

Counting Child Labour in India: A Critique of Epistemology

M S Bhatt and Aijaz Abdullah

This paper underscores the significance of reliable and up-to-date data bases on child labour for an informed understanding of policy formulation, implementation and evaluation. The available data sources on child labour in India have been examined to illustrate the arguments. The paper concludes that, the available data bases have indeed proved helpful in understanding some critical dimensions of child labour. But these do not capture all the dimensions of child labour and hence cannot be fully trusted for a systematic analysis of the processes of socialization of children or even policy formulation for the abolition of child labour. There is need for fresh data generation on a sustained basis. The paper is organised in three sections. Section I explains the backdrop of the subject. Section II deals with the epistemological issues using the available data bases on child labour as the reference material. The last section presents summary and conclusions.

I Background

India is one of the few developing countries in the world which, right after independence, recognised the significance of adequate, reliable and up-to-date socio-economic data bases and modern methods of data management as critical inputs to development planning.¹ Administrative and institutional arrangements were accordingly put in place from time to time to meet the growing macro and sectoral data requirements at various levels of governance.² These efforts paid

M S Bhatt, Professor, Department of Economics, Jamia Millia Islamia, Jamia Nagar, New Delhi 110025, email: ab1sul2@yahoo.com.

Aijaz Abdullah, Research Scholar, Department of Economics, Jamia Millia Islamia, Jamia Nagar, New Delhi 110025.

¹ See Chandrashekar and Tilak, 2006 for details.

² The entire data generation exercise was initially inspired by the eminent academicians like P.C. Mahalanobis, V.K.R.V. Rao, Sukhmoy Chakravarty and Pitambar Pant, to name a few. Their pioneering work paid rich dividends. Today data bases of Indian economy in many areas and sectors are comparable to the best in the world. Data management techniques have indeed witnessed very distinct changes both in quality and coverage. Recognizing information as a critical input to the policy formulation, the Government of India, soon after independence, appointed National Income Committee (1949) to recommend measures for bringing improvements in the system of data collection. To create a sound statistical system, Central Statistical Unit (1949) was established and which was followed by the establishment of Central Statistical Organization in 1951, Directorate of National Sample Survey in 1950, and the Computer Centre in 1967. Government of India appointed National Statistical Commission in 2000 headed by Rangarajan and mandated it to critically examine the deficiencies of statistical system in terms of timeliness, reliability and adequacy and recommend measures to correct these deficiencies.