

# ***Exploitation and Exclusion***

## ***A Socio-Cultural Analysis of Child Labour in Iran***

**Kameel Ahmady<sup>1</sup>**

### **Abstract**

Poverty and unemployment in families may produce child labour. These and other factors, such as uneven development, may deprive parts of society from social privileges. Indeed, uneven development is the main cause of poverty and unemployment, especially in a country's marginal, ethnic and religious areas. Following the Revolution, Iranian society was confronted with a rising population – it has doubled over the four decades. Unlike the population, the country's economy has not experienced a boom; instead, there has been a downward turn in the economic-development rate under sanctions and macro-level policies, leading to higher levels of unemployment and poverty. Under these circumstances, families use their children's labour to make up part of their expenses. Families without caretakers or with irresponsible caretakers also cause child labour. Some heads of families are unable to work and support their families for reasons such as addiction, illness and disability, while others have already died. Thus, families are faced with rising poverty, and this prompts children to enter the work cycle. Poverty in families without caretakers or with irresponsible caretakers proves the ineffectiveness of the country's protection policies. This article is an excerpt from the book *Traces of Exploitation in Childhood (A Comprehensive Research on Forms, Causes and Consequences of Child Labour in Iran)*.<sup>2</sup>

**Keywords:** Child labour, harms, community, culture, childhood study

### **Introduction**

Child labour is a global phenomenon that takes various forms. However, the International Labour Organization has defined 'child labour' as work that deprives a child of their childhood, potential and dignity and that is harmful to physical and mental development. For example, it deprives the child of schooling by forcing them to drop out of school or requiring them to engage in long and hazardous work hours. A report by the International Labour Organization ('ILO') in 2017–2018 indicates that about 152 million children worldwide are engaged in some type of work. From this report, it can be concluded that out of every ten children in the world, one is working.

According to the International Labour Organization, sub-Saharan nations account for the highest numbers of child labourers. The 2018 statistics suggest that 19.6% of children in the region aged five to seventeen work and that most of them are engaged in hard and hazardous labour. The situation is different in the Middle East and North Africa, where about 5% of children aged five to seventeen are

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engaged in hazardous work. The situation in South-East Asian nations is a matter of concern: in countries such as India and Pakistan, the highest number of children are either sold or kidnapped in the form of 'peasant contracts', to be employed on farms or in factories and workshops under tough working conditions. The figures provided by the International Labour Organization are approximate projections of the numbers of child labourers across the world, because it is almost impossible to provide accurate estimates, given the phenomenon's varying forms and natures.

Rising poverty, compounded by the globalisation of economic activities and the impoverishment of large segments of the population, results in families sending their children to work so they can continue living and fighting for their survival. In other words, these factors have resulted in the spread of a phenomenon called the 'informal economy'. In general, the informal economy has mushroomed in different parts of the world over the past fifty years. Various definitions have been provided for the informal economy, and different terms used to refer to it, such as 'shadow economy', 'parallel economy' and 'underground economy'. It is worthy of note that the informal economy differs from the illegal economy sector: various nations' laws do criminalise activities in the illegal economy (such as drug production and trafficking), but allow legal activities in the informal economy. The informal economy is generally referred to as 'the business operations in social environments not regulated by the government'.

The informal economy in Iran has spread significantly, forging deeper inequality and poverty. If one considers large-scale social change (in terms of lifestyles and standards of living) and the spread of the informal sector, one could argue that poverty, inequality and the exploitation of the disadvantaged would intensify side by side. The more disadvantaged demographics by gender and age – i.e. women and children – account for the highest number of workers in an informal economy.

Many occupations in the informal economy could cause physical and psychological harm to children. Hidden child labour in enclosed environments falls into the 'hazardous' job category, because children are not seen by the public and it is, therefore, not clear what happens to them. Meanwhile, jobs in small workshops, family workshops and, in many cases, illegal workshops, and other jobs in the informal economy, entail much harm because children experience restricted freedom in closed work environments and are less capable of defending themselves. The existence of depressing, suffocating and dangerous underground environments increases the chance of child exploitation. Additionally, children often forfeit the right to earn wages and are thus exploited.

Generally, child labour takes a variety of forms, which may include peddling and selling flowers on the street, manufacturing, working in mechanics' or tailors' shops, crystal-making, operating brick-making kilns and even collecting trash. Little information is available on the various types of factories and workshops and their child labour conditions, because it is not clear how many hours a child works per day and how much she/he receives. Therefore, it is necessary to determine the various forms of child labour and review their natures, conditions and risks. In other words, this research piece aimed to determine and study the different forms of child labour in Tehran in terms of their natures, conditions and consequences. However, various measures are being taken to investigate this issue on a national and global scale, as well.

## **Research Objectives**

This study aimed to identify the various forms of child labour in Tehran and its surroundings, thus seeking to determine the causes and factors affecting various work conditions, the natures and

conditions of work and the consequences of various forms of child labour, emphasising child labour hazards, among other things. To meet these goals, questions were raised that could provide a better understanding of the situation in relation to child labour in Tehran. Those questions are:

1. What are the various forms of child labour?
2. Which factors cause child labour in different occupations?
3. How do child labourers perceive their own work in different occupations?
3. What are the implications of child labour in different occupations?
4. What hazards are children exposed to in different occupations?
5. What are the working conditions of children in different occupations?

### **Literature Review**

In his 2017 article 'Overview of child labour in the artisanal and small-scale industry and mining sector in Asia and Africa', Dylan O'Driscoll reviewed data from academic, political and non-governmental organisation sources on child labour in ASM activities. 'ASM' refers to small groups working in low-cost, low-tech and energy-intensive drilling. Thus, a clear distinction can be drawn between large-scale industrial mines, which usually have permits, and small-scale industrial mines, which are often without permits. O'Driscoll's article elaborates on different types of child labour in mines in such countries as Tanzania, the Philippines and Indonesia, citing occupations including well-drilling, underground work, ore-mining transportation and crushing, cooking for adults and selling goods and services, all of which cause physical and psychological injuries to children.

In an article titled 'Lived Experience of Working Children's Feelings of Loneliness in Tabriz', Ali Imanzade studied and analysed working children's lived experiences of loneliness. The study was a qualitative phenomenological survey of 15 working children chosen via purposive sampling. From the findings in relation to these children's experiences of loneliness were developed four main themes: 'perceived feelings', 'types of feelings of loneliness', 'implications of loneliness' and 'ways to overcome loneliness'. Working children are exposed to different feelings of loneliness, especially existential loneliness. They also feel meaninglessness, despair and abandonment in their lives. In summary, these sentiments can be removed by adopting such policies as improving social interaction, providing education, training in social skills and offering spiritual therapy.

In his 2011 thesis titled 'People-Oriented Sociology and the Test of Castells' Theory on Child Labour', Salahuddin Naderi studied the situation of Afghan children. In this study, he uses Emmanuel Castells' theory to elaborate on the situations of children, demonstrating conditions in which children face no-return situations known as 'black holes'. Migrant Afghan children are at greater risk of falling into these black holes than other children. The ideal of people-driven sociology is to help these people and make them acquainted with their situations. In the study, measures were taken to educate, inform and empower children, using the project and a child-to-child approach.

In an article titled 'The relationship between child labour and human development in underdeveloped and developing countries', Tulaei, Rafiei and Biglerian (2011) studied the phenomenon of child labour and the Human Development Index in 15 lesser-developed countries. The researchers reasoned that countries that were higher on the Human Development Index would have lower child labour rates and vice versa – nations with high child labour figures would be lower

on the Human Development Index. The findings suggest that, as hypothesised, the higher a country is on the Human Development Index, the lower its child labour rate and vice versa. In addition, a high ranking on the Human Development Index directly links with the quality of human life necessary to reduce and alleviate child labour in various communities.

## **Child Labour**

'Child labourers' refers to a group of children who work outside the home. This type of work involves a variety of real and begging work, non-professional labour, waxing, vending low-value goods and so on. As defined by the International Labour Organization and UNICEF, any person under 18 engaged in an activity to earn an income or for the benefit of his/her family is a child labourer.

Considering the International Labour Organization's theoretical classification, 'child labour' includes children who are engaged in the worst forms of labour. The term 'child labour' is not used to refer to children who do light work. Accordingly, light work includes non-hazardous work done by children aged 12 to 14 for fewer than 14 hours a week.

Article 22 of the Iranian Labour Code defines 'child labour' as work by persons under the age of 15; it considers exploitation of these children to be against the labour law, meaning it could be legally prosecutable. The Code also refers to people aged 15 to 18 as 'adolescent workers'.

In general, 'child labour' refers to labour that deprives children of the world of their childhoods, human value, potential and dignity and is hazardous and detrimental to their physical or mental growth. Therefore, the following characteristics would apply:

- the work is physically, mentally, socially or morally dangerous and hazardous to children;
- the work deprives children of schooling;
- children are forced to drop out before graduation because of it; and
- children are forced to combine their presence at school with long hours of work.

With this in mind, the 'worst forms of child labour' involve slavery, children's separation from their families, exposure to serious hazards and diseases, or abandonment on the streets of large cities. Whether or not a certain type of 'work' can be called 'child labour' depends on the child's age, the type and hours of the work done, its conditions and the goals pursued by different countries. Hence, responses to child labour vary from one country to another and within different sectors of a society.

## **Global Child Labour Statistics**

In 2005, the ILO reported that 246 million children were working worldwide, of which 21 million were less than ten years old. About 88,000 children lose their lives in forced-labour incidents each year.

The most important achievement of global efforts to alleviate child labour was the adoption of child-abuse prevention measures and laws that prohibit child employment in different countries around the world. These resulted in a significant reduction in the number of working children in less than 15 years: the 2018 global report by the ILO showed the child labour figure reducing to about 152 million. According to figures released by the Organization, one out of every five child labourers is in

Africa, compared to the 2.9% who live in the Arab world, 4.1% who live in Europe and Central Asia, 5.3% who live in the Americas, and 7.4% who live in Asia and the Pacific. Out of the 152 million children who have fallen victim to forced labour, about 73 million work in hazardous jobs. Children aged 15 to 17 usually perform the most hazardous work, i.e. about three-quarters of it. However, about 19 million children who engage in highly hazardous work are under 12. In other words, 48% of them are 5 to 11 years old, 28% are 12 to 14, and 24% are 15 to 17. Meanwhile, 70.9% work in agriculture, 11.9% in industry and 17.2% in service sectors.

As suggested by the ILO's report, out of every ten children in the world, one child falls victim to forced labour and, as stated, sub-Saharan African nations account for the highest number of child labourers – 22.4% of children aged 5 to 17 work, most of whom are in hard and hazardous jobs. The situation is different in the Middle East and North Africa, where about 5% of children aged 5 to 17 are engaged in hazardous work; however, in South-East Asian nations, the situation for working children is alarming. Children are being sold and kidnapped in countries such as India and Pakistan.

<b>Year</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2011</b>
<b>Boy</b>	73.5%	77.8%	82.5%
<b>Girl</b>	26.5%	22.2%	17.5%
<b>15–18</b>	26%	85.4%	81%
<b>10–14</b>	24%	16.5%	11%
<b>Rural</b>	60%	51%	50%
<b>Rural boy</b>	71%	74%	82.2%
<b>Rural girl</b>	29%	26%	17%
<b>15–18 (rural)</b>	83.5%	90%	86.2%
<b>10–14 (rural)</b>	16.5%	10%	3.8%
<b>Urban</b>	40%	49%	50%
<b>Urban boy</b>	84.7%	81.7%	82.8%
<b>Urban girl</b>	15.3%	18.3%	17.2%
<b>15–18 (urban)</b>	71%	80%	91.8%
<b>10–14 (urban)</b>	29%	20%	8.2%

*Percentage distribution of demographics of child labourers worldwide, 1995–2011 (ILO)*

Child labour has been prevalent in the agricultural and animal-husbandry sectors in Iran; however, unlike in the West, no industrialisation took place in Iran for children to enter industrial workshops, as this process began under Reza Shah. Since the Iranian economy was incorporated with the world economy and a new labour division came into being, Iranian children have become more engaged in the work that was defined for the country, according to the new labour division. One type of work

was employment in carpet-weaving workshops – a new form of child labour. Working at these workshops was very difficult and tedious, and the environmental conditions were undesirable. Despite the fact that the carpet-weaving industry was developing in Iran, carpet weavers were living in absolute poverty. The working conditions of weavers are described as follows:

The wretched weavers were usually working under undesirable and miserable conditions. They were living in enclosed environments to avoid hot summer days. There was no ventilation. The workshops were also closed during winter to have a warm environment. This is why weavers looked ailing and morbid. They also had to work for long hours of the day.

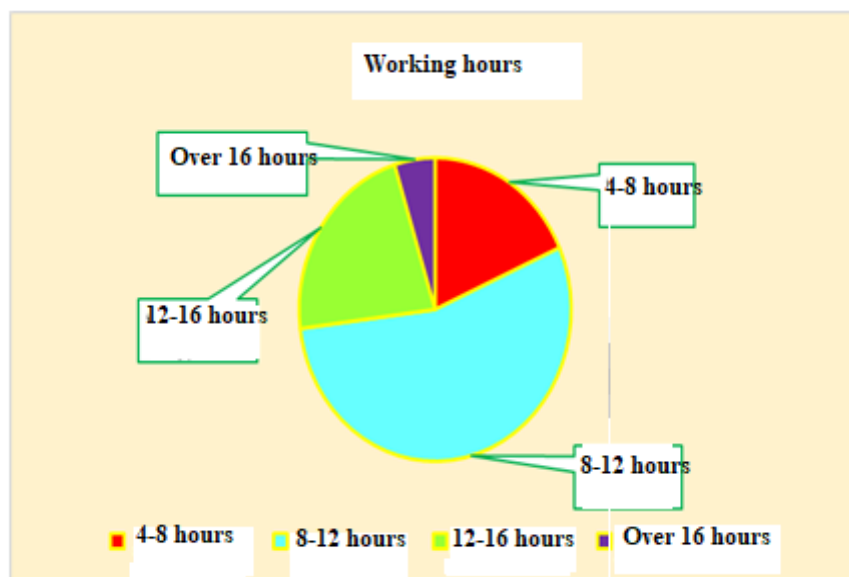


Diagram 1: Distribution of children based on working hours (N = 133): Work-related theories (ILO)

### Child Labour as Culture of Poverty

The 'culture of poverty' theory was proposed by Oscar Lewis in 1959. It is characterised by four main hypotheses.

The first hypothesis refers to children's abandonment by their families.

The second hypothesis relates child labour to poverty and considers poverty to arise from passive abandonment. According to this deterministic approach, the families of these children are unable to meet their moral obligations to their children because of poverty; therefore, they abandon them to look outside of the home.

The third hypothesis posits that child labour originates from the consequences of migration from rural to urban areas, which include poverty, marginalisation and change to the family structure, putting pressure on children to work in marginalised areas.

The fourth hypothesis states that child labour originates from urban and deviant sub-cultures. Lewis argues that the culture of poverty is characterised by features of despair, hopelessness, reliance, self-humiliation and the inevitability of poverty.

## **Child Socialisation**

The main concept in sociological theory about childhood is that of socialisation. 'Acculturation' may well correspond to this process, because it implies that children adopt the cultures of the human groups where they find themselves, absorbing and acquiring them gradually. Children should not be viewed as fully equipped to participate in and interfere with the complex world of adults; rather, they should be considered people with high potentials to gradually establish communications with other humans.

Structural-Functional Theory characterises children in all social domains as having consistent, stable characteristics. According to this theory, children constitute blocks of societies and are special, persevering, potential and normal people. In fact, they represent all potential social characteristics and realities. Of course, the way they are represented may vary from one society to another, albeit they are represented uniformly inside each society, to the extent they form part of social structures. The theory hypothesises that children are not born defective and disabled; rather, they are formed by a group of social factors, i.e. citizens with special needs.

Applying the Social Development Model, one would observe a social structure and a population consisting of rational adults and children, who anticipate performing a series of rituals and ceremonies deemed necessary to become an adult social member. According to the structural social theory, the stability of the child need to be emphasised and confirmed.

Different advocates of this theory have sought to investigate both the necessary and sufficient conditions for childhood within a specific society. Children are seen as general categories who are perceived to come out of social structures set up for them. Thus, children assume a series of mindsets, and their mindsets are not arbitrary nor do they come from caprice; they are constructed by society.

## **Migration**

This theory emphasises that the capitalist industrial revolution intensified migration of workforces from villages to cities and created surpluses of labour in cities. The inevitable outcome of this situation was rising unemployment and a shift of manpower to an economically downgraded sector – lower service activities with lower salaries. Accordingly, a large number of families were marginalised and, consequently, exposed to all kinds of social harms and deviancy.

## **Social Psychology: Child Labour and Mental Health**

In relation to mental health, various approaches, such as behaviourism, humanism, social network, social psychology and model psychology, have been taken to investigate the direct and indirect impacts of the hierarchical-compensatory model.

The humanist approach posits that 'mental health' refers to the meeting of basic needs and the achievement of a self-actualisation stage. Any factor that hinders the individual from meeting his basic needs and thwarts his progress and actualisation disrupts his/her life.

According to the behaviourist approach, adaptive behaviour, like other behaviours, is learned through repetition. Mental health involves adaptive behaviours (or compatible conducts) that are

learned. Thus, the approach holds that defective learning is the cause of mental disorder and that mental health is overshadowed by failed learning adaptive behaviours or the failure to overcome social situations.

Chauhan (1991) believes that mental health is a state of psychological maturity, defined as the highest effectiveness and satisfaction obtained from individual and social interaction, which includes positive feelings and feedback towards oneself and others.

The hierarchical-compensatory model contends that kin, particularly spouses and children, are of primary importance, followed by friends and neighbours and formal organisations in a well-ordered, hierarchical selection process. It assumes that if individuals fail to enjoy primary supportive relationships, they downgrade to lower-rank relationships to receive support. Advocates of this approach argue that, since intimate relationships with close people have greater impacts on the human spirit, people prefer primary and intimate groups over others. Theorists remark that when primary family relationships are lost, lower-level relationships, such as friendship, can replace family relationships. According to studies taken from this model, people within the support network of the family are less depressed and generally have better mental health.

Additionally, for Adler (1938), to have mental health is to have specific goals in life, a strong life philosophy, desirable and stable family and social relationships, usefulness to fellow humans, courage and determination, control over emotions and feelings, and – the ultimate goal – to achieve self-perfection, accept mistakes and remove problems as much as possible.

### **Dysfunctional Natural Growth Process**

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the French thinker and founder of modern training/educational styles, was the first to distinguish adolescence from childhood, seeking in the pseudo-novel *Emile* to direct the attention of the instructor from the curriculum and learnable content to the child itself, as the one who must learn the skills. He raised the idea of 'child-centeredness' to modify social attitudes towards children. To him, children are neither an irrational animal nor an adult; rather, only a child yet to go through the natural growth process.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau, seen as the pioneer of child psychology, believed the world of childhood is different from that of adulthood and argued that children must be aware of their differences, weaknesses and inabilities, but not suffer from them; they must learn dependence, but not be compliant. He reiterated that children should be treated based on their age, because nature views them as children before becoming adults, and if such order is to break down, a futile and useless product would ensue.

Considering Rousseau's views in terms of child labour, one would be confronted with a useless product, because these children enter adulthood before they go through the natural growth process.

### **Social Learning Theory**

Social learning theory suggests that social behaviour is learned by observing and imitating the behaviour of others, while behavioural psychology focuses on how the environment and reinforcement affect behaviour.



Albert Bandura (1989) put forth the idea that individuals can learn behaviours through observation. In fact, he claimed, most human behaviour is learned by observing others' behaviours and modelling them. As he suggested, most people do not learn what they need to continue living simply through direct experience; rather, they mostly learn indirectly, especially through their surrounding environments.

Social Cognitive Theory ('SCT'), developed by Albert Bandura, has roots in a series of studies that social learning theory was founded on. However, it focuses more on the human thinking process. SCT mainly holds that people learn by observation, while behavioural encouragement or punishment and the resulting expectations will affect their behaviours in similar situations. In the meantime, learning is made when the individual identifies with the model. SCT describes the influence of individual experiences, the actions of others and environmental factors on individual health behaviours. It states that people are more likely to be affected by message sources with which they identify. Thus, developmental research can identify these patterns for use in future messaging.

SCT also signifies encouragement and punishment: campaign messages can increase positive outputs from campaign recommendations or punishments for not taking the recommended action seriously.

According to Bandura's theories, social institutions such as peers, social groups and mass media greatly contribute to forming and creating healthy and unhealthy characteristics in individuals. He emphasised the learning-and-reinforcement pattern through latent learning to conclude that learning turns into action through observation.

Bandura regards four main processes for social learning: 'attention', 'retention', 'reproduction' and 'motivation'. The individual's direct or indirect observation of an event is the onset of learning. In fact, the first step in social learning is to pay attention to an event to be observed. It is clear that one would not learn anything from an event unless he pays attention to it and understands its important parts. In other words, whatever one pays attention to is what relates to his institutions of life, needs and personal interests. Thus, one would memorise the learnable content and add it to his body of knowledge to retain it when necessary. If one fails to retain the observed action, it will not be possible to model the process. The production is the practical application of the learned that leads to reward and punishment, while proper reproduction is a result of trial and error, thereby reducing motivation to continue the path. Motivation, which is important for action, depends on encouragement.

People are socialised by others through modelling and learning values and norms adopted in society. Others often serve as a bridge between personal life and the social world, acting as a powerful factor for our socialisation. We perceive ourselves and our status in society in the eyes of other people and institutions, so we need to pay attention to others' messages and perceive their content to perform our duties in the community. In other words, we all learn how to behave under specific social situations and the expectations of roles in society. Such factors as models and learners can contribute to the success or failure of social learning. Some of the measures affecting observational learning include the following.

- **Attention** – to learn, observers must attend to the modelled behaviour. Experimental studies have found that awareness of what is being learned and the mechanisms of reinforcement greatly boost learning outcomes. Attention is impacted by characteristics of the observer (e.g. perceptual abilities, cognitive abilities, arousal and past performance) and characteristics of

the behaviour or event (e.g. relevance, novelty, affective valence and functional value). In this way, social factors contribute to attention – the prestige of different models affects the relevance and functional value of observation and therefore modulates attention.

- **Retention** – to reproduce an observed behaviour, observers must be able to remember features of the behaviour. Again, this process is influenced by observer characteristics (cognitive capabilities, cognitive rehearsal) and event characteristics (complexity). The cognitive processes underlying retention are described by Bandura as visual and verbal, where verbal descriptions of models are used in more complex scenarios.
- **Reproduction** – by reproduction, Bandura refers not to the propagation of the model but the implementation of it. This requires a degree of cognitive skill and may require sensorimotor capabilities, in some cases. Reproduction can be difficult because, in the case of behaviours that are reinforced through self-observation (he cites improvement in sports), it can be difficult to observe behaviour well. This can require the input of others to provide self-correcting feedback. Newer studies on feedback support this idea by suggesting effective feedback, which would help with observation, and correction improves the performance of participants on tasks.
- **Motivation** – the decision to reproduce (or refrain from reproducing) an observed behaviour is dependent on the motivations and expectations of the observer, including anticipated consequences and internal standards. Bandura's description of motivation is also fundamentally based on environmental and, thus, social factors, since motivational factors are driven by the functional value of different behaviours in a given environment.

### **Theoretical Link Between Child Labour and Business**

This theory was raised by Lahiri and Moore in 1992 to investigate a theoretical bond between child labour and business.

They demonstrated that trade sanctions could actually increase, rather than reduce, child labour. Researchers have stated that, in a low-income country, there are goods produced with low skill. In a country of high income and competitive exporting power, child labour accounts for most economic skills.

On the other hand, sanctions appear to reduce demand for such goods (i.e. low-skill goods), thereby reducing child labour. However, trade sanctions could have some other impacts, such as reducing the value of tuition and presence at school and limiting access to schooling, followed by declining investment in education.

### **Information Age and Black Holes**

In his seminal work entitled *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, Manuel Castells (2009) uses numerous empirical studies and evidence of a global scale to analyse how global capitalism is reconstructed, how information capitalism is formed and what the negative impacts of this reconstruction will be. To Castells, one of the negative impacts of global capitalism

reconstruction and of the formation of a 'network society' is the rise of a process called 'social differentiation and exclusion'.

There are black holes of global, national, regional and local scales, especially in the 'Fourth World', which, for Castells, began to surface in the late 1960s, following the information technology revolution and the transition from industrial capitalism and authoritarian societies to information capitalism and networked societies, helping create developments in global economic relations.

Weakening of nation-state structures and changing welfare states within the construction of the classical nuclear family have been followed by the development of new forms of poverty and marginalisation and 'geography of socio-territorial exclusion' across different parts of the world.

Castells maintains that processes that create social differentiation and exclusion can be divided into two categories: distribution-consumption relations and production relations. Inequality, polarisation, poverty and destitution pertain to the category of distribution-consumption relations, or the different levels of wealth generated through collective effort. On the other hand, labour individualisation, excessive exploitation of workers, social exclusion and degenerate bonding are what characterise the process of productive relations. Castells demonstrates that the most notable thing about the workforce in the information age is not the end of work, but the condition of the workers.

### *Excessive Exploitation*

To Castells, 'inequality' refers to the unequal acquisition of wealth by different individuals and groups in society.

'Polarisation' is a specific process of inequality that occurs when income or wealth distribution grows faster than the middle part of the spectrum. This may make the middle part of the distribution spectrum smaller and intensify inter-population social differences.

'Poverty' is a criterion that is institutionally defined and refers to a level of resources that, if not achieved, will make it impossible to access the minimum levels of welfare in society.

'Destitution' refers to a phenomenon that social statisticians call 'excessive poverty', suggesting the lowest level of income-assets distribution or, as some experts have put it, a kind of 'deprivation' that includes a number of economic and social disadvantages.

By 'excessive exploitation', Castells refers to a set of working conditions that allows the capital to regularly delay the payment-allocation process or to impose a harsher condition on a certain group of workers compared to the normal procedure in the market. This term refers to inequality and discrimination against Afghans, minorities, women, young people, children or other labour groups who are discriminated against while supervisory agencies permit it and do not take positive steps to end it. One of the outcomes is the prevalence of child labour across the world.

'Defencelessness' is another term used by Castells when referring to employing children; this implies that the employer can pay minimal wages to the child labourer and create oppressive working conditions for them. However, it appears that the most important reasons for employing children are non-economic. These reasons may be that children are less aware of their rights, less troubling, carry out orders more readily, work more consistently without any complaints, are more reliable and

are less likely to steal things. In the informal-sector industries, where workers are recruited informally, fewer leaves of absence are more highly valuable for employers.

The reasons for child exploitation must be sought in the mechanisms that lead to poverty and social exclusion in the world. As children suffer from poverty, and considering the deprivation of global wealth, power and information in certain countries, regions and neighbourhoods, one could argue that family structures would be undermined in these circumstances, which could disintegrate the last defence of children. Destitution, in some impoverished areas of the world, especially in rural areas and slums, causes disintegrating family structures, which forces families to sell their children or to send them to the streets to support the family.

Castells argues that the tough, low-wage working conditions and the long working hours facing children are rooted in a number of factors. Firstly, this crisis arises from the concurrent spread of poverty and the globalisation of economic activity. Economic crises damage people's livelihoods, and the impoverishment of large groups of the population makes families and their children turn to any kind of work for survival. Under these conditions, there is no opportunity to continue study and the family needs more breadwinners, like children. Families in such conditions have no choice but to get their children to work. Studies have suggested the impact of populous families on child labour: the higher the number of children, the more people there are to be sent to the streets instead of school.

### *Immigration and Marginalisation*

The demise of traditional societies around the world has led children towards impoverished and defenceless geographical areas. The crises unfolding include the forced migration of children and their families to other regions and countries, which could disrupt the protective system and the traditional patriarchal structure.

### *Social Exclusion*

'Social exclusion' is another term used by Castells to define social classes. Social exclusion, or social marginalisation, is social disadvantage and relegation to the fringes of society. It is a term used widely in Europe and was first used in France. It is employed across disciplines, including education, sociology, psychology, politics and economics.

Social exclusion is the process by which individuals are blocked from (or denied full access to) various rights, opportunities and resources that are normally available to members of a different group and which are fundamental to social integration and the observance of human rights within that particular group (e.g. housing, employment, healthcare, civic engagement, democratic participation and due process). Social exclusion is a process, not a situation. Thus, its boundaries may vary at different times, depending on educational issues, demographic characteristics, social discrimination, work procedures, practical policies and who may be socially included or excluded.

A lack of regular work as a source of income could serve as the ultimate mechanism of social exclusion. Why and how people are confronted with difficulties in meeting their needs all depend on different types of poverty.

Castells also maintains that the social exclusion process in a networked society is linked with people and lands. Some countries, regions, cities or neighbourhoods are completely excluded in some cases,

marginalising the entire or majority of the population. Thus, institutional developments from the reconstructed world economy, within the political economy of today's societies, have brought about a social exclusion process founded on power relations and exploitation. This process functions differently at the middle level and the micro-level, according to some social variables such as gender and age, with the weakest groups being exploited and excluded. The manifestation of this is child labour and related cases of abuse.

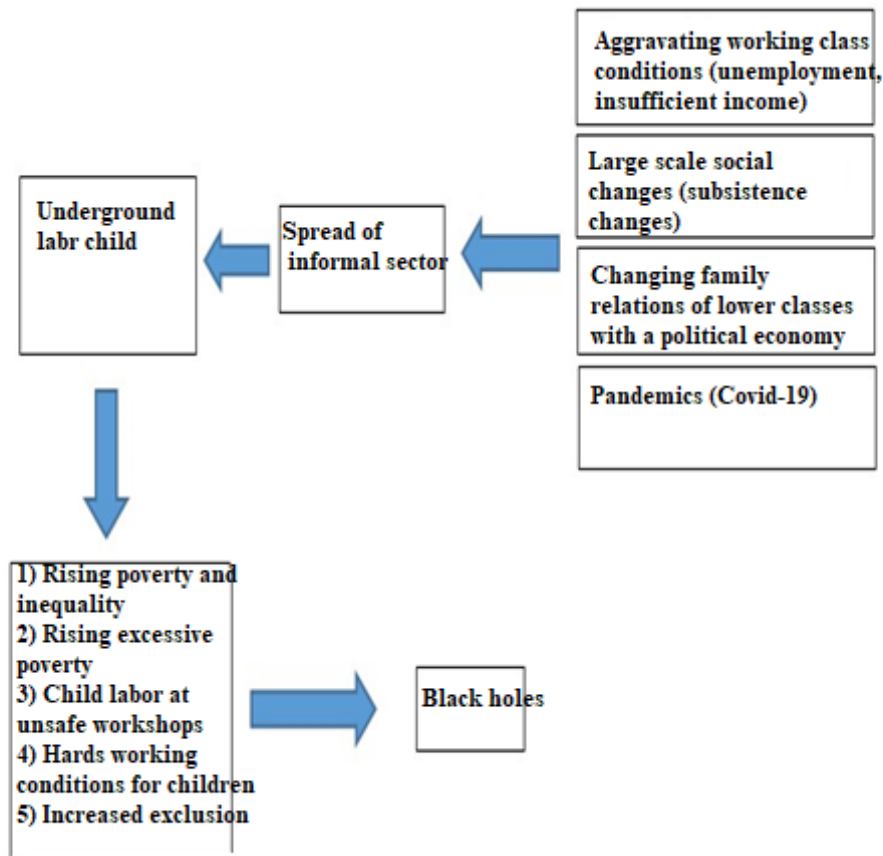
Castells' studies have suggested that the imperfect links and unequal economic relations between the Third World and developing countries within the world economy have brought about widespread social changes through structural-modification programmes in these societies, causing weak and disintegrated nation-state structures and the spread of the informal sectors of economies. These institutional developments within the political economy have resulted in poverty; inequality; impoverishment; labour individualisation; excessive exploitation of the poor, women and children; social exclusion; and the formation of a criminal economy within these societies. Changing familial relationships of the lower class, along with the political economy and social-segregation patterns, have transformed the traditional construct of families' functional relationships in the lower classes.

### *Black Holes*

For Castells, a networked society devours itself because, in a society with child labour, the meanings of survival and consistency in life are lost, thus bringing about a future society where no human compassion exists; hence Castells refers to such areas as 'black holes'. The Fourth World's black holes function to absorb the marginalised and, at the same time, help reproduce social exclusion.

These black holes, while being interrelated, have no socio-cultural links with mainstream society. These areas are economically related, with specific markets, such as criminal economies, and administratively linked by such institutions as the police and social security.

The Fourth World has emerged from numerous social-exclusion black holes around the world. The Fourth World covers a large spectrum of the globe, such as sub-Saharan Africa and impoverished areas of Latin America and Asia; however, this type of socially excluded geography can be seen in almost every country, everywhere. They are made up of slums in American cities, Spanish locals or masses of unemployed young people in the French suburbs of North Africa, the Bassi neighbourhoods of Japan and the slums in Asian metropolises. The inhabitants of the Fourth World include millions of homeless, prisoners, criminals, prostitutes, murderers, the infamous, the sick and the illiterate. There are many in some areas and few in some other areas. However, they are on the rise, as the current social policies are intensifying this social exclusion.



*Diagram 2: Black hole theoretical model*

Castells argues that there is a structural link between the infinite-market rationale within the networked global economy, strengthened by advanced information technologies, and the phenomenon of child labour. In fact, within the economic development domain, we see expanded child labour being adopted by the rational market reaction. We must also add to both sets of supply-and-demand factors (discussed below) the collapse of governments and societies and the widespread elimination of populations resulting from wars, famine, epidemics and robbery as factors causing child labour. On the other hand, illiteracy leads to unemployment, poverty and, eventually, social deprivation.

### **Economic and Social Factors Causing Child Labour**

For Mendevich (1979), economic, social and cultural factors contribute to child labour. In developing countries, weakening economic situations increase the child labour phenomenon. Also, established traditions in less-developed nations are another cause of child labour. The absence of formal education and a strong economic platform have led parents to seek jobs for their children to help earn their livings.

Rodgers and Standing (1981) maintain that child labour in low-income countries falls into two categories: firstly, economic and social factors; and, secondly, behavioural factors. The former category involves the production-process structure and labour market; it is believed that, in

primitive societies all members of the family work for survival and social cohesion, and children work according to their abilities. In other words, labour is an assumed part of socialisation in such societies. As Rodgers and Standing's findings suggest, although the industrialisation and urbanisation processes leverage different types of child labour in their early stages, this declines in the long term.

In relation to the second category, behavioural factors, one would refer to the role of families in children's work patterns, because family dimension and structure determine child employment. There are generally three factors increasing children's activities in low-income countries:

1. conditions in which fertility rates have fallen, with most children in such families being in adolescents and youth;
2. household work in families where the main adult worker is engaged in agriculture and service, especially self-employed affairs; and
3. family income and parental education.

Christiaan Grootaert and Ravi Kanbur (1995) investigated child labour factors from an economic perspective and divided them into four supply-and-demand factors. For them, factors determining the supply of child labour are as follows.

1. Household size and time allocation: the way a child's time is allocated to work by the family depends on its size and structure, child and his parent's *level and amount of income*. Therefore, the household plays a major role in child employment.
2. Household reactions to job losses. The major reason behind family's decisions to send their children to work is *to increase family income* and better manage the situation.

Factors determining the demand for child labour are as follows.

1. Labour-market structure: the labour market itself determines the role of employment in household income.
2. Technology: the extent to which the level of technology can help a child replace an adult.

### **Executive Guidelines on Reducing Child Labour**

Unbalanced development in a centre-periphery country and discrimination against some ethnic and religious groups are two of the main causes of poverty and deprivation. Today, many families and children of particular ethnic groups migrate to Tehran and its surroundings to find work and meet the minimum life requirements. Although it is true that economic and social-development programmes have underscored balanced national development, we are still witnessing many inequalities across this nation.

Therefore, planning institutions such as the Budget and Plan Organisation and other state institutions should take positive measures to develop policies to tackle such problems and reduce child labour as a result.

1. In many parts of the country and even in lower classes, education-related economic opportunities are scant. When education does not result in employment, families will not invest in their children's educations, as they believe that the investment they have made will bring no return in the future and not lead their children to employment, thereby causing a

wastage of investment and future planning. This prompts families to not support their children's educations, but to oppose their schooling and ultimately begin to encourage them to work. As stated, parents think that education does not lead to employment, because it is work that helps family living standards; meanwhile, the jobs children choose are, firstly, detrimental and hazardous, coming with the possibility of severe physical and mental illnesses. Secondly, these jobs are not permanent and, as soon as the children are out of work, the defective poverty and unemployment cycle persists. Thirdly, early retirement will happen as these jobs are hard and could bring physical and mental repercussions.

2. It is critical to identify child labour and the families involved through comprehensive national plans to combat poverty and empower families. In Iran, the Welfare Organisation is responsible for supporting those harmed by child labour. This organisation, in collaboration with other organisations such as the Relief Committee, Social Affairs, the Welfare Ministry, the Cooperative and Social Affairs, the Ministry of Economy, and the Office of the Foreign Affairs should identify at-risk children and those forced to work, to free them from the work cycle and to empower them for future life.

## **Field Quotes About Working Children**

### *Carrying Loads with Wheelbarrows*

One of the most difficult types of work children do is carrying loads with wheelbarrows. This work not only causes sidewalk obstruction, but also causes altercations with pedestrians. The main hazard of this work, however, is that the child has to walk for too long each day while carrying heavy loads. This creates disorders in the child's physiology and physical organs, while his spinal column may be damaged. These child labourers usually frequent crowded streets and end up in fights with taxi drivers. They are also exposed to pollution and risk their lives.

Some remarks from these children:

You have to carry a heavy load by yourself; you sweat down, drag it and that's quite bothering.





*Image of a child waiting to carry loads on a wheelbarrow in Tehran Bazar*

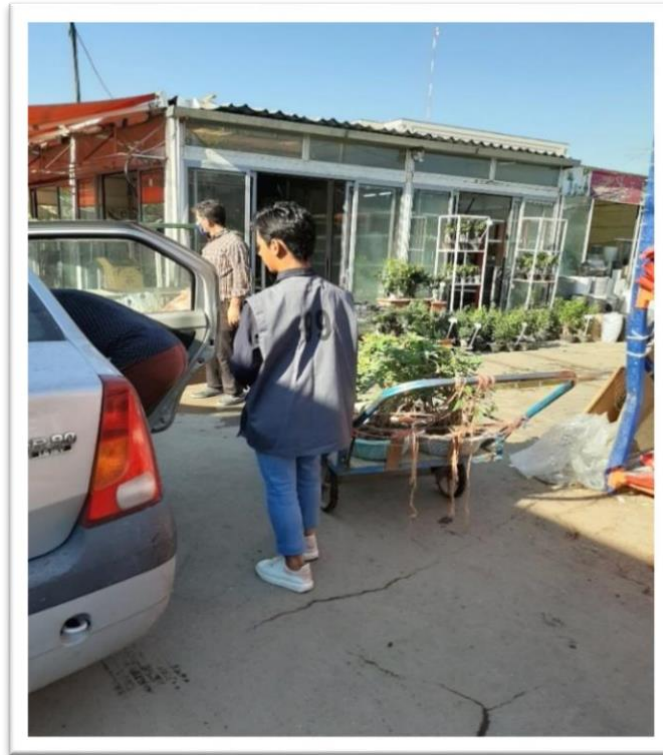
The Lors and Kurds harass me. If there is a load, they don't allow us to work. They say this country is theirs. They bully me.

We are unhappy with this situation. This is a heavy wheelbarrow. Wheelbarrowing is very difficult.

I get into fight with people very often. They curse me. When you walk past them, they push you and hit your wheelbarrow. They obstruct the wheelbarrow – throw it away.

You get harassed. That's too heavy loads. You become tired when you get home. Each morning, you need to wake up at nine to get to work.

You have to lift 20-kilo oil bottles and 40-kilo tea bags. There are sorts of 100-kilo sugar bags. Also they are all heavy. You get destroyed.



*Image of a child labour at Imam Reza Flower Market in South of Tehran*

#### *Working in Carwashes*

Most hazards children face includes working too long and sleeplessness, working in a standing position, inhaling cleaning material and amputation from their inability to correctly use work tools. Children describe their situations as follows:

A newcomer arrived who did not know how to work with the tools. He got his eyes blind. He is still in the hospital.

It is too difficult. You need to work from early morning to late night. You just stand up and work. That's awful. You deal with soap and wash the cars, with all the dirt.

I get the car neat; they curse at me. My employer mistreats me.

#### *Trash Collection*

Collecting garbage is one of the worst forms of child labour. Children face risks in this type of work. They may suffer from cut fingers from contact with sharp objects; smelling waste and contaminated garbage; inhaling nasty materials, especially during summer days; walking too long to search the bins; victimisation of violence and other crimes; working on dangerous sites; working on cold and hot days; long hours of work; excessive tiredness; the possibility of falling into bins from leaning into them, etcetera.

The children describe their ordeals as follows:

You suffer from sleeplessness; you need to get all this garbage on your back and walk for too long.

Low sleep gets man angry – you know it.

You get suffocated when smelling the garbage.

You have to work from early morning to late in the night; then you get up at six the next morning. I can't get a SIM card; I can't call my parents. That's bothering.

You get your hands cut. These sharp, pointed objects hurt you. When I cut my fingers, we find a piece of cloth from the garbage to fasten it up.

You see many masks in the bins. We have no gloves and touch them, which is infectious.

According to one health expert, it is not a suitable environment for the children. They have to work for too long. They need to turn to drugs to remain awake. With respect to health, the situation is awful. There is no general monitoring of the situation. The monitoring of child labourers on the streets is minimal. When speaking with children at garages, they will tell you that the situation at the workshops is worse. They describe their employers' aggression.



*Image of trash and garbage collected by child labour in Jannat Abad district of the capital*

#### *Wood and Carpentry Workshops*

The hazards facing these children include moving heavy loads, high noise levels, limb amputations and mental injuries.

A number of these children stated:

I lose my finger if I get it under this device; that's too dangerous.

Once, I got hurt and lost my foot toe.

We need to lift these hard objects, which is too difficult.

When working with the carpentry machine, you may get your fingers hurt. My brother got hurt once. He wanted to move the garbage, as he was hurt. My employer doesn't allow me to work with the machine. That's awful.



*Image of a child working at a carpentry workshop in Esmaeil Aabad district of Tehran*

### *Selling Flowers*

Another form of labour that may result in hazards for children is working at flower markets. Generally, this type of work entails fewer hazards compared to other work. Since most children are recruited for this job based on kinship, they receive a bit of social support. This is much more pleasant for the children. As they are working with flowers, they enjoy it, but selling them on the streets cause problems for them.

Some of these children say:

You need to sell flower while the sun dazzles your eyes. You need to move these barrows and that's difficult.

I plant flowers, and pick them up, which is dangerous, also.

We need to wake up at 4 in the morning, that's annoying. But if you don't make it to the market before the sunrise then you lose the day of income. I am sleep most of the time but there is not much I can do; it seems like my destiny.

### **Conclusion**

According to the Iranian Labour Code, labour by children under the age of 15 is prohibited; however, we witnessed a large number of children under the age of 15 working. Some of them work in the informal economy and some in the formal sector, such as in factories, brick kilns, grocery stores, crystal and glass factories, agriculture, flower markets, etcetera. Meanwhile, inspectors from the Ministry of Labour do not monitor them, and, as a result, their employers practically bypass the

Labour Code and abuse their child labourers. Even when inspectors attend the workplace to inspect the situation, employers hide children in various ways. Migration networks also provide opportunities for children to work by providing them routes between origins and destinations.

As we have seen, children of certain ethnicities are more engaged in some activities. For example, garbage collectors are mostly from Herat, and the children working in fruit and vegetable bazaars are mostly from Kurdistan. This suggests the importance of migration networks in establishing child labour. Ethnic and gender discrimination is yet another cause of child labour. Some ethnic discrimination is affected by a similarly unbalanced development pattern. In Iran, some ethnic groups and women suffer from structural discrimination and have restricted access to political, economic and military opportunities. One outcome of structural discrimination is restricted access to various social opportunities and, consequently, more poverty.

Power relations are also another interfering factor. Because there are no rules or regulations to monitor the relationships between employers and workers in the informal sector, employers abuse and exploit child labour. It should also be pointed out that, for the families of these children, the employer is seen as a source of power, and if the employer abuses their child's rights, the family accepts it.

Accordingly, and based on figures from the International Labour Organisation in 2005, an average of 22,000 children die each year as a result of work-related injuries. Working children not only suffer from physical injuries, but also from non-physical injuries, which cannot be compensated for. For example, child labourers suffer from cognitive dysfunction, and this affects their learning, especially during school. Children's emotional development is also affected by work under hazardous psychological conditions, lowering their self-esteem, self-confidence, family attachments, love and friendships. These children may also suffer from depression and become anxious due to a lack of skills to do their work.

Thus, strategies are required to tackle the child labour crisis, and policies need to be established to provide child labourers with education and healthcare facilities.

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