The working hours of unpaid child workers in the handloom industry in India

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Introduction

Child labour is rampant in various forms in most developing countries in spite of several prohibitory legislative measures enacted by national governments and by the United Nations under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The rights of the child are important in protecting children from any economic exploitation and from doing work that hampers their education, or that is detrimental to their mental, physical, moral, or social development (UNHR 1989). Yet there is no sign of decline in the use of child labour and it continues unabated. The economic circumstances of the households and the sluggish economic development of poor countries are held to be the primary factors that have impeded the success of governments' efforts in abolishing child labour. It is argued that in developing countries, without the support and contribution of the unpaid child labour, the survival of millions of households suffering from extreme poverty would be at stake. However, it is never realised that the use of child labour not only hampers the development and growth of the child, but also deprives the households and the nation of the probable potential benefits of the creative talents that would have accrued to them, had the chilren been properly socialised and brought up. The other striking feature of the popular use of child labour is the time allocation and their work schedule where the traditional cultural norm of gender bias is religiously followed and applied as a rule of thumb.

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Murshidabad district, in the state of West Bengal, India, is famous for producing *gamchha* (a popular traditional napkin used by the local people) by handlooms which are owned and operated by households themselves in their homes. The area is characterised by a massive concentration of family-based handlooms where children routinely work without wages or incentives. They do work for the maintenance and wellbeing of their own households on which their identity and survival depend. Most of the households including children and women in the area are weavers, weaving is their primary occupation and source of livelihood. With the introduction of mechanised looms, they have of late been confronted with new challenges of competition in respect to pricing and a wide variety of products available in the market. The control of the handloom industry lies with the master weavers who provide raw materials on a credit basis to households for weaving *gamchha*, with the condition that they must return the products to the master weavers, and in return, be paid a piece rate wage for the product. In cases where households fail to deliver the products to the master weavers, it is construed and treated as a breach of contract that necessitates and warrants the imposition of *ghatthi* (a kind of fine imposed) on defaulting households. The involvement of child

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labour ranges from 20 to 30 hours per week. The future of unpaid child labour is the core concern of the debate among policy-makers, development protagonists and academics which centres on the share of child labour in paid and unpaid work, time spent on different work, and their involvement in household chores. Against this backdrop we attempt to explore the differential treatment of child labour in the allocation of time, their work schedule, and schooling on gender basis.

Literature review

A society's culture plays an important role in determining the working hours of child workers. Scholars find that in a highly gender segregated society, girls suffer hardship than boys and are less likely to go to school (Khan and Lyon 2015). However, in some cases, boys are at greater risk than girls because of their involvement in hazardous and onerous work (Boyden *et al.* 1998). Girls do more household chores (Bashir 1994; Boyden 1994; Delap 2001; Fallon and Tzannatos 1998; Gazaleh *et al.* 2004; Ilahi 2001; ILO 1996), because family characteristics play an important role in deciding children's work and schooling (Rosangela *et al.* 2005). This is due to a labour market orientated against women. Another explanation is that parents treat sons differently where the father's education has a noteworthy effect on child workers. Girls work even when it is not necessary and this discrimination is consistent with the lower expected returns from schooling compared to boys (Bhalhotra 2001). In rural areas, girls spend twice as much time as boys, and in urban areas girls spend three times more than boys in unpaid work (Bashir 1994).

Indian working children are unpaid in family-based enterprises (Swaminathan 1998). They receive wages for cleaning cement bags, plaiting plastic ropes, collecting waste, etc. and their parents receive all their earnings. The debate is whether an increase in household income will lead to a decrease in their work. It is observed that an increase in household income has not led to decrease in girls household chores (Kambhampati and Rajan 2008); more importantly, girls' labour complements their mothers' work in family-based enterprises. Likewise, South Asian girls face intra-family discrimination in feeding (Harriss 1990), yet it is not nutritional differential treatment, which implies an advantage in welfare. It is due to labour market orientation in favour of males. Turkish children work in family enterprises as unpaid family workers (Dayioğlu 2006). Gender-based distinctions in work performed by boys and girls in Ghana (Canagarajah and Coulombe, 1997) is also documented. In Thailand, girls work 15 hours more per week in domestic services, but in Vietnam and Zambia, children's work does not have a strong gender differentiation, where the share of boys and girls in economic activities and in school is almost equal (UCW 2009a, UCW 2009b). Zambian children differ little in economic activities, but girls are much more likely to give up school than boys to undertake work. Peruvian girls adjust their working time more than boys in response to changes in their mother's job or sickness of a family member. They spend more time in household work compared to boys, while boys spend more on income-generating activities than girls. Therefore, in indigent households the time allocation of girls is high (Ilahi 2001). Girls face discrimination in Bangladesh too, when performing household work, as parents take no account of unpaid household chores performed by girls (Delap 2001). They work more in income-generating activities. In Pakistan also, gender discrimination in employment is significant; girls are more likely to be unpaid family workers in both urban and rural areas (Hazarika and Bedi 2003; Khan and Lyon 2015).

Social and religious circumstances affect working time and study time, leading to gender discrimination. Gender difference in Egypt is remarkable, where girls worked 13 hours more per week than boys (Gazaleh *et al.* 2004). However, children work less in rich households, as educated mothers do not let girls work. Community variables also play an important role. Children work longer hours due to the poor quality or unavailability of schools, electricity, and drinking water in their community (Akabayashi and Psacharopoulos 1999). Neither the size of the farmland nor of the bank account have any significant impact, but boys with many siblings work longer. Social norms that favour boys result in girls being ignored or overlooked, valued less, nourished less, asked to work harder, and denied their rights to mental, physical, social, and intellectual development. In poor families, the situation of girls is worse: they are treated as pseudo members of the family, since they hope to wed and depart their paternal home, and they are

trained in household chores and income-generating activities so that after marriage they are simply accepted in their in-laws' home (Gazaheh *et al.* 2004). Girls achieve less social recognition and are less visible than boys (Burra 1995; Kambhampati and Rajan 2008), they work for longer hours than boys in socially isolating occupations like domestic services that make it difficult to attend school (Boyden 1994). Girls are relatively disadvantaged compared to boys (Jayaraj and Subramanian 2002).

In the handloom industry, especially in poor families, working children supplement the family income. Parents want to have more children just to increase manpower. Children in the family are a source of cheap labour as they work in return for food and shelter. Girls are seen as a liability as there are fewer job opportunities for them. Education for girls is considered to be unfruitful, a waste of money and time, it is discerned as hopeless for future benefit to them. Guardians are unwilling to send girls to school, because the future return is not equal to the value of the present work that they provide at home. This discrimination is very apparent in the match industry of Sivakasi because employers employ young girls and they are paid less than boys (Weiner 1996).

Education and morbidity trends resulting from the discriminatory allocation of time among unpaid working boys and girls are of great interest, but there is a dearth of study on the working hours of unpaid working children in the handloom industry. Pal *et al.* (2011a) found that the greater the size of the households, the higher the risk of morbidity among unpaid working children. The decision on whether the child should go to school depends upon the household's economic circumstances. Poor families are generally compelled to send their children to work in order to survive, imposing constraints upon their children's schooling. It is well documented that the probability of the children attending school increases with the increase in a household's standard of living (Pal *et al.* 2011b) that helps to reduce discrimination.

Methods

This study is based on primary data collected through field visits to the handloom unit in each household as well as interviews and discussions with parents and children working with handlooms in the Domkal Block of Murshidabad District. We conducted the field survey between January 2008 and August 2008. The total number of households visited was 327, and in each household only the head of the household and a child (166 girls and 161 boys) between the ages of 5 and 14 years were selected for interview. The main objectives of this study are as follows:

(1) to measure the inequality of working time among the children – the Lorenz curve is computed separately for the male and female children; and
(2) to determine the relationship between working hours and socio-economic factors. Regression analysis has been performed, simple bi-variate tables and correlation matrix computed to find out the working time spent on household chores that children share beyond their unpaid family work and schooling.

Results and discussion

In this study, children are classified in three categories: (i) unpaid family workers; (ii) self-employed; and (iii) employed. It is observed from the sample that the number of employed or self-employed children is very small as compared to 97.6 per cent of unpaid family workers. The female children comprised 51.41 per cent of unpaid workers and male children comprised 48.59 per cent of unpaid workers. Among the unpaid workers, the male and female children contribute nearly the same share, 51 per cent and 49 per cent respectively, while the other two categories are strongly differentiated by sex. In paid work, 33.33 per cent are female children and 66.67 per cent are male children. Similarly, for self-employment only 20 per cent are female children.

Equal allocation of time between male and female children is a natural phenomenon and utilisation of time is the building block of one's social, physical, mental, moral, spiritual, and aesthetic development. More concisely, allocation of time for working children should be optimised, because the unfortunate children from poor families have to spend their golden time contributing to earning their livelihood. In this investigation, we find that a child has to spend as much as eight to

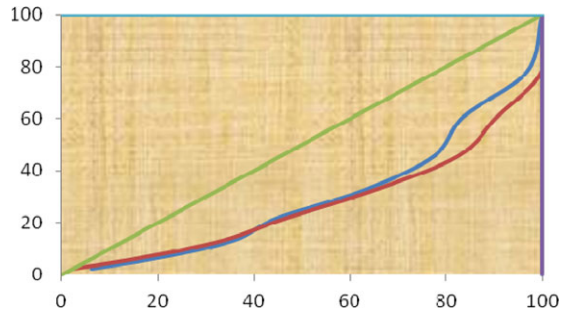

FIGURE 1. Work share within group inequalities.
Population share in the X-axis and Total hours share in the Y-axis. Blue curve is for the male and red curve is for the female.
[Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

ten hours a day in family work, neglecting their education. We observe that children spend on an average 4.52 hours per day in handloom activities. The Lorenz curve is drawn to ascertain time spent by the girls and boys. Fig. 1 shows that the share of girls and boys are almost same, with two to six hours scheduled. It is true that the working time of male and female children will not be same. Therefore, inequalities in the distribution of time for each and every activity for individual children should be investigated. The Lorenz curve depicts the inequalities between male and female children in time spent in various work. It is slightly higher for male children. Both boys and girls, about 75 per cent of them, fall into the bottom 30 per cent of the time schedule but the boys' share rises with longer hours.

Regression analysis has been carried out to investigate the effects of socio-economic factors, on which working hours depend, by taking the independent variables of caste structure, type of family, household size, number of females in the household, educational level of mother, educational level of the head of the household, number of children, number of male children above 14 years, whether the household possesses assets or agricultural land, savings, gender of the working child, rest time the child gets, and the number of looms in the household. Table 1 describes the independent variables. Along with these variables we consider awareness factors of the parents, whether they believe that their son or daughter or both of them should go to school, and whether the children should bear the responsibility of sharing the economic burden of the family combined with their schooling.

Some of the predictor variables are not statistically significant, but their association with the dependent variable, considering the sign of the β-coefficients, is important. However, we consider only the significant predictors. Table 2 shows that the multiple correlation value 0.856, indicates that the dependent variable can be well explained by the predictors about 86 per cent.

We find, from the Table 3, a negative relation between working hours and the caste system, i.e., higher caste children work less while children from a nuclear family have to spend much more time working. The interesting finding is: the greater the number of females in a family, the lower the children's working hours; and the larger the size of the household, the longer the working hours of children. This is due to the fact that educational level of the mother plays an important positive role in reducing her children's working hours.

We further find that a well-built house or a household with assets shows a negative relation with long working hours. As the number of looms in the households increases, working hours also increase, but an increase in the number of male children over 14 years old is likely to lead to a decrease in working hours. Children belonging to households possessing less agricultural land are required to work more. Where households believe that there should be a gender difference in educating their children or engaging them in work, these beliefs have been reflected in their children's long working hours. The maximum number of child respondents who are working to support their family have more working hours. Boys are allocated more working hours, indicating they are working more

TABLE 1. Description of the independent variables in regression analysis

Variable	*Notation*	*Description*
Caste structure	Dcaste	Higher caste = 1, otherwise = 0
Family type	Dfam	Nuclear family = 1, joint = 0
No. of females in the household	Nofemale	Number of female members in the household
Household size	Hhsize	Total number of members in the household
Education of head of household	DeduHoH	Up to primary level education = 1, otherwise = 0
Education of spouse of head of household	Deduwife	Up to primary level education = 1, otherwise = 0
Number of children in the household	Children	Number of children
Male children above 14 years	Childm14	Number of male children above 14 years of age
Whether the parents make any gender difference when sending their children to school	Dgenderdiff	Yes = 1 No = 0
Parents' belief whether the children should both work and study	Dwrkstud	Yes = 1 No = 0
Parents' belief whether both son and daughter should go to school	DwhoSchl	Yes = 1 No = 0
Agriculture land	Dagrland	Yes = 1 No = 0
Assets	Dassets	Assets consisted of bicycle, wrist watch, television, mobile phone, and radio; each item carries 1 point, giving a maximum household score of 5
Gender of the child	Dgender	Boy = 1 Girl = 0
Numbers of looms in the household	NoLooms	Number of looms in the household
Nature of the household	Dnature	Pucca or semi Pucca = 1 Kuchha = 0

The dependent variable: working hours spent in unpaid work by each child.

TABLE 2. Model summary

Model[b]	*R*	*R Square*	*Adjusted R Square*	*Std. Error of the Estimate*	*Durbin-Watson*
1	.856[a]	.732	.714	−.045	1.720

[a]Predictors: (Constant), RestTime, DEduWife, DTypeFam, childm14, DNature, DWhoSchl, DBPL, DWrkStud, DEduHoH, DSave, DWhenWrk, NoLooms, DAgrLand, DCaste, DWhyWork, DAssets, GenderChild, children, nofemale, DGoSchool
[b]Dependent variable: working hours

compared to the girls. Children attending school are devoting less time to enterprise work, so sending them to school is a factor to reduce child labour. We also find from the analysis that the children of the family with no savings, are likely to work fewer hours, which is apparently against the general wisdom that a family with more assets is demanding fewer working hours from their children. In other words, a positive response for savings indicates that long working hours for children in the family enables them to save.

The involvement of working children in household chores

We find from Table 4 that girls are mostly doing the household chores like cleaning and cooking work while boys are engaged in shopping or other household work. Caring for siblings is not an important work given to them as revealed from the data set.

The important findings revealed from the correlation matrix, Table 5, are that an upper caste household shows a positive relation with all household work done by the children.

This indicates a social as well as an economic solvency of the households to do work in the handloom industry. The number of girls also provides a positive relation with cooking and cleaning. It is so, as the girls have been included in this number. The relation is same with household size. The educational level of the head of the household and the mother's education is negatively related to the hours worked by the children, which is

TABLE 3. Results of regression coefficients

Variable	*Unstandarised Coefficient β*	*Standard error*	*t*
Constant	6.406	0.557	11.506
No. of females	−0.216	0.082	−2.644
No. of children	0.277	0.074	3.754
No. of children over 15 years	−0.160	0.100	−1.909
DBpl	−0.271	0.140	−1.931
Dsaving	0.292	0.170	0.720
Dgotoschool	−0.876	0.310	−2.826
Dwhy work	−1.493	0.190	−7.851
Dwhen work	1.865	0.328	5.692
RestTime	−1.770	0.147	−12.078

Dependent variable: working hours

TABLE 4. Descriptive statistics of household chores performed by children

	No			*Yes*			
Variable	*Girls*	*Boys*	*Total*	*Girls*	*Boys*	*Total*	*Pearson Chi-square*
Cleaning	126 (75.90)	143 (88.80)	269 (82.30)	40 (24.90)	18 (11.20)	58 (17.70)	.002
Cooking	127 (76.50)	157 (97.50)	284 (86.90)	39 (23.50)	4 (2.50)	43 (13.10)	.000
Shopping	147 (88.60)	101 (62.70)	284 (75.80)	19 (11.40)	60 (37.30)	79 (24.20)	.000
Caring siblings	166 (100.00)	156 (96.90)	322 (98.50)	0 (000)	5 (3.10)	5 (1.50)	.022
Other jobs	136 (81.90)	115 (71.40)	251 (76.80)	30 (18.10)	46 (28.60)	76 (23.20)	.025

TABLE 5. Correlation matrix of the household chores with different socio-economic variables

Socio-economic variables	*Cleaning*	*Cooking*	*Shopping*	*Caring for siblings*	*Other jobs*
Caste	0.325**	0.211**	0.200**	0.019	−0.170**
No. of females in the household	0.183**	0.175**	−0.049	−0.034	0.098
Household size	0.154**	0.140	−0.007	0.083	0.215**
Education of head of household	−0.122*	−.082	−0.115*	0.033	−0.018
Education of spouse of head of household	0.041	−.050	0.053	−0.044	−0.064
Family type	−.0163**	−.055	−0.106	−0.023	0.010
BPL	0.099	0.090	0.166**	−0.068	−0.170**
Whether child goes to school	0.143**	0.098	0.108	0.021	−0.484**
Rest time of the child	−.002	−0.130*	−0.027	−0.052	−0.439*
Assets of the household	0.051	0.018	0.096	−0.008	−0.092
Agricultural land	00	−0.107	0.105	0.054	−0.047

** 0.01 level of significance and * indicates .05 level of significance.

the result expected from the analysis. Because the mother's education or the education of the head of the household has a significant role in developing their children's future. The households below the poverty level (BPL) show a positive relationship with the children's working hours. Households possessing assets show a positive relation with working hours. The male children have positive relation with shopping and looking after siblings and a negative relation with cleaning or cooking jobs, which are mainly performed by the female children.

Conclusions

On the basis of data analysis, we find that the children devoting their valuable time to work are mostly unpaid, and their paid work is strongly defined by gender roles. The boys' share is small in paid or self-employed work, while the number of girls in paid work is almost negligible. Girls are deprived from their childhood, and treated as being unpaid. The deprivation of girls in the households is also reflected in labour market in developing countries, like Bangladesh, Pakistan or Zambia, where girls are mostly engaged in unpaid work. In our sample we find no sharp contrast in the share of boys and girls in unpaid work.

The analysis focused the allocation of time in two ways: first, how the girls or boys spend time on family-based enterprise work and how they spent time on household chores. On average, children work 4.52 hours per day, i.e., 31.64 hours per week in a handloom enterprise and the time allocation in different work schedules differed according to sex of the child. The boys' share is greater for the longer spell, i.e., when the time is more than eight to ten hours. It may be due to the fact that girls take part in household chores which prevents them from doing family-based handloom work. Some social or economic factors like upper caste families, having valuable assets, the number of female members, the education of the mother or the head of the household, or the number of male children in a household, or habits of going to school are determinants of the working time of child workers. On the other hand, parents' mental backwardness, and the number of looms are more likely to increase children's working hours. Moreover, a decrease in the possession of agricultural land is more likely to increase the working hours of the child workers in the handloom industry. This means that there is an occupational shifting of landless families away from agriculture, as they stick to only one occupation, and are forced to use their children in handloom work. Apart from working as unpaid labour, these unfortunate children have to provide labour in typical household work. Girls have to perform cooking or cleaning, whereas the boys usually do the shopping or other jobs. Girls are thus brought up with a view that they will be able to perform typical feminine jobs, whereas boys are encouraged to do other work not related to household chores. Hence the double burden of girls starts from early childhood and their future exclusion from the labour market depends upon deep-rooted family systems.

Economic growth in India is not enough to combat discrimination against the unequal working hours of boys and girls, and its elimination cannot be achieved in isolation (ILO 2006). Government policies must be combined with the right strategy, focusing on equality, equal opportunity for girls and boys, freedom from exploitation, free education for all children, and a change in the attitude of parents towards girls. In the 2016 Olympic Games, Indian women performed better than men in spite of unequal treatment, which indicates that the discriminatory treatment in working hours between boys and girls is harmful for well-being and future of our country.

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