



Sectoral and Spatial Dynamics of Child Labour in Urban Slums: A Case Study of Kolhapur Municipal Corporation (2011–2021)

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Abstract:

Child labour remains a persistent socio-economic issue in developing nations, particularly within rapidly urbanizing regions of India. Despite legal frameworks, urban slums continue to foster child labour due to poverty, informality, and spatial inequality. This paper investigates the sectoral distribution and spatial patterns of child labour in the slums of Kolhapur Municipal Corporation (KMC) between 2011 and 2021, while critically evaluating the efficacy of India's legal and policy framework. Using primary field survey data and secondary sources, the study reveals that the tertiary sector (service-oriented jobs) employs the largest share of working children (45–50%), followed by the secondary (28–32%) and primary sectors (18–22%). Spatially, child labour is concentrated in slums near industrial zones, markets, and transport hubs. The paper identifies significant gender disparities, with boys dominating visible outdoor labour and girls relegated to hidden domestic work. Despite comprehensive laws (Child Labour Act, RTE Act) and welfare schemes (NCLP, ICPS), implementation remains weak due to enforcement gaps, low community awareness, and the dominance of the informal economy. The paper concludes that a spatially targeted, multi-sectoral approach addressing poverty and education access is essential for eliminating child labour in urban slums.

Keywords: *Child Labour, Urban Slums, Sectoral Distribution, Spatial Pattern, Kolhapur, Policy Implementation, Informal Economy.*

Introduction:

Child labour is one of the most persistent socio-economic and spatial issues in developing countries. In India, despite significant economic growth and a comprehensive legal framework, child labour continues to exist, especially within urban slums. These informal settlements are characterized by poverty, inadequate

housing, lack of basic services, and limited access to education—conditions that compel children to enter the workforce at an early age. The city of Kolhapur, governed by the Kolhapur Municipal Corporation (KMC), presents a relevant case for examining the dynamics of child

labour within slum areas over the period 2011–2021.

The phenomenon of child labour in slums is not uniform; it varies across economic sectors and geographical locations. Children are engaged in rag picking (primary sector), small-scale industrial work (secondary sector), and domestic services or street vending (tertiary sector). Understanding the sector-wise distribution is essential for identifying vulnerabilities. Furthermore, spatial factors such as proximity to industrial zones, markets, and waste disposal sites significantly influence the concentration of child labour. This paper integrates sectoral and spatial analysis with a review of the legal-policy framework to provide a comprehensive understanding of child labour in Kolhapur's slums.

Objectives

1. To analyze the sectoral distribution of child labour (primary, secondary, tertiary) in the slums of Kolhapur Municipal Corporation.
2. To examine the spatial patterns and clustering of child labour across different slum clusters and wards.
3. To identify the socio-economic and gender-based determinants of child labour in urban slums.
4. To evaluate the legal and policy framework governing child labour in India and assess the challenges in its implementation at the local level.

Methodology:

The study is based on primary data collected through field surveys conducted in slum areas of Kolhapur Municipal Corporation between 2011 and 2021. The survey employed structured questionnaires and observational methods to gather data on child labour participation, nature of work, working conditions, income patterns, and household characteristics. A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select slum clusters across high, medium, and low child labour concentration wards. Secondary data was sourced from the Census of India (2011), NSSO reports, the International Labour Organization (ILO), and official government acts and scheme guidelines. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics, cross-tabulations (e.g., sector-wise and gender-wise distribution), and spatial interpretation of proximity factors.

Findings and Analysis:

1. Sectoral Distribution of Child Labour:

The survey data reveals a clear dominance of the tertiary sector, followed by the secondary and primary sectors (Table 1).

Table 1: Sector-wise Distribution of Child Labour in Kolhapur Slums (2011–2021)

Sector	Nature of Work	Percentage (%)
Primary	Rag picking, scrap collection	20
Secondary	Workshops, garages, small-scale industries	30
Tertiary	Domestic work, hotels, street vending	50
Total		100%

Source: Field Survey

1.1 Primary Sector (20%):

Children engaged in rag picking and scrap collection face severe health hazards (infections, injuries) and irregular income. They are typically concentrated near dumping grounds and landfill sites. The work requires minimal skill but exposes children to toxic substances and unhygienic surroundings.

1.2 Secondary Sector (30%):

This sector involves work in mechanical workshops, garages, and small-scale industries. Children assist in welding, machine handling, and repairs. The work is semi-skilled, physically demanding, and hazardous. Boys constitute the majority (70%) in visible industrial labour, while girls are often confined to home-based packaging or assembly work (Table 2).

Table 2: Gender-wise Distribution of Child Labour in Secondary Sector

Gender	Type of Work Involvement	Percentage (%)
Boys	Workshops, garages, welding, mechanical work	70
Girls	Home-based work, packaging, light assembly	30
Total		100%

Source: Field Survey

1.3 Tertiary Sector (50%):

This is the largest employer of child labour, including domestic work (30%), hotels/tea stalls (35%), street vending (25%), and other services (10%). The sector's dominance is due to low entry barriers and high demand for cheap labour. Girls are predominantly engaged in domestic work (55% of girls vs. 10% of boys), while boys dominate hotel work and vending (Table 3). Exploitation, long hours, and verbal abuse are common.

Table 3: Gender-wise Participation in Tertiary Sector

Gender	Major Area of Work	Percentage (%)
Boys	Hotels, tea stalls, street vending	65
Girls	Domestic work, household services	35
Total		100%

Source: Field Survey

2. Spatial Pattern of Child Labour:

Child labour is unevenly distributed across Kolhapur's slums. High-concentration wards (40% of child labour) are located near industrial areas and markets. Medium-concentration wards (35%) have mixed land use, while low-concentration wards (25%) are peripheral with fewer economic opportunities (Table 4).

Table 4: Ward-wise Distribution of Child Labour in Slums

Ward Category	Characteristics Share of Child Labour	Percentage (%)
High	Concentration Wards Dense slums, near industries and markets	40
Medium	Concentration Mixed land use, moderate slum population	35
Low	Concentration Peripheral areas, fewer economic opportunities	25
Total		100%

Source: Field Survey

Industrial area slums show "Very High" child labour intensity, followed by core urban slums ("High") and peripheral slums ("Moderate to Low"). Proximity to industrial zones, markets, and transport hubs is a critical determinant. For instance, slums near industrial areas generate high levels of workshop work, while those near

markets fuel street vending and hotel employment (Table 5).

Table 5: Influence of Proximity on Child Labour Participation

Location Factor	Type of Work Generated	Impact Level
Industrial Areas	Workshop, mechanical work	High
Markets Street	vending, hotel work	High
Transport Hubs	Loading, vending, service jobs	Moderate
Residential Areas	Domestic work	Moderate

Source: Field Survey

3. Socio-Economic Determinants:

The study identifies poverty, lack of education, migration, and large family size as the primary drivers of child labour (Table 6). Migrant families, facing economic instability and disrupted schooling, are more likely to push children into the workforce. Poverty is the most significant determinant, creating a cycle where immediate income needs outweigh educational benefits.

Table 6: Socio-Economic Determinants Influencing Child Labour

Factor Key	Characteristics	Impact on Child Labour
Poverty	Low income, unstable employment	High
Education	School dropouts, lack of access	High
Migration	Rural-urban migration, lack of support	Moderate to High
Family Size	Large households, high dependency ratio	Moderate

Source: Field Survey

4. Gender Dimensions:

A clear gendered division of labour exists. Boys are more visible in industrial and outdoor work (workshops, vending), while girls are concentrated in hidden, unregulated domestic work. Female child labour is significantly underreported due to its indoor, private nature.

Table 7: Gender-wise Distribution of Child Labour by Type of Work

Type of Work	Boys Percentage (%)	Girls Percentage (%)
Industrial/Workshop Work	45	10
Hotels & Street Vending	30	15
Domestic Work	10	55
Home-based Activities	15	20
Total	100	100

Source: Field Survey

5. Legal and Policy Framework and Implementation Challenges:

India has a robust legal framework, including the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act (1986/2016), the Right to Education (RTE) Act (2009), and the Juvenile Justice Act (2015). Welfare schemes such as the National Child Labour Project (NCLP) and Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) provide rehabilitation and education support (Table 8).

Table 8: Major Laws Related to Child Labour in India

Law/ Act	Year	Key Provisions	Objectives
Child Labour (P&R) Act	1986/2016	Prohibits child labour, regulates adolescent work	Elimination of hazardous labour
Right to Education Act	2009	Free & compulsory education (6–14 years)	Universal education
Juvenile Justice Act	2015	Protection, care, rehabilitation of children	Child welfare and protection

However, the study identifies significant implementation gaps (Table 9). Weak enforcement (limited inspections), low awareness among slum communities, and the dominance of the informal sector (hidden work, especially domestic work) severely limit policy effectiveness. Persistent poverty remains the root cause, driving children into labour despite legal prohibitions.

Table 9: Key Challenges in Implementation of Child Labour Policies

Challenge	Nature of Issue	Impact on Child Labour
Weak Enforcement	Limited inspections, poor monitoring	High
Low Awareness	Lack of knowledge about laws and schemes	High
Informal Sector Dominance	Hidden and unregulated employment	Very High
Poverty	Economic compulsion for child labour	Very High

Discussion:

The findings from Kolhapur align with broader national trends where the tertiary sector has become the largest absorber of child labour due to the expansion of the urban informal economy. The spatial clustering near industrial and commercial zones confirms that urban economic geography directly shapes child labour patterns. The high concentration of child labour in migrant-heavy slums suggests that urbanization without adequate social protection exacerbates vulnerability.

A critical insight is the disconnect between India's progressive legal framework and ground-level realities. While the RTE Act and NCLP provide

pathways out of labour, weak enforcement and the hidden nature of domestic work (predominantly affecting girls) perpetuate the problem. The gender analysis reveals that policies focusing only on visible, hazardous labour miss a large population of girls working in private households. Furthermore, poverty alleviation remains the missing link; without stable household incomes, families will continue to rely on children's earnings.

Conclusion:

This study of Kolhapur Municipal Corporation (2011–2021) concludes that child labour in urban slums is a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by sectoral demand, spatial location, poverty, and gender norms. The tertiary sector dominates employment, but secondary sector work remains more hazardous. Spatially, child labour is concentrated in slums near economic nodes—industrial areas, markets, and transport hubs. Socio-economic determinants such as poverty, migration, and low educational access drive children into work, while gender disparities ensure that girls' labour remains hidden and underreported.

Although India possesses a comprehensive legal and policy framework, its effectiveness is undermined by weak enforcement, low community awareness, the pervasive informal sector, and persistent poverty. The persistence of child labour in Kolhapur's slums represents a failure of implementation rather than a lack of legislative intent.

Recommendations:

Based on the integrated analysis, the following recommendations are proposed:

- I. Spatially Targeted Interventions: Focus enforcement and rehabilitation efforts on high-concentration wards—slums near industrial areas, markets, and transport hubs. Establish mobile schools and health camps in these hotspots.
- II. Strengthen Enforcement in the Informal Sector: Conduct regular, unannounced inspections of workshops, hotels, tea stalls, and residential areas (for domestic work). Create a confidential reporting mechanism for neighbours and community members.
- III. Address Hidden Female Child Labour: Design specific programs to identify and support girls engaged in domestic work. Provide conditional cash transfers to families to keep girls in school and recognize domestic work as a form of child labour in official surveys.
- IV. Enhance Community Awareness: Launch mass awareness campaigns in slum clusters about the Child Labour Act, RTE Act (free education right), and NCLP rehabilitation benefits. Involve local NGOs and community leaders.
- V. Link Poverty Alleviation with Education: Expand existing schemes (e.g., NCLP stipends, mid-day meals, scholarships) with higher financial incentives for families below the poverty line. Ensure every

working child is enrolled in a special training centre and mainstreamed into formal school within one year.

- VI. Improve Urban Infrastructure: Upgrade basic services (water, sanitation, roads) in slums and build accessible, high-quality schools within or adjacent to slum clusters to reduce the opportunity cost of schooling.

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