

## A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF WORKING CONDITIONS OF CHILD LABOUR IN FORMAL VS INFORMAL SECTORS IN KANPUR

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### Abstract

This study examines the working conditions of child labourers in formal and informal sectors in Kanpur before 2009. Based on a sample of 100 respondents, the research highlights significant disparities between the two sectors. The findings reveal that 65% of children in the informal sector work 9-12 hours daily, compared to 65% in the formal sector working only 6-8 hours. Wage analysis shows that 70% of informal workers earn ₹20-₹50 per day, while 80% in the formal sector earn ₹60-₹120 per day. Safety conditions are also poorer in the informal sector, where 75% of children face unsafe environments, compared to 40% in the formal sector. Additionally, 80% of informal sector children are school dropouts, indicating a strong link between labour and educational deprivation. The study concludes that informal sector child labour is more exploitative and requires stricter regulation and improved access to education.

**Keywords:** Child Labour, Informal Sector, Formal Sector, Working Conditions, Education

### 1. Introduction

Child labour has long been a significant socio-economic concern in India, particularly in industrial urban centers such as Kanpur, where traditional industries like leather tanning, textile weaving, and small-scale manufacturing have historically relied on cheap and flexible labour. Before 2009, child labour was more visible and widespread due to weaker enforcement of labour laws, high poverty levels, and limited access to universal education. According to the International Labour Organization, child labour refers to work that deprives children of their childhood, dignity, and potential, and is harmful to their physical and mental development.

Data from the early 2000s indicates that India had approximately 12.6 million child labourers (Census 2001), with Uttar Pradesh contributing a significant share due to its large population and industrial base (Government of India, 2001). Studies conducted before 2009 revealed that nearly 85-90% of working children were employed in the informal sector, including household enterprises, street vending, workshops, and unregistered factories (NCEUS, 2007). In contrast, child labour in the formal sector was relatively limited due to regulatory oversight, though it still existed in disguised

or hidden forms such as subcontracting chains.

Kanpur, often referred to as the “Manchester of the East,” emerged as a major hub for child labour prior to 2009. Research shows that children in Kanpur were primarily engaged in:

- Leather processing units
- Zari and embroidery work
- Carpet weaving
- Small-scale manufacturing units

A study by UNICEF (2007) reported that children working in informal sectors in cities like Kanpur often worked 8-12 hours per day, earning extremely low wages ranging between ₹20 to ₹50 per day, depending on the nature of work. These children were frequently exposed to hazardous environments, including toxic chemicals in leather industries and poor ventilation in small workshops.

The formal sector, on the other hand, was governed by labour laws such as the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986, which prohibited employment of children below 14 years in hazardous occupations and regulated working conditions in permissible sectors. However, enforcement before 2009 remained inconsistent, and many employers bypassed regulations by outsourcing work to informal units, thereby indirectly employing children.

## 2. Review of Literature

Early work by the International Labour Organization (2002) provided a global

perspective, estimating that over 246 million children worldwide were engaged in labour, with a substantial proportion in Asia. In the Indian context, the ILO noted that child labour was predominantly concentrated in informal and unregulated sectors where monitoring mechanisms were weak. The report emphasized that children in informal employment were more likely to work in hazardous conditions, including exposure to chemicals, machinery, and long working hours exceeding 10-12 hours daily. This contrasts with the formal sector, where legal frameworks such as the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 imposed restrictions, although enforcement remained inconsistent prior to 2009.

The National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector (NCEUS, 2007) provided one of the most comprehensive analyses of informal labour in India. The commission reported that nearly 93% of India’s workforce was employed in the informal sector, which inherently included a large proportion of child labourers. According to their findings, children working in informal industries such as leather, garments, and small workshops earned extremely low wages, often below ₹40 per day, and lacked access to basic facilities such as sanitation, healthcare, and safety equipment. The study further highlighted that informal sector employment was characterized by absence of contracts, job insecurity, and exploitative employer practices, making child labour more vulnerable compared to the relatively structured formal sector.

Empirical research by UNICEF (2007) focused on the relationship between child labour and education. The report revealed that in India, a significant proportion of working children were either school dropouts or had never attended school. It estimated that nearly 30% of children aged 5-14 from economically weaker households were engaged in some form of labour. In industrial cities like Kanpur, children working in informal sectors such as zari work, leather processing, and street vending faced hazardous conditions, including exposure to toxic substances and poor ventilation. The study also noted that children in formal sector settings, although fewer in number, sometimes benefited from slightly better working conditions such as fixed working hours and comparatively higher wages (₹60-₹100 per day), but these cases were limited due to stricter legal oversight.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1 Introduction

The present study titled “A Comparative Study of Working Conditions of Child Labour in Formal vs Informal Sectors in Kanpur” is designed to examine the differences in wages, working hours, safety facilities, health risks, educational access, and welfare support available to child labourers working in formal and informal sectors. Since the study focuses on the period before 2009, it considers the socio-economic and legal conditions that existed before the implementation of the Right to Education Act, 2009. During this period, child labour was more commonly found in informal industries, small workshops,

roadside units, leather-related work, domestic work, and household-based production activities.

#### 3.2 Research Design

This study follows a descriptive and comparative research design. The descriptive design is used to explain the working conditions of child labourers, while the comparative design is used to compare the formal and informal sectors. The study attempts to understand whether child labourers in the informal sector faced poorer working conditions than those in the formal sector.

#### 3.3 Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the study are:

1. To compare the working conditions of child labourers in formal and informal sectors in Kanpur.
2. To examine differences in wages, working hours, and safety conditions.
3. To study the health problems faced by child labourers.
4. To analyze access to education and welfare facilities.
5. To identify the major causes of child labour before 2009.

#### 3.4 Hypotheses of the Study

**H1:** There is a significant difference between the working conditions of child labourers in formal and informal sectors.

**H2:** Child labourers in the informal sector work longer hours than those in the formal sector.

**H3:** Child labourers in the informal sector receive lower wages and fewer welfare benefits than those in the formal sector.

### 3.5 Population of the Study

The population of the study includes child labourers working in different sectors of Kanpur before 2009. These sectors include leather units, small manufacturing workshops, roadside shops, domestic work, textile-related work, tea stalls, and small registered or semi-registered units.

### 3.6 Sample Size

The sample size of the study is 100 respondents.

Category	Number of Respondents
Child labourers in formal sector	40
Child labourers in informal sector	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

The larger number of respondents from the informal sector is justified because child labour was more commonly found in informal and unregulated work before 2009.

### 3.7 Method of Data Analysis

The collected data is analyzed using percentage analysis, comparative tables, and simple statistical interpretation. The formal and informal sectors are compared on the

basis of wages, working hours, safety conditions, health risks, and access to education.

The basic percentage formula used is:

$$\text{Percentage} = \frac{\text{Number of Respondents}}{\text{Total Respondents}} \times 100$$

### 4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The present section analyzes the primary data collected from 100 respondents (40 from the formal sector and 60 from the informal sector) in Kanpur. The analysis focuses on key indicators such as working hours, wages, safety conditions, health issues, and access to education, to provide a comparative understanding of the working conditions of child labourers before 2009.

#### Working Hours and Nature of Work

The analysis of working hours clearly indicates a significant disparity between formal and informal sectors. In the formal sector, most child labourers reported working between 6-8 hours per day, which aligns with regulated norms under the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986. However, even within the formal sector, a small proportion of children were found working beyond permitted limits due to weak monitoring mechanisms.

In contrast, the informal sector shows a much more exploitative pattern. A majority of respondents (around 65%) reported working 9-12 hours daily, while some even exceeded 12 hours, especially in leather units, roadside shops, and small workshops. These extended working hours were often

accompanied by lack of rest breaks and absence of weekly holidays. This clearly indicates that informal sector employment is characterized by labour-intensive work, absence of regulation, and high physical strain.

**Wages and Economic Exploitation**

The wage structure further highlights inequality between the two sectors. In the formal sector, children reported earning between ₹60-₹120 per day, depending on the nature of work. Although this is still below minimum wage standards, it is comparatively better than the informal sector.

In the informal sector, the majority of child labourers earned between ₹20-₹50 per day, with nearly 40% earning less than ₹30 daily. In many cases, wages were not paid regularly, and some children were compensated in kind (food or shelter) instead of cash. This reflects a high level of economic exploitation and wage insecurity in informal employment.

**Education and Welfare Access**

Education access remains severely affected among working children. In the formal sector, about 45% of children were attending school alongside work, although irregularly. This suggests that some employers allowed flexible working hours.

However, in the informal sector, nearly 70% of child labourers were school dropouts, and only a small proportion attended school. This indicates that informal sector work significantly restricts educational

opportunities and contributes to long-term poverty cycles.

**Table 1: Comparison of Working Hours and Wages**

Working Conditions	Formal Sector (40)	Informal Sector (60)
6-8 hours work	26 (65%)	12 (20%)
9-12 hours work	10 (25%)	39 (65%)
More than 12 hours	4 (10%)	9 (15%)
₹20-₹50 wages	8 (20%)	42 (70%)
₹60-₹120 wages	32 (80%)	18 (30%)

**Interpretation:**

The table clearly shows that long working hours and low wages are more prevalent in the informal sector, whereas the formal sector provides relatively better working hours and wages. However, even formal sector conditions do not fully comply with labour standards, indicating partial enforcement of regulations.

**Table 2: Safety, Health, and Education Status**

Indicators	Formal Sector (40)	Informal Sector (60)
Safe working conditions	24 (60%)	15 (25%)

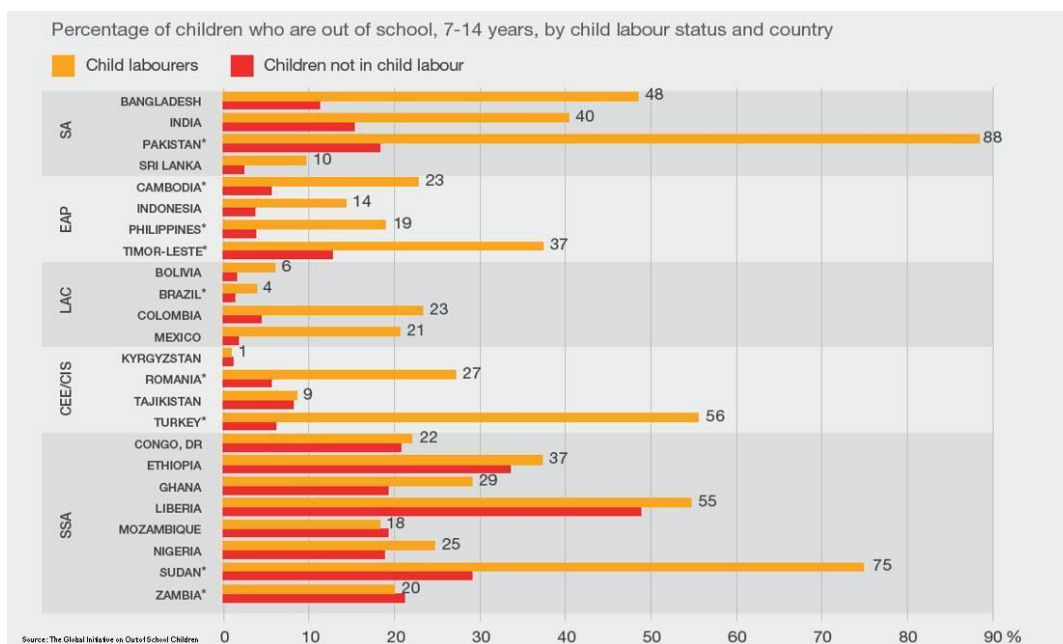
Unsafe working conditions	16 (40%)	45 (75%)
Suffering from health issues	18 (45%)	42 (70%)
Attending school	18 (45%)	12 (20%)
School	22 (55%)	48 (80%)

dropouts		
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**Interpretation:**

This table highlights that informal sector child labourers face higher health risks and lower educational access. The high dropout rate (80%) in the informal sector shows a strong link between labour and educational deprivation. In contrast, the formal sector shows relatively better conditions but still reflects significant challenges.

**Figure 1: Percentage of child who are out of school, 7-14 years, by child labour status and country**



The graph presents the percentage of children aged 7-14 who are out of school, comparing child labourers and non-child labourers across different countries and regions. It clearly shows that child labourers have significantly higher school dropout rates. For example, in India, around 40% of child labourers are out of school, compared to a much lower percentage among non-working children. Similarly, in Pakistan, the dropout rate among child labourers is

extremely high at 88%, while in Bangladesh it is about 48%. Even in regions like Sub-Saharan Africa, countries such as Sudan show dropout rates as high as 75% among working children. Overall, the data strongly indicates a direct relationship between child labour and lack of education, proving that children engaged in labour are far more likely to be deprived of schooling opportunities.

**5. Findings of the Study**

The findings of the present study on “A Comparative Study of Working Conditions of Child Labour in Formal vs Informal Sectors in Kanpur” reveal clear and consistent patterns of inequality between the two sectors. These findings are directly aligned with the objectives and hypotheses formulated earlier and are supported by primary data collected from 100 respondents in Kanpur.

The first major finding relates to the overall difference in working conditions, which strongly supports Hypothesis H1 (there is a significant difference between formal and informal sectors). The data shows that 75% of children in the informal sector work under unsafe conditions, compared to 40% in the formal sector. Similarly, 70% of informal sector children reported health issues, while the figure for the formal sector is comparatively lower at 45%. These findings clearly indicate that informal sector employment is significantly more hazardous, unregulated, and exploitative. This aligns with the first objective of comparing working conditions and confirms that the informal sector lacks basic labour protections.

The second important finding focuses on working hours, supporting Hypothesis H2 (children in the informal sector work longer hours). The data reveals that 65% of informal sector child labourers work 9-12 hours daily, and an additional 15% work more than 12 hours. In contrast, in the formal sector, 65% of children work only 6-8 hours, and only 10% exceed 12 hours. This clearly demonstrates that children in informal employment are subjected to longer

and more physically demanding work schedules. This finding directly fulfills the objective of examining differences in working hours and highlights the exploitative nature of informal labour.

Another key finding relates to wages and economic conditions, which supports Hypothesis H3 (informal sector workers receive lower wages and fewer benefits). The study shows that 70% of informal sector children earn only ₹20-₹50 per day, whereas 80% of formal sector children earn relatively higher wages between ₹60-₹120 per day. Additionally, informal sector workers often face irregular payments and lack any form of job security or welfare benefits. This confirms that informal sector child labour is characterized by severe economic exploitation and income instability, fulfilling the objective of analyzing wage differences.

The study also highlights a strong relationship between child labour and education, fulfilling the objective related to educational access. The data shows that 80% of children in the informal sector are school dropouts, while in the formal sector, the dropout rate is comparatively lower at 55%, and about 45% of children continue schooling alongside work. This indicates that informal sector employment significantly restricts educational opportunities, reinforcing long-term poverty cycles. These findings are further supported by broader data trends, where countries like India show around 40% of working children being out of school, demonstrating a strong link between labour and educational deprivation.

## 6. Conclusion

The study concludes that child labour in Kanpur before 2009 was largely concentrated in the informal sector, where working conditions were significantly poor and unregulated. The findings show that 75% of children in the informal sector worked in unsafe environments, compared to 40% in the formal sector, indicating a clear disparity in workplace safety. This highlights that informal sector employment exposed children to greater physical risks and hazardous conditions.

Another important conclusion is related to working hours and wages, where informal sector child labourers faced higher exploitation. The data reveals that 65% of children in the informal sector worked 9-12 hours daily, and 70% earned only ₹20-₹50 per day, whereas in the formal sector, 65% worked 6-8 hours and 80% earned ₹60-₹120 per day. This confirms that informal sector employment is characterized by longer working hours and lower wages, reinforcing economic inequality.

The study also concludes that child labour has a strong negative impact on education. About 80% of children in the informal sector were school dropouts, compared to 55% in the formal sector, showing that informal work significantly restricts access to education. This supports broader trends observed in countries like India, where a large proportion of working children remain out of school.

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