

How does child labour affect children?

A case study from India

The difference between 'child labour' and 'child work' is that child labour refers to work that is harmful to children. It is work that is mentally or physically dangerous, work that interferes with their ability to go to school which can affect their income-earning potential as adults. The health and wellbeing of child labourers is at risk, and they can end up being trapped in a cycle of poverty.

There are a number of ways that child labour can affect children, and these can vary depending on which industry the child is working in. Generally, child labourers can suffer from long-term health problems due to malnutrition, exposure to chemicals, abuse, injuries, exhaustion, and psychological harm.¹

- In agriculture, children may be exposed to toxic pesticides or fertilisers. They work with dangerous blades and tools, and carry heavy loads.
- In mining, children may use poisonous chemicals, face the risk of mine collapse, and sometimes work with explosives.
- In construction, children may carry heavy loads, work at heights without safety equipment, and risk injury from dangerous machinery.
- In manufacturing, children may use toxic solvents, perform repetitive tasks in painful positions, and risk injury from sharp tools.
- In domestic work, children risk abuse, work long hours, and often live in isolation from their families and friends.

Raj's story

The gem and jewellery industry is important in India both domestically and for export. Owning jewellery is a status symbol in India, and as people earn more money the demand for jewellery increases. Particularly known for diamonds, gemstones and gold, in 2013 the Indian gems and jewellery industry's domestic market was worth \$US40.45 billion, and it exported goods worth \$US36.04 billion.² Jewellery manufacturing is a labour intensive activity. Use of child labour has been reported around the world in mining the raw materials, such as gold, used in jewellery production. Children are also used to cut and polish gem stones, as well as making the final jewellery product.³

Raj* works for a small business, based in one of India's larger cities, making gold jewellery. Now 12-years-old, he started working at the business when he was 10. Raj's family are poor, and when his father died the family struggled financially. His mother works as a domestic maid but her earnings aren't enough to provide food for the family and cover the cost of school fees and equipment. Raj and his brother had to leave school and start working. He earns the equivalent of approximately \$A18 per month.

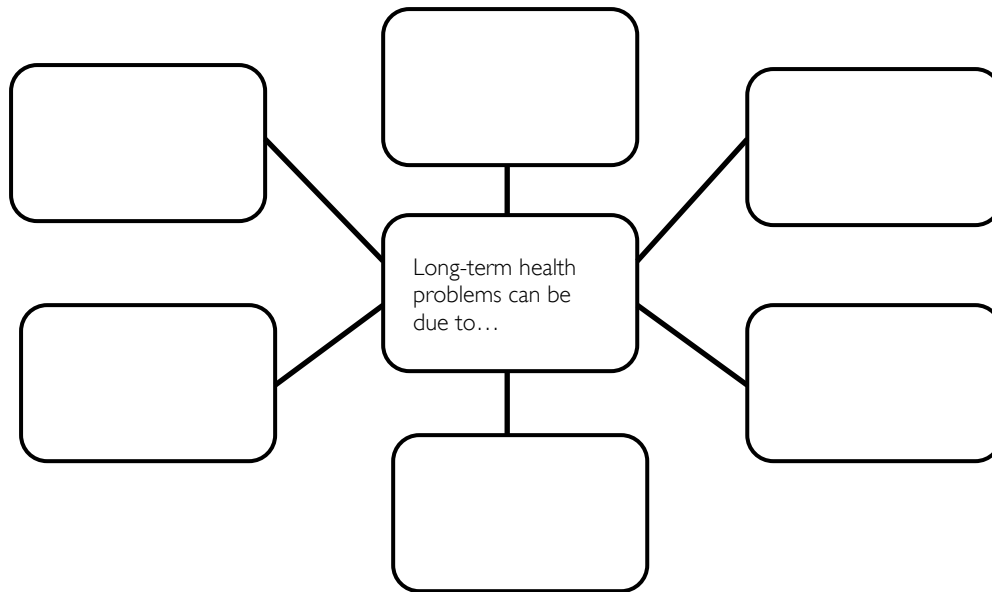
Raj undertakes tasks like cutting the gold, imprinting designs on the jewellery, and collecting gold flakes for reuse. It is intricate, detailed work which Raj has said starts hurting his eyes when he works for a long time. His hands get cut and scratched, sometimes the skin peels off from the chemicals. Occasionally gold flakes get in his eyes, which hurt to get out. His mother talks about her worry that her children are okay, particularly as Raj typically finishes work late, and the local community can be dangerous at night.

Raj wants to be a computer engineer when he is older. He enjoys learning and doesn't like missing school. Over the last year Raj has been able to return to school in the mornings, and then work at the shop in the afternoon and evening. Community projects provided his family with interest-free loans, school materials, remedial tuition, and access to a savings program.

* Name changed to protect identity

For you to do

1. Child labourers can experience long-term health problems from working. Complete the diagram identifying common causes of these problems.



2. Use the following words to fill in the blank spaces and complete the paragraph⁴ about the long-term economic effects child labourers can experience due to missing out on school:

education hazardous labour poverty unemployed work

Starting work early, in the form of child labour, can affect prospects for decent _____ throughout a person's life. Children who miss out on school, or who have a disrupted _____, are less likely to have the skills needed for securing decent work. As adults they are more likely to be _____ or experience job insecurity. They are more likely to work in _____ conditions and/or have a low income. As they are likely to be living in _____, these adults are also more likely to have to rely on their own children working in order for the family to have enough money to survive and be able to afford basic necessities. This continues the child _____-poverty cycle into the next generation.

3. Read Raj's story and look at the photos in the *How does child labour affect children?* photo kit. Write either two diary entries for Raj, one from when he first started working and another for when he returned to school, or write a short opinion piece for a newspaper about the challenges child labourers face, using Raj as an example.

¹ WVA, *Unlucky for some: 13 myths about child labour*, 2014

² India Brand Equity Foundation, "Gems and Jewellery Industry in India", www.ibef.org/industry/gems-jewellery-india.aspx [accessed Nov 2015]

³ WVA, *Behind the bling: Forced and child labour in the global jewellery industry*, 2013

⁴ adapted from: International Labour Organization, *World Report on Child Labour*, 2015, p. 6