

Why does child labour occur?

Case studies from India

There are many reasons why children end up working in jobs that can have long hours and/or dangerous conditions. Typically all of these reasons stem from their families living in extreme poverty which makes them vulnerable to economic shocks and needing children to work for the family's survival.

Reasons why children work

Some of the common reasons why children can end up working in a child labour situation include:

- **Low family income** – adults in the family are unemployed or have extremely low wages. They do not earn enough to cover the family's costs. This can also mean they do not have savings so are vulnerable to any economic / financial shocks, such as increasing prices for necessities like food.
- **Debt** – in order to cover costs, particularly large unexpected costs such as medical bills, the family borrows money and may become "debt-bonded" where their labour is used in exchange for the loan.
- **Illness or death in the family** – extended illness or death in the family can result in expensive medical bills, and loss of income.
- **Gender stereotypes** – girls can face discrimination with expectations they will work for the family, particularly in the household, rather than go to school.
- **Inter-generational** – if parents were child labourers themselves, it can be seen as tradition or appropriate for children to work, particularly if they are expected to work for and eventually take over the family small business or farm.

Why might child labour used?

Children may be used by a business (including family businesses) in order to keep their costs low. Children are not paid as much as adults and can be seen as easier to control. They are less likely to demand higher wages or better working conditions. As a result of lower costs, the business owner may receive higher profits and/or be able to sell the product for less which can make it more attractive to consumers.

Child labour in India

India has the largest total number of child labourers in the world.¹ India also has the largest total number of people living on less than \$1.25 a day.² The table below compares some of the development indicators for India with those for Australia.³

Indicators	India	Australia
Human Development Index rank (out of 187)	135 th (medium)	2 nd (very high)
Total population	1,252.1 million	23.3 million
Life expectancy at birth	66.4 years	82.5 years
Average years of schooling	4.4 years	12.8 years
Gross National Income per capita (\$US)	\$5,150	\$41,524
People living on less than \$US1.25 a day	32.68%	n/a
Child labour (as a % of children aged 5-14 years-old)	11.8%	n/a

A 2009-10 Government survey found that for child labourers aged 5 to 14 years-old, 69.5 percent worked in the agricultural sector, 17.5 percent worked in industrial sector, and 13.0 percent worked in the services sector.⁴



For you to do

1. Look at the photos in the *Why does child labour occur?* photo kit. For each person listed identify the reason(s) why they or their children work.

Dinesh _____

Khalid _____

Misarun _____

Premvati _____

Sobha _____

2. Not every situation where children need to work to help their family is 'child labour'. Look at the photos in the *Why does child labour occur?* photo kit and identify the person who they or their children are an example of child work rather than child labour. Explain why this is child work rather than child labour.

3. Watch the first 1 minute 16 seconds of the film clip *Child labour in India*. Kailash Satyarthi, an Indian child rights activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner, outlines some of the common reasons for child and exploited labour in India. Note: this film clip references some older statistics about child labour.

With a partner, use the information from the film clip, the photo kit, and the previous page of this worksheet, to create a mind map showing the reasons why child labour occurs. Group the reasons into categories, for example: social and cultural factors; economic factors; environmental factors; and, personal factors.

4. Write a paragraph discussing why poverty is an underlying cause of child labour.

¹ Childline India Foundation, "Child Labour in India", www.childlineindia.org.in/child-labour-india.htm

² United Nations, The Millennium Development Goals Report 2015, p.15

³ United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Report 2014

⁴ US Department of Labour's Bureau of International Labour Affairs, "India", *2013 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labour*, p. 1