Cappa, 2021). Such children resign themselves to dropping out of school and deprived childhood to ensure that they contribute to their family income this just contributes to a cyclic persistence of poverty and social inequality especially in the developing and transitional countries.

The Children and Young Persons (Employment) Act 1966 is an important law which seeks to prevent the misuse of children and young persons through employment. It provides prohibitions on hours of work suitable for young persons, categories of employment and places of work which are suitable for young persons (Ministry of Human Resources, 2019). But it allows the employment of children and young persons to work under prescribed circumstances and conditions and restricts hazardous work, based on risk assessment and safety measures. For Sabah and Sarawak Labour Ordinance respectively, are the legal provisions outlining legal employment relations and rights for both, adult and child employment in the two states. To achieve this these ordinances must be brought on par with international standards and the Children and Young Persons (Employment) Act 1966 for combining all types of protection for such children (Chandrarajan, 2023).

Table 1: Children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour

		Children aged 5 to 17 years in child labour			
		2016		2020	
		%	No.	%	No.
World total		9.6	151,600	9.6	160,000
Sex	Girls	8.4	64,100	7.8	62,900
	Boys	10.7	87,500	10.2	97,100
Age	5-11 years	8.3	72,600	8.9	79,000
	12-14 years	11.7	41,900	10.7	40,400
	15-17 years	10.5	37,100	9.5	35,600
ILO regions	Africa	19.6	72,100	20.0	92,000
	Sub-Saharan Africa	22.4	70,000	23.9	86,600
	Arab States	2.9	1,200	2.6	1,400
	Asia and the Pacific	7.4	62,100	5.6	48,700
	Americas	5.3	10,500	6.0	8,200
	Latin America and the Caribbean	7.3	10,500	8.2	8,200
	Europe and Central Asia	4.1	5,500	5.7	8,300

The figure above reflects the continuous problem of children engaged in labour worldwide with increased differences in region, gender and age. Currently, 5-17 years 160 million children are still alive for child labour, slightly higher than in 2016, boys are 12% affected while girls are 8%. Sub-Saharan Africa is still the most affected region with approximately 24% of children working due to lack of jobs and feeble operational policies, ignorance of education, and essential health

facilities. In Asia, socio-economic disparities cause child labour affecting education and increasing the children's vulnerability to health consequences of hazardous work environments. If all these problems are not solved child labour continues to be a cycle whereby future generations end up being poor, illiterate and subjected to problems.

In the global standings, studies from 2016 and 2020 show growing trends, with a child labour incidence rate of 9.6 per cent and impact more prominently on children aged between 5 to 11 years, particularly boys. Sub-Saharan Africa continues to be the hotspot due to the interned result of poor income, low female literacy and exclusion. However, due to a lack of fragmented data, it is difficult to fully understand the problem, but other studies reveal similar trends in Malaysia. And worse, refugee children, a most vulnerable group, are denied legal personage and basic rights like education resulting in increased vulnerability to exploitation. UNHCR Malaysia estimates that in May 2019, 25,499 refugee children under the age of 18, of which 23,823 are of school-going age, were marginalized in accessing education and protection (Birgitte Poulsen-Krogh, 2019; Claudia Cappa, 2021).

One of the most affected sectors by the issue of child labor in Malaysia is the informal work sector. Studies by Aziz & Iskandar (2013) and Poulsen-Krogh & Ab Wahab (2019) found that children are often involved in jobs such as street hawkers, night market laborers, and domestic work, which are not strictly regulated by labor laws. According to a UNHCR Malaysia report (2022), many refugee and migrant children are forced to work in this sector due to difficulties in accessing education and social protection. This situation leaves them vulnerable to exploitation, including low wages and long working hours. Since the informal sector is difficult for authorities to monitor, employers tend to take advantage of weak enforcement to continue employing children in precarious working conditions. Therefore, improvements in monitoring and stricter legal action need to be implemented to protect the rights and welfare of children in Malaysia.

The problem of child labour in the context of this report is still topical for Malaysia. However, there are certain positive changes in the country regarding the modernization of labour laws at the national level by international norms (Yashodhan Ghorpade & Amanina Abdur Rahman, 2024). There are still issues that relate to the implementation and overseeing of the gaps in the legal structures, especially in containing the disguised bureaucracy in which child labour is rife (Chen & Xin, 2022). Therefore, a need to improve the child protection framework, especially in areas related to policies to prohibit and protect vulnerable children. Effective actions also need to be planned with assistance from information retrieval and monitoring mechanisms to complement understanding of the overall nature of the issue. Creating awareness in society about the impacts of child labour and embracing education, particularly the children's freedoms while denying them a second income chance through the protection of their rights (Giang et al., 2021). Unification of all such efforts can greatly reduce incidences of child labour in Malaysia to a greater extent.

In summary, child labour is an emergent issue that needs global intervention because it has underlying social and economic issues as well as adverse developmental repercussions in the long run. In Malaysia, the remedy to this problem is to strengthen the laws, increase the availability of data and enhance the efficiency of the enforcement measures. They can be initiated by the government, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and society to ensure that all children without discrimination have equal opportunities for a better future. To a certain extent, this anti-child labour approach can play a role in minimizing the effects of child labour

on the society and economy and at the same time advance the cause of child and sustainable social and economic development.

Literature Review

Concepts and Definition of Child Labour

Child labour refers to the deployment of children in any activity deemed to be harmful to their growth, health and education (Mihigo et al., 2024). According to the International Labour Organization, child labour is work which is hazardous in the sense that it is detrimental to the child's psychological, physical, social or moral development and this includes work that either excludes a child from school, overtaxes or fatigues him or her so much that he or she cannot go to school (Ajefu & Massack, 2023). According to United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), child labour starts at a tender age since the child cannot resist exploitation being young or even lack the legal capacity to do so (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2023). These vices are blamed on poverty, culture and poor economic status which exposes them to economic risks.

Child labour involves acceptable labour which refers to activities that may not be harmful to the education and development of children and other prohibited types regulated by countries according to varying floors of child labour (Humphries, 2023). Child labour is defined and combatted at a relatively country-specific level based on the general international standards but adapted to the socio-economic conditions (de Guzman Chorny et al., 2019). However, the basic minimum ILO Conventions are ILO Convention 138 on Minimum Age and ILO Convention 182 on Worst Forms of Child Labour (Rikhotso et al., 2022; S Chandrarajan, 2023). This standard sets for ranges what it means to expose workers to dangerous jobs identifies the minimum age that a worker can be employed and specifically highlights child labour.

However, these frameworks show that definitions have a range of different, often exceedingly practical, consequences in different parts of the world (Takakura, 2023). For instance, in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) paucity of diversified earnings forces youngsters, especially children, to work, including in demeaning and risky capacities. Thus, it is rather difficult to enforce anti-Child Labour and "acceptable work", and "child labour" both are rather vague terms when it comes to the differentiation between permissible light work, and other hazardous work (Birgitte Poulsen-Krogh, 2019; Hanafi et al., 2024). Such uncertainty can reduce the efficiency of international initiatives aimed at children's protection from dangerous situations and the elimination of the factors that cause child labour – poverty and educational disadvantages.

Influence of Definitions on Legislation and Enforcement

Legal provisions on child labour are determined by definitions given to the concept and practice. As conceptualised in international standards, clear definitions are important for establishing sound legal frameworks and interventions. At the same time, context-oriented or ambiguous definitions make it possible to face certain problems related to policy enforcement. For instance, the Children and Young Persons (Employment) Act of 1966 in Malaysia provides for legal restrictions on the employment of young persons and lists the type of work that is acceptable to be performed including restrictions on hours (Ministry of Human Resources, 2019). Nonetheless, its provisions sometimes do not meet the international standards mainly regarding hazardous work and other informal employment (MacEachen et al., 2022). Such misalignment can weaken enforcement and unravel some gaps in child safety.

Furthermore, Malaysian labour laws exist disturbed within the contexts wherein informal employment and income pressure are rife (Yashodhan Ghorpade & Amanina Abdur Rahman,

2024). The country has also signed and ratified international conventions including the ILO Convention 138 however enacting these standards locally can be a cumbersome process. It is true that the lack of policy directions to deal with informal employment, which greatly accounts for child labour, hampers the effort to enforce the law. As it stands now, Malaysian children are involved in agriculture and small-scale businesses that negate the countries and international laws on child labour (Hoque, 2024).

Comparative Analysis: Malaysian and International Standards

These definitions in the Malaysian context show certain discrepancies with the international benchmarks. Within the ILO framework, the general restrictions to child labour include banning hazardous work for children below eighteen years; minimum age provisions for entry to employment withstanding at about fifteen years for non-hazardous work and eighteen years for hazardous work. The principles of employment relationship reflected in Malaysian laws respect freedom of employment and employer while challenging these principles by failing to hold experience over informal employment, where many child employees are engaged (Alemayehu & Fekadu, 2019; Rikhotso et al., 2022). Moreover, such children who are in Malaysia, as mentioned earlier, do not benefit from formal labour rights because Malaysia has not ratified the UN Refugee Convention.

Internationally more focus is put on comprehensive approaches that involve both legal changes and social-economic ones to respond to the underlying factors like poverty or illiteracy. Unlike Cambodia, the effort made by Malaysia has been legislative with less social incorporation such as comprehensive programs that would perhaps ease the economic forces that promote child labour. For instance, conditional cash transfer programs like those in some countries are suggestive for they free families from the worst financial strains and ease out on child labour. Malaysia's inclination towards ratification of conventions shows their intent to adhere to conventions that would automatically help to tackle the problem but their distance from following international standards is another matter entirely.

Practical Implications of Definitions

The way child labour is conceptualized implicates legislation, as well as the attitudes of citizens and policies. In Malaysia, where the informal economy is not always addressed enough, and where refugees and stateless children are out of any protection measures, a broader understanding of child labour is required. In particular, the establishment of transparent and unambiguous definitions related to enforcement can cause the convergence of the actions of subjects, the maintenance of the uniformity of the execution of legislation, and the promotion of information campaigns among the population (Alemayehu & Fekadu, 2019). Hence, to reduce either type of rate, international definitions emphasize the role of education as a preventive measure, which Malaysian authorities can stress by increasing the availability and quality of education for any children regardless of the socio-economic or legal situations.

To sum up, child labour and the definitions that underlie it are the key to the formation of legislation and control. Through such adjustments as bringing its definitions closer to the international norms and plugging the loopholes as realised at the enforcement level, especially for the informal economy and vulnerable children, Malaysia enhances its determination to fight child labour with all its might and resources to protect and ensure that all children are well protected and treated. This implies that along with legal changes, it is necessary to implement complex approaches based on a sociological understanding of the root causes of child labour.

The Role of Child Labour in Society

Factors such as social and cultural differences affect children's participation in the labour force in society (Kaur & Byard, 2021). This study therefore proposes that child working is viewed as a necessity in poor families and destitute communities, young people work and contribute to the family's welfare in the same way that a member of the family would do wherever possible (Abdullah et al., 2023; Mihigo et al., 2024). However, child employment has a cost that deprives youngsters of their education, health, and hope for a brighter future while also shortening the poverty cycle. Most children in countries of the third world are employed in sectors like agriculture, domestic work and manufacturing due to several reasons such as illiteracy, and non-enforcement of law on the employment of children and most employers still believe that it is socially acceptable to employ children (Giang et al., 2021).

Aside from the given economic purpose the question of child labour has a social aspect which enables forming expectations for the child and Future Adult as a worker and the value of Education and Family. Childhood socialised into labour posts may début contrasting attitudes toward education and career opportunities and can have low expectations (Chen & Xin, 2022). So, children are locked into enterprises in many societies and are not recognized as individuals entitled to go to school, be healthy, and grow. Notably, child labour is also an economic detriment to a nation as this erodes the capital on humans for a country as it deems education years of future generations (Alemayehu & Fekadu, 2019). Thus, the goal must shift to understanding the role of that facet in the whole social system before proposing solutions which remove not only child labour but also less obvious enablers of the problem.

Importance of Addressing Child Labour for Social Development

Child labor eradication is one of the key principles of social development because it is a factor that affects child health, schooling and overall welfare (Elsayed, 2024). Basic knowledge, skills and other important values in a child are expected to be acquired in childhood but children who are involved in labor are unable to access these essential experiences in childhood (Hoque, 2024; Klymak, 2023). Hence, they miss an opportunity to cultivate a better future. This loss is not only in terms of human capital because educated and healthy children turn into less effective and low-earning adults who in turn continue to replicate the cycle by inducing the circle of poverty and social integration (Camilo & Zuluaga, 2022). Every nation that supports child labor denies itself human capital which is so crucial when it comes to development and economic growth.

The negatively impacted health of children who are engaged in child labor often has severe repercussions in their future (Letsie et al., 2021). The adverse health effects associated with exposure to unhealthy and hazardous working conditions include chronic diseases, major physical injuries, psychological complications as well as several illnesses (Das, 2022). Besides, child labor deprives children of opportunities to learn mentally and physically in future years of their lives (Kozhaya & Martínez Flores, 2022). Preventing these health issues by eliminating child labour helps make sure that children are provided with a safe environment in which to grow and thereby produce wholesome citizens. It is When a society puts its focus on improving the health of children, it is eventually rewarded with a healthy and more productive population several years down the line.

Apart from cases of personal welfare, eradication and prevention of child labor will promote social justice (Cunningham et al., 2024). All children regardless of social or investment status must have the chance of attaining their dreams and achieving their goals. Child labor deprives them of this right perpetuating other injustices of social injustice and rendering vulnerable individuals and groups in society to lack good education and decent jobs (Fuseini & Daniel,

2020). The United Nations and the International Labour Organization (ILO) explained that the theme of ending child labour is consistent with related sustainable development goals which include ending poverty by 2030 (SDG 1), ensuring inclusive and quality education for all (SDG 4) as well as promoting jobs, growth and innovation among others (SDG 8) (Jamal, 2023). The above goals are all to produce a society that is fair as well as accommodating to everyone.

In summary, child labor is not from the single-goal perspective of aiming to spare children from being exploited but creating an educated, good, and sustainable society. When people eradicate child labor, they train the next generation, mentors, creators, agents of change, and employees (Shahraki et al., 2020). This investment enhances the development of people and lays down the social change process in society. Education and caring for our future generation, the children act as a very solid foundation to the ultimate economic development of any society. It turns out to become the record of humanity's aim to improve children's rights and ensure changes in the environment making people capable of building a better world and existence.

Factors Contributing to Child Labour

The use of children in the labour market is a cycle of social, economic, cultural as well as systemic survival that continuously feed on each other in a cycle of exploitation and poverty (Das, 2022; Metta et al., 2023). The principal driver is poverty, but other structural and environmental factors also play their part. Thus, an understanding of these factors in detail will show how it sustains child labour, especially within the context of Malaysia.

Child labour is prevalent in almost all countries in the world and in Malaysia poverty is one of the top causes. The matter stands worse in rural settings and with poor and vulnerable populations across the country including indigenous people and those without legal documents. For instance, young people in the agricultural sector are usually involved in physically demanding tasks by their parents to feed the family (Klymak, 2023; Shahraki et al., 2020). A UNICEF survey conducted in 2020 noted that due to the economic pressure brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, many families mainly in the informal sector, had to move to the more impoverished status hence dropping out of school, children had to work (United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2023).

Another is the absence of quality and affordable education which remains one of the major push factors for child labour (Ajefu & Massack, 2023). This can mean schools are located at a considerable distance from children's homes in remote areas of Malaysia and the cost of transport is exorbitant, especially to poor families. This makes the children drop out of school and work all through to be able to access these services. Besides, the refugee and stateless children in Malaysia are denied legal formal education any time they desire to attain it. In its report for 2019, UNHCR stated that out of refugee children of school-going age, 23,823 were out of school and at risk of exploitation (Birgitte Poulsen-Krogh, 2019).

Additionally, there are competencies for violation of labour laws which are the major causes of child labour, but they are rarely effective. Malaysia's Children and Young Persons (Employment) Act 1966 provides for maximum working hours and prohibited employment activities for children but the Ministries of Agriculture & Agro-based Industry, Domestic Trade & Consumer Affairs, and Small Industries in specific sectors as noted above remain largely unpoliced (Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences, 2023). Refugee children are especially vulnerable to exploitation because they are undocumented, and most labour laws do not apply to them. Lack

of enforcement of these provisions keeps these exploitative practices going especially for people working in the informal economy (Kozhaya & Martínez Flores, 2022).

Child labour is also fuelled by cultural and social beliefs as well as practices (Claudia Cappa, 2021). Culturally inclined norms prevailing in the rural setting regarding the use of children as a labour force consider it as a channel of training a child. This cultural acceptance may lead to child abuse in family-owned businesses, petty businesses or trading (Birgitte Poulsen-Krogh, 2019). For instance, native people in Sabah and Sarawak engage children to work on farms as a cultural virtue among them. Although this work may not seem all that awful for the children, it robs them of education and perpetuates the cycle of poverty.

Migration and statelessness bring special risk factors that make children a convenient target (Alemayehu & Fekadu, 2019). There are many irregular migrants in Malaysia most of whom are residing in vulnerable situations. Their offspring are denied an education and other social amenities which compels them to work (Hoque, 2024). Even so, the situation among Rohingya refugee children in Malaysia is alarming. Lacking protection or rights to receive education, many of them turn to low-wage employment, working in construction, or street selling, and become exploited.

In conclude, the social problem of child labour has several root causes in Malaysia: poverty, inadequate supervision and control over the use of child labour, tradition, and systematic denial of opportunities for any discriminated group, including refugees or stateless persons, with children of immigrants from Southern Thailand and Indonesia at the highest risk. Solving these problems in most countries demands the combination of different measures connected with decreasing the poverty level, increasing the quality of education for everybody, and giving people more effective labour laws. At the same time, it is crucial to help vulnerable people and guarantee children's equal opportunities in life.

Effects of Child Labour

The consequences of child labour on health, education and society are serious, long term and persistent. Such effects are detrimental not only to individual child development but also to the developmental perspectives of society and the economy. This section provides an analysis of these impacts with concrete illustrations as well as research evidence.

Health Impacts

Employment of the child also has the food and the physical and mental health of the child consequences on the child (Devi, 2019; Mihigo et al., 2024). There are children who 'work' in dangerous situations, they are exposed to physical hazards such as being trapped by machines and contact with poisonous substances and can hardly get enough food since they work for extended hours without resting (Kaur & Byard, 2021). For instance, children in Malaysia can be found working in agricultural firms and manufacturing firms where they are exposed to hazards such as the operation of dangerous chemicals and expanding the body in contractive movements that are health risks and cause long-term diseases. Besides, mental health also gets the same treatment as the physical health of society in this sense (Feeny et al., 2021). Working children are stressed, depressed or have any other form of emotional problems due to working and having no school and are sometimes emotionally or physically abused by the employer (Aung & Tewogbola, 2019). For example, UNICEF reported in 2021 that neglected and exploited children who work in informal urban economy sectors are likely to suffer from depression and post-traumatic stress disorder in future (Claudia Cappa, 2021).

Educational Impacts

Consequently, child labour is a great source of change in education as a sector (Kaur & Byard, 2021). Because of working and doing house chores child labourers especially females hardly attend school or drop out, thus these kids do not perform as well academically as per supposed to (Mihigo et al., 2024). Malaysian children from the poor bracket of the society, refugees or indigenes are more vulnerable. For example, early school leaving is apparent to refugee children in Malaysia because of economic constraints and basic needs to support their families.

This lack of education leads to low productivity of children and denies them the chance together with knowledge and skills for their opportunities in future as well as be promoted to higher poverty levels (Letsie et al., 2021; Metta et al., 2023). Such children are socially delayed from their fellow students in developmental and interpersonal skills that would assist them learn how to become responsible citizens, economically productive members of society, as well as healthy (Abdullah et al., 2023).

Societal and Economic Impacts

The loss of child labour from a societal and economic analysis has been historic. During holidays and other long periods, they cannot be allowed to equal their freedom from the cycle of poverty (Baland et al., 2020; Posso, 2023). These people become a liability to their families, communities and national health systems because lack of education denies them a chance for better paying and more secure employment as they grow. Economically, the product given through child labour cuts the stock of human capital (André et al., 2021). For instance, in Malaysia the children allowed to work are barred from any kind of training at all whether it is relevant to the society or has the potential of enhancing the skills of the labour pool (Tang & Zhao, 2023). It has impacts not only on separate families, but also on the overall development of the economy of the country which has a big percentage of the people of young age. An ILO study conducted in 2020 pointed out that countries can achieve spectacular economic growth in the long run if they remove Child labour and invest in education primarily in the developing world including Malaysia (S Chandrarajan, 2023; United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2023). In summary, the social costs of child labour are something that the health, education, and social systems of any country that continues this practice will bear. Solving these problems presupposes the development of ambitious strategies and actions that ensure Children's Right to Education, Health, and Protection (Claudia Cappa, 2021). Eradicating child labour is not only for the right reasons but also a sound business decision regarding the future social economic development of Malaysia and any other country impacted by this practice.

Challenges in Combating Child Labour

There are many limitations in campaigns to eradicate child labour, and they arise from socio-economic factors, cultural beliefs, globalization factors and lack of adherence to standards on labour. These various problems are interrelated and simply cannot be solved over the short term with a single approach which makes the problem persistent and challenging to solve.

Poverty and Informal Work

The lack of elimination of child labour is still blamed on poverty (Devi, 2019). Most children in households with low income secure a cash income and their parents rather compel them to go to work than to school (Cunningham et al., 2024; Fuseini & Daniel, 2020). For example, the children in the rural areas of Malaysia, some of them rely on farming for instance, such children must stay in the farming fields to help their parents earn income for their family needs. This only perpetuates poverty because such a child cannot attend school and has a greater opportunity to

obtain better-paid employment. This problem gets worse when there are informal forms of employment arrangements. Business sectors, including agriculture, domestic work, small-scale trades, and other informal economic sectors, do not normally come under the observation of the legal structures that should prevent child labour (Giang et al., 2021; Metta et al., 2023). A UNICEF report in Malaysia reveals that children with no documentation like refugees or stateless are at high risk of being exploited in sectors where most employers violate labour laws (Claudia Cappa, 2021).

Globalization and Demand for Cheap Labour

Child labour is prevalent in the developing nations and has been attributed to the increased influence of globalisation (Borelli et al., 2023). The demand for cheap human resources from the supply chain has been highly felt from around the world, particularly in the textile, agricultural and manufacturing industries which have been noted for child exploitation (Bellés-Obrero et al., 2023). Currently, the labour standards world over are low and a vast array of multinationals are relocating their production to areas that do not protect workers, which inherently leads to child exploitation. For example, some Malaysian children have been found working in plantations of palm oil, and small factories affiliated to global supply systems (Birgitte Poulsen-Krogh, 2019; MacEachen et al., 2022). They take advantage of the delay that politics gives them and the poor implementation of the anti-children labour laws to make their profits. Measures against this threat entail embracing corporate governance and implementing Supply chain accountability, that is, complying with ILS-affecting strategies of monitoring supply networks (Chen & Xin, 2022).

Weak Enforcement of Labour Laws

There are laws as provided by the labour laws for example protecting children, but implementation of these laws is what becomes hard. In most of the developed countries including Malaysia, such laws are enacted by the state and most of such governments are either disabled have no capacity or have no political muscle to enact and implement those laws appropriately (Mangsor et al., 2021; Posso, 2023). Flaws and vices of the labour inspection systems also lower the bar to beat violators further. For instance, the Children and Young Persons (Employment) Act 1966 of Malaysia established rules concerning child work and acceptable circumstances for employment throughout Malaysia, in addition to the sectors known to be unlawful for children (Institute of Liver and Biliary Sciences, 2023). This is however skewed by poor enforcement, especially in rural and hard-to-reach areas (Feeny et al., 2021). Because there are no frequent inspections and severe consequences for violators, child employment can remain rampant at the hands of employers.

Systemic and Structural Barriers

Child labour eradication therefore calls for radical measures that try to address the root causes of child labour hence social and structural aspects like socio-economic inequity and students' education system deficiencies (Eric Edmonds & Olivier Thévenon, 2019). Many children work because families cannot afford fees or because education is impossible in the developing world. Malaysian refugees and stateless children have other risks so they cannot be in normal schools and government social protection systems (de Hoop et al., 2019). Nevertheless, in the international economic system, the equation of profit is still a measure equal to the employment of reasonable standards of decency (Fumagalli & Martin, 2023). This transforms into a global structure through which the third-world nations are compelled to propose cheap labor with child labour inclusion to attract investors (Abdullah et al., 2023; Jamal, 2023). These structural impediments can thus not be remedied without international cooperation through shifts in the

policies of trade liberalization and through backing for education and poverty-modification establishments in the concerned regions.

Overview, each of the following is a factor which when presented, will be discussed in the challenges that define fighting child labour as key (Eric Edmonds & Olivier Thévenon, 2019; Mihigo et al., 2024). That is why poverty, informal employment, culture, globalization, and insufficient child labour legislation embody the problem. To overcome these hurdles, a complex approach towards poverty reduction policy, mandatory compliance to labour rights, appropriate sensitisation of the public, corporate governance and international cooperation are required. There is no question that child labour requires continuous and comprehensive attack so that the cycle can be broken and a much brighter future prepared for all children.

Comparison Malaysia's Approach with other ASEAN Countries

In addressing the issue of child labour, Malaysia's approach differs from that of other ASEAN countries such as Thailand, Indonesia, and Vietnam. Malaysia has enforced the Children and Young Persons (Employment) Act 1966, which restricts child labour in certain sectors and sets out safe working conditions (Kamaruddin & Zin, 2022). In contrast, Thailand has introduced the Labour Protection Act 1998, which is stricter in prohibiting any form of child labour under the age of 15 and provides special protection for those who work (López, 2023). Indonesia has introduced the National Action Plan for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour (2002-2022), with a focus on social intervention programmes to remove children from high-risk sectors such as agriculture and fisheries (Wulansari, Taufik & Oktavian, 2023). This difference indicates that Malaysia still faces challenges in strengthening enforcement and monitoring mechanisms to ensure compliance with child labour laws.

Malaysian Case Studies

In addition, there are discrepancies in existing studies on the effectiveness of measures taken in Malaysia. A study by Poulsen-Krogh & Ab Wahab (2019) showed that although child labor laws in Malaysia are in line with international standards, their implementation remains weak due to a lack of effective data and monitoring. Establishing clarity and uniformity in the definition of a child across all legislation is essential since the problem of minors working is linked to more general issues like human trafficking and the right to nationality (Soh et al., 2019; Ko & Cooray, 2024).

In addition, a case study in Malaysia shows that child labor still exists in the informal sector including Sabah and Sarawak. A report by UNHCR (2022) found that many migrant children in Malaysia are forced to work on informal sector to support their families due to lack of access to formal education and social protection. This case illustrates the gaps in the protection of child labor in Malaysia, especially for vulnerable groups such as refugees and undocumented migrants. Therefore, more comprehensive efforts are needed to ensure that child labor protection in Malaysia is more comprehensive and effective.

Conclusion

Despite the efforts put in place the problem of child labour counts as an important obstacle to sustainable development harming children's health, education, and social fulfillment. It also undermines the physical status of children applying hazardous working conditions plus long-term effects that are detrimental to a child's psychosocial well-being. Lacking education, these children cannot learn what is required to find well-paid work and escape the vicious cycle of poverty. Therefore, the issue of child labour should be solved for the future enhancement of

economic and social development in any given country. Thus, the enabling legislation the Children and Young Person (Employment) Act, Sabah Labour Ordinance and Sarawak Labour Ordinance permits the employment of young persons but within the permissible conditions as the type of employment; number of working days; and hours of work. About this it is important to note that section 12 of the Children and Young Person (Employment) Act (Amended 2018) provides that no child below the age of 12 years should be allowed to work in anyway but rather be sent to school (S Chandrarajan, 2023). It is also worthy to note that though the term ‘child labour’ is not specifically given in the above-mentioned legislations, but it refers to the work which should not be done by children and young persons. Refer to Table 2 that shows comparison between the Children and Young Person (Employment) Act, Sabah Labour Ordinance and Sarawak Labour Ordinance (Birgitte Poulsen-Krogh, 2019).

Child labour exists in Malaysia, and as such eliminating the problem entails a radical solution that must focus on economic, educational and legal reforms. First, the issue of poverty remains a paramount concern since due to financial hardships families force their kids to work. Measures like giving incentives like conditional cash transfers to families and parents, defraying vocational training costs to parents, and subsidizing costs of education to families in the low-income bracket can partly address this problem, and operate to decrease the economic benefits to child labour, or shift costs of child labour to others. In this way, the government can eliminate the necessity of children’s engagement in work when investing in education and offering financial support. Another of the recommendations is the enhancement of the quality education accessibility. This can explain the distance and cost of schools as the issues which remain as obstacles for many children in rural schools to attend classes. Investing in facilities, eliminating or reducing school fees, and providing transport means to reach out to out-of-reach schools can greatly boost enrolment and attendance rates. Furthermore, schooling improvements must address the need for educational facilities to be meaningful to children in rural areas and there should be such improvements as vocational skills training for schools and educational programs that may involve the community.

Moreover, a change of cultural mindset and perception towards child labour needs a lot of effort and one of them is this. To afford the child an education and to avoid developments because of child labour that continues to impact the child negatively in the future, public awareness by posting both children and parents using fliers or bulletin notices emphasizing the value of education. Through education operations, as the way towards improving opportunities for higher returns, the campaigns may assist in addressing firmly rooted beliefs that see child labour as acceptable. Substantial improvements in the effectiveness of child labour laws must be made, as well as better enforcement of existing laws, especially in the areas where child labour is concentrated, such as agriculture and domestic work. It may be possible for this matrix of cooperation of government ministries, the ILO and NGOs to establish and monitor proper and effective age verification systems and compliance with labour regulations. Furthermore, the severe consequences to any violators together with increased resources needed for labour inspections would help eradicate child exploitation.

In conclusion, it could be said that comprehensive measures on the Malaysian government level and non-governmental organizations and international cooperation support from civil organizations are required to mitigate the problem of child labour. The problem of child labour is solvable through poverty eradication, education facility enhancement for kids, and increasing the efficiency of police work to protect children’s rights to receive proper education and no

working. Through eradicating the source and changing the community Malaysia can safeguard the children and build a better future for citizens.

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