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# *Eco-Fun-omics: Child Labor vs Child Starvation; Which is a Greater Evil?!*

This job of mine is worst I hate,  
My mother says Dear Tom, this is our fate,  
My Father says go to work, if you want a full plate.  
I'm sure I'll fall sick and die, if I work at this rate.

My greatest dream is to learn,  
And to get a job by it and earn,  
When I see other school going boys, My heart burns,  
With desire to study, Alas! my heart can only yearn!!!

(<http://tcst.weebly.com/some->

[poems-on-child-labour.html](http://tcst.weebly.com/some-poems-on-child-labour.html))

Hello friends! I have been too preoccupied to publish this article. It was one of my students who was curious about my next article and asked me to publish it asap. So, here it goes.

This topic has been in discussion for ages. However, for me it was an international conference which drew my attention towards this issue. My economic history professor, Dr. Anirban Mukherjee (PhD, University of British Columbia), needs to be acknowledged because he arose my desire to study this topic. We all know how terribly child labor can affect our society. However, the question we are discussing here is 'Child Labor vs Child Starvation; Which is a Greater Evil?!'. So if you want the eviction of child labor, child starvation crops up and vice versa. Basically, it is a vicious cycle – trying to cleanse one evil will result to the birth of a second one. We will try to provide an answer to the question which has a more sinister influence on our society.

**Child labor** refers to the employment of children in any work that deprives children of their childhood, interferes with their ability to attend regular school and that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful. This practice is considered exploitative by many international organisations. Legislation across the world prohibit child labor. (Source : [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child\\_labour](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Child_labour))

About 168 million children around the world remain trapped in child labor while at the same time there are 75 million young persons aged 15 to 24 years of age who are unemployed and many more who must settle for jobs that fail to offer a fair income, security in the workplace, social protection or other basic decent work attributes. The case for accelerated global action targeting child labor and the lack of decent work opportunities for youth is very clear.

A recent study showed that child labor is directly proportionate to the drop out rate of a country. As these kids leave school and education, they become victim of child slavery. Elementary education is a critical input in human resource development & necessary for countries economic growth. Male students drop out mainly to seek jobs while female students drop out to help in domestic works. The mid-day meal works as an incentive at times. Just a single incentive is not enough to the BPL (below-the-poverty-line) children to continue studying. Over the years we can see and improvement but definitely the slow rate of improvement is not enough.

There may be various causes of child labor – but the main ones are poverty and hunger. Scientific research has shown that child labor takes away the mental, emotional and physical ability of a child to grow and nourish. They either become mentally and emotionally dull or physically incapable to live a normal adult life. Needless to mention, this would take away the opportunity of the country to flourish.

The prevalence of undernourishment, as a share of the population, is the main hunger indicator used by the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization. It measures the share of the population which has a caloric (dietary energy) intake which is insufficient to meet the minimum energy requirements defined as necessary for a given population. '*Malnutrition of Rural Children and the Sex Bias*' by Amartya Sen

and Sunil Sengupta cited that, there is a greater prevalence of undernourishment among girls than among boys. Also, in rural India the undernourishment is more among the children of the landless farmers.

According to me child starvation is a bigger threat compared to child labor. Let me try to explain the co relation between child labor and child malnutrition. In most poor family they suffer from both. A family sends their children to work primarily to earn. The low income of a family is the main reason for this poverty trap. An extra earning member is thought to help in meeting the ends. With child labor and low income being correlated, providing resources to child laborers may seem like a good way to target aid to poor households. Basically, helping the poor households eat twice a day. The Government laws prohibiting child labor can work against the society.

Firstly, empty stomachs will produce thieves and criminals. Secondly, providing education to students who are food deprived, wouldn't actually help. Mid-day meals are definitely a good way to tackle the problem. However, we must not forget that all children do not get themselves enrolled and the drop out percentage is high. Keeping everything in mind, it would not be wrong to say simply targeting child labor without providing the poor households with other earning opportunity will actually aggravate the situation i.e. children will be illegally transported for jobs. Curbing the problem from the base is important. Just like a crouton, snipping at the top will lead to more sinister branches. Many economist have the opinion that a higher reservation wage of the adults of a family will be helpful in such a situation. In labor economics, 'reservation wage' is the lowest wage rate at which a worker would be willing to accept a particular type of job. However, I have a slightly different opinion. Simply increasing the reservation wage wouldn't be helpful. We need to look at the demand side too. Here, laborers contribute to the supply side. Raising their reservation wage might seem an efficient way to curb the problem but we cannot ignore the fact that this would raise the cost to an employer. Hence, it would reduce the demand of a labor. It will be helpful, if and only if, the labor demand curve is relatively inelastic in nature i.e. an employer cannot do without it's employees (or workers). This is true for two cases, firstly highly educated or skilled job like astronomy. Secondly, in urban areas for extremely unskilled work like sewage cleaning jobs or so.

I might be questioned if 'I have an opinion in favor of child labor?' My answer would be 'no'. I am taking neither the side of child labor nor the side of child starvation. When we are comparing child labor and child starvation we must not forget prohibiting child labor does not imply the prosperity of a child. In fact, if a factory employing children is shut down, this can also mean that those little ones are left to die with starvation. All I want to state here is, 'flexible child labor prohibiting laws'. What I intend to ascertain is that in order to prevent one evil, we as a society should not encourage another evil. The Government can establish certain rehabilitation programs for those child labors who would lose their livelihood because of a certain child labor prohibiting laws. For example, a camp can be set up for those children where for a few months the importance of education can be taught and proper food is also provided. This way, we can expect these children not to contribute to the existing drop out rates. There can be various other alternative ways, which will limit the existence of both evil sisters. We as a society are pretty capable to give these little innocent hearts a chance to live a normal, happy and a colorful life.