

Of Toil and Turmoil - Mental Health Interventions for Child Laborers in The Brick Kilns of Rajasthan

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ABSTRACT

The exploitative nature of child labor in India is intrinsically marked by the intersection of systems of social stratification such as gender, class and caste. Deplorable working conditions, threats and coercion, trafficking, wage theft, physical maltreatment, sexual abuse and lack of access to education are some of the many distressing conditions that children are subjected to. Brick kilns in India continue to remain among one of the biggest employers of children. There have been considerable rescue efforts over the years but the gaps in policy adoption, implementation and execution continue to grow at an alarming rate. The advent of Covid-19 witnessed an increased number of conversations surrounding the importance of physical and mental health. However, such discourses are far from reality for those children trapped within the vicious cycle of child labor, particularly mental health. This paper aims to closely examine the lack of constructive action being taken to address the long-term psychological impact on child laborers between the ages of 8 and 17 in the brick kilns of Rajasthan¹ by exploring -

- a. the historical development of child labor in these kilns
- b. the direct and indirect health-related consequences of child labor
- c. the effect of Covid-19 on the persisting struggle to abolish child labor

This study elucidates children in such circumstances beyond the realm of economic exploitation alone and sets the stage for effective policy making vis-à-vis mental health.

Keywords: brick kilns, child labor, Covid-19, mental health, Rajasthan

¹ A state in northern India.