

**The Hidden Role of the Children in the Household Economy: An Insights from the Hilly Regions of Arunachal Pradesh**

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**Abstract**

The contributions made in the household economy is not only from adults but also from the childrens. However, most of the children's works goes unnoticed and unrecognised. In remote rural areas, children are actively engage in many activities. Given the backwardness of the rural economy majority of the population are engage in agricultural activities. Whereas the parents are working in the agriculture, the childrens are busy in taking care of their of younger siblings so that the parents would be free to do their work. In this way childrens contribute a lot in the household economy. In this paper, an attempt is made to study the various types of activities where children are engaged that indirectly contribute in the household economy.

**Key Words:** Childrens, Household Chores, Child Labor, Household Economy

**Introduction and Conceptual Framework:**

The concept of child labour varies across different setting and context. There has been a series of debates on the definition of Child's labour. The researchers are still finding it difficult to develop a consensus definition of child work. The centre of the arguments is the 'inclusive' and 'exclusive' definition of child labour- what to include and exclude? The definition of the International Labour Organisation is exclusive. It includes only those paid or unpaid economic activities that are related to the market. It does not include domestic chores in the category of child labour. The main reason for its exclusion is that domestic chores are not related to the market. However, another group of researchers demands a more inclusive definition of child labour. They say that household chores should be included in child labour as it also contributes indirectly to the family income. Children are engaged in household chores so that parents would be free to work. According to a study by Vandermesh (Bhukuth, 2008), people employed girls as a domestic worker at home, but they are not paid directly by the employer but through an agent or intermediaries. The intermediaries pass on the wages to the parents. Similarly, children are engaged in family domestic chores to make adults free to work. In this way, they are contributing to the family income indirectly (Bhukuth, 2008).

In India, child labour is largely predominant in agriculture, domestic work, and pre-industrial, pre-capitalist workshops (Myron Weiner, 1989). Cartwright called those children who are taking care of their siblings as home care children, and he included them in the category of 'not doing' any work (cited in Bhukuth, 2008). However, in a dominant agricultural society,

women are compelled to take help from their children (Neera Burra, 2005). Particularly in rural areas, the supporting parents is considered as part of parenting and growing (V.Gayathri, 2003).

Therefore, we cannot label sibling care activities as ‘not doing’ any work category. Burki and Shahnaz (2003) called them as children involved in home production (cited in Bhukuth, 2008). The inclusion of household chores in the child labour definition shows that girls work more hour than the boys (Rammohan, 2014). Fukui defines work as ‘any kind of activity of which the direct or indirect aim is to assume responsibility for one's life. Where this responsibility rests on the child, the issue is one of child labour’ (cited in Bhukuth, 2008:181). Contrastingly, Lieten (2002) argued to exclude the household work from the ambit of the definition of Child labour. He brought the distinction between child work and child labour. All the economic activities- either paid or unpaid comes under the broad category of child work. Child labour is more specific to paid work. He segregates work into formal and informal work. Burra (2005) argues that it is easier to tackle the broadly defined child labour than the narrowly defined one. She challenged the idea of differential notions of “labour” and “work” as it leads to a distinction between formal and informal economy. Therefore, we should not distinguish between formal and informal work, paid and unpaid work, which relates to each other closely. Rajan, n.d, argues that economic discourses focus more on paid work, whereas anthropology and sociology concentrate on all work done by the children (Rajan, 2008).

As per Bhukuth (2008) in English, there is a distinction between child work and child labour, but in French –language publications, there are no such distinctions. Thus, all work is injurious to the child irrespective of light and heavy as it interferes with the education of the child. Akabayashi and Psacharopoulos argued that children who divided his time between education and work tends to under-performs at school and is a poor achiever (as cited in Bhukuth,2008). Motkuri (2003), reinforced the need for broadening the definition of child labour and suggested to include not only the working children but also the nowhere children. An NGO, Child Rights and You (CRY) consider all forms of labour as hazardous, and therefore, the distinction between hazardous and non-hazardous work is spurious<sup>1</sup>. It is because children are obligated to work due to poverty and adult unemployment. On May 15, 2015, the Government of India gave its nod to the controversial amendment (Prohibition & Regulation) Act that permits children under 14 years of age to work in family-run enterprises or entertainment industry with certain conditions while completely banning their employment elsewhere.

### **Brief Literature Review:**

Several studies have tried to find out the reason for the engagement of children in economic activities. One of the many reasons is the parent’s level of education. It determines the children activities (Rana Ejaz Ali Khan, 2008) and minimises the labour force participation of

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<sup>1</sup> [www.cry.org](http://www.cry.org)

both girls and boys. Contrastingly, Barman (2011), found a negative relationship between the level of education of the child and parents with the participation of children in the workforce.

The cultural beliefs and tradition also influence the attitude of the parents. The common belief is that children need to learn skills that can be good for their future (V.Gayathri, 2003). A study of child labour in Peru and Pakistan shows that child labour improves the personal development of the child (Ray, 2000). Such misconception encourages millions of children to engage in either paid or unpaid domestic and agricultural activities. The demand for cheap labour and the inadequate income and unemployment of adults are the major reason for the employment of the children. Due to inadequate income, the poor and bonded family sell their children to the employers who exploit the children in town and cities (Das and Singh, 2014). The socio-economic factors influence the engagement of children in the household. In richer households, children spend less time on housework. In a household with large agricultural land or cattle, both boys and girls work more in the family business. It is because farm work is very labour intensive (Webbink, Smits, & Jong, 2012)

Poverty is often associated with child labour. Several studies have found a positive relationship between poverty and child labour (Pallage, 2005). Family Poverty increases the probability of child work (Amin, Quayes, & Rives, 2004). Contrastingly poverty is not the reason for child work; rather, it is the income that attracts to parents to send their child for work (Swain, 2014). The arguments on child labour issues are never-ending, and therefore, we cannot fit the whole issues in one frame. It is very complex as it encompasses social, political, economic, and anthropological aspects. There is still a lack of consensus among different groups of researcher on the definition of child labour. Therefore, the need is to see the issues from an interdisciplinary perspective. It also demands to see the issues from a local context.

### **Objectives and Methodology of the study:**

This paper aim to study the contribution of children in the household economy. The study is descriptive and is base on the primary data. It is collected using a sample survey. The study area is Upper Siang and Shi-Yomi districts of Arunachal Pradesh. The selected districts are one of the most remote districts in Arunachal Pradesh, which is bordering to China in the northern and western part of Arunachal Pradesh respectively. Three villages from each district are selected as sample villages. The names of the village selected from Upper Siang are Pasi, Padam, and Moying. Tato, Mechuka, and Ruku villages are selected from Shi-Yomi district. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the households from each villages. The household having 5-14 years of aged was only selected for the interview. Altogether 132 households have been interviewed using the structured questionnaire.

### **Results and Discussions:**

Table 1 presented the basic statistics of the children. The total number of children selected for an interview were 132 out of which 42.4 per cent were male and 57.6 per cent female. Out of the school-going children, 83.3 per cent are attending school, and 16.7 per cent are not.

Although the majority of the children (62.2) per cent of them have started schooling at 4-5 years, a considerable percentage have started lately at six years or more.

**Table 1. The Basic profile of the children**

Source: Field Data, 2019

Further, 87.1 per cent of the children missed school at least once in a week, and 12.9 per cent had missed two days in a week. The reasons for their absence are the burden of taking care of the younger siblings (48.4) so that the parents would be free to engage in their work. Reasonable proportions (35.5) are helping their parents in agricultural activities. Marginal percentage (6.5) is engaged in collecting wild fruits from the jungle. This fruit is called ‘Pipikoya’ in their local language, and its demand is high in the market. The price fluctuates between 4000-7000 per kg. It is a special case of Ruku village. The people of Ruku village goes to a jungle in the month of winter where they spend 10-15 days to collect wild fruits which is pricy. The parents take their children along with them to carry foods, as they have to spend 10-15 days in the jungle. However, most of them are compels to assists the parents as it is one of the main sources of income for them. Interestingly, in their innocence, the children

| Category                       | Percentage                        | Percentage |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|------------|
| Attending school               | Yes                               | 83.3       |
|                                | No                                | 16.7       |
| Age at which started schooling | At 5                              | 62.2       |
|                                | More Than 5                       | 37.8       |
| Missed school in the past week | Yes                               | 28.8       |
|                                | No                                | 71.2       |
| Number of missing days         | 1                                 | 87.1       |
|                                | 2                                 | 12.9       |
| Reasons for missing the school | Agricultural field                | 45.2       |
|                                | Sibling care                      | 48.4       |
|                                | Collect fruits From the<br>Jungle | 6.5        |

do enjoy the task.

Table 1 shows that 16.7 per cent of the children is not attending school. Table 2 presents the reasons for the non-attendance of schooling. More than 60 per cent (61.1) are not attending school because they have to carry their younger sibling. Marginal percentage (5.6) is working as a domestic helper. The parents of those children who are working as domestic helper are working as a labour in General Reserve Engineer Force (GREF). No local children are working as a domestic helper. The parents do not send their children to school, as they are too young (11.1). A very less percentage of children drop out of school. Out of 132 children, only four children dropout from the school. The reasons are the failure in the examination and lack of interest in study (75) and taking care of the siblings (25).

**Table 2: Reasons for Out of School Children**

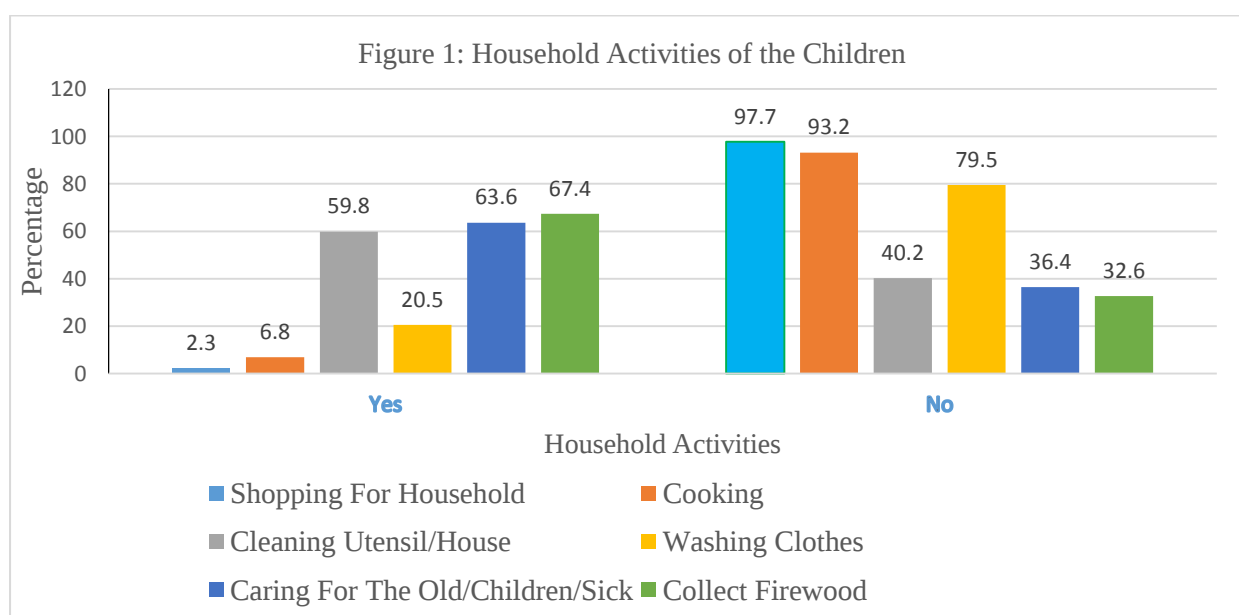
| Category | Reasons | Percentage |
|----------|---------|------------|
|----------|---------|------------|

|                               |                         |      |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|------|
| Not attending/attended School | Parents Did Not Send    | 22.2 |
|                               | Sibling Care            | 61.1 |
|                               | Work As Domestic Labour | 5.6  |
|                               | Too Young               | 11.1 |
| Age at which left the school  | 6                       | 25.0 |
|                               | 8                       | 25.0 |
|                               | 10                      | 50.0 |
| Reasons for leaving School    | Got Failed              | 75.0 |
|                               | Sibling Care            | 25.0 |

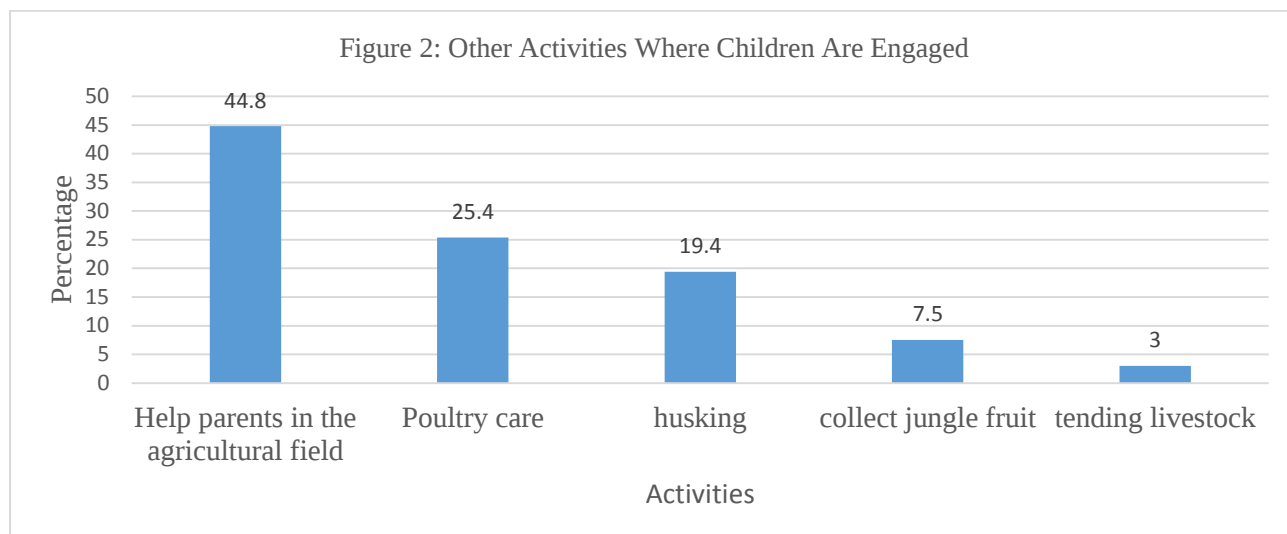
Source: Field data, 2019

### Household activities of the children:

Figure 1 presents the household activities of the children. The children are engaged in the household task, the highest being the collection of firewood from the jungle (67.4). In Ruku village, which is the remotest of all other villages, the child collects firewood from the hills and sell it in the market. One bundle of firewood costs two hundred rupees. Other tasks include caring for the old/children (63.6), cleaning utensil/house (59.8), washing clothes (20.5), cooking (6.8), and negligible percentage engages in shopping for household (2.3). Apart from these, the other tasks where they are involved are helping parents in agricultural field (44.4), poultry care (25.4), husking (19.4), helping in collecting wild fruit from the jungle (7.5), and tending livestock (3.0). In the villages, particularly in Pasi and Padam, people invite the group of children to work in their agricultural field. They paid 200 rupees per day per person. However, it is not a regular practice. Figure 2 presents the other activities of the children where they are engaged.



Source: Field data, 2019



Source: Field data, 2019

### Working place and time:

Table 3 shows the place and time where the children carry out their work. Most of them are actively involved in the household and helping their parents in the agricultural field. The usual practice is to do household activities like cleaning utensils, fetching water in the morning and after school, they go to the agricultural field and collect firewood from the jungle. More than 52 per cent of the children carry out the activities inside the household. Around 40 per cent of them carry out the activities in both household and agricultural field. Marginal percentage (2.4) of them goes to the jungle to collect firewood and tending livestock after the school. Those children who are staying with the parents and attending the government schools are engaged both in household and agricultural activities. They do the work both before and after school (67.2). Other children are studying in private school and staying in private hostel are found to engage in the work during the vacation (22.4). Few children do the work during daytime (7.2) and only after school (2.4). The average working hours of the children are 2 hrs per day, but on weekends it is marginally higher (2.8 hrs). It is because the children have to go to the agricultural field in the weekends where they work for longer hours. They work because they have to help their parents and consider it as part of the tribal culture.

**Table 3: Working place and time**

| Category                                          | Place                            | Percentage |
|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------|
| Where did you usually carry out these activities? | Inside the Household             | 52.4       |
|                                                   | Agriculture field                | 5.6        |
|                                                   | Household and agricultural field | 39.5       |
|                                                   | Others (Jungle, livestock)       | 2.4        |
| When did you carry out the activities?            | Both before and after school     | 67.2       |
|                                                   | Vacation                         | 22.4       |
|                                                   | Both day and night               | .8         |

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|              |     |
|--------------|-----|
| Day          | 7.2 |
| After school | 2.4 |

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Source: Field data, 2019

**Conclusion:** The introduction section laid out the various debates revolving around the definition of child labour- whether household activities should be include or excluded from the definition of child labour?. The findings of the present study suggest that children are actively involved in both household and agricultural activities. The reasons for their engagement is to allow adults or parents to work freely. In this way, they are contributing to the household economy indirectly. The women are the prime benefit receiver of the children work as the study reveals that most of the children are engaged in taking care of the sibling. It is not easy to conclude whether household chores should be included in child labour, but at the same time, we can not ignore the role of the children in the household economy. The challenge now is to acknowledge the role of the children in the household economy. The question of the inclusive and exclusive definition of child labour calls for more in-depth empirical research to support its arguments.

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