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# **Child Labour in Knitwear Industry of Tiruppur**

J. Jayaranjan



**V.V. Giri National Labour Institute**

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Industry of Tirunur**

**CATALOGUED**

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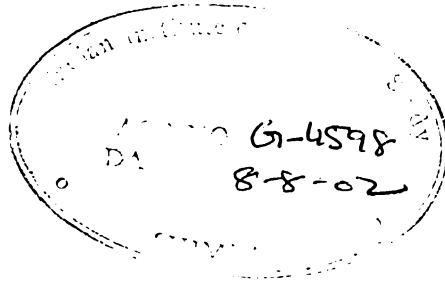
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## PREFACE

The present study on child labour in the knitwear industry of Tiruppur (Tamil Nadu), seeks to situate the problem of child labour in the context of the Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act 1986. This study is part of the multi-centric study on child labour that was sponsored by ILO-IPEC and carried out by VVGNLI in nine hazardous industries during 1999-2000. This study has been carried out by Shri J.Jayaranjan of Institute of Development Alternatives, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, for VVGNLI.

The study goes against the thesis of positive correlation between poverty and incidence of child labour. However, the contribution of child labour to the family income is found to be substantial, which indicates importance of economic compulsions and considerations as against poverty in analysing child labour. More than the survival strategy, as is often seen, the issue is that of maintaining and elevating the economic status, which requires more attention and in-depth understanding.

Traditional understanding of child labour in terms of household literacy status and household size is also contradicted in the study. Higher levels of household literacy do not always guarantee greater chances for children to attend schools. As far as migration is concerned, the study finds a positive correlation between the two though not so strong as has been the general pattern.

Apart from these supply side factors, the organisation of production through subcontracting and home based production lies central to the existence of child labour. The study reveals that

the restructuring of the production organisation and the process has enhanced the demand for child labour in Tiruppur Knitwear industry. The study on the whole, captures the complexities of supply and demand side factors and cautions the danger of generalisations while tackling the issue of child labour.

I thank the author as well as his Institute for the valuable support in conducting this study.

*Uday Kumar Varma*

**Uday Kumar Varma**  
**Director**

# **Child Labour in Tiruppur Knitwear Cluster**

## **Introduction**

Social systems undergo transformation continuously. The pace and the nature of transformation is determined by the social and historical conditions of the system that is transforming. The transformation experience is of a different kind for the Third World countries. Most of these countries had freed themselves from the yokes of the colonial powers soon after the end of World War II. Such states were proactive in initiating changes towards transformation of their economies and societies. However, social changes including economic development do not take place in a vacuum. The process of change is a complex interplay of the pre existing social structure and the new forces that are unleashed in the attempt to 'develop' and 'change'. The consequences of such interplay have very many dimensions, some are intended and very many others are unintended. Different sections of the society are affected variedly by this transformation process.

While it brings new hopes to many, it also springs many ill effects forcing us to interrogate the validity of the developmental strategy itself. By critically interrogating the strategy, one can bring forth the problematic dimension of the strategy. Solutions to such problems could be multi-dimensional. The intensity and visibility of such ill effects vary widely. The sensitivity about these problems also varies. One such instance is the problem of child labour. Nature of industrialisation is not only the product mix or the nature of production or the technology of production. The nature of organisation of production is our concern here. The nature of industrialisation in its current phase is mostly in the

unorganized sector. The regulatory role of the state is minimal if not anything. Labour remains completely unorganised and capital is free to engage labour in its own terms. With the absence of a social security system and with subsistence wages, labour has to fend for itself. It is not paid even to reproduce itself. Physical reproduction would obviously mean the welfare of the workers and their family. But given the excess supply of labour in the market and the absence of any regulation by the state capital is free to pay not even reproductive wages. In turn to the labour is forced squeeze their livelihood even by self exploitation and the exploitation of their family members. Capital on its past attempts cost reduction by engaging child labour. Reduction in cost of production turns to be very acute particularly in a context where the final product has to be sold in the international market.

The present context is the incidence of child labour in the knitwear export cluster of Tiruppur. Tiruppur has emerged as an important knitwear exporter to the world to the domestic market. The town is the fastest growing in the State. Demand for labour is booming. Units normally work for three shifts a day. The ever-expanding demand for labour in the industry had drawn a large number of children into the labour market. Despite the efforts of the state to abolish child labour through legislation, employing child labour continues to thrive in this cluster. There is also pressure from a set of clients, particularly from external buyers, not to engage child labour. But the structure of the industry and the range of the product market is conducive to employ child labour. On the other hand, the wage levels are high in the industry. Correspondingly, the cost of living in the town is also very high forcing the labour to augment its wage income by various methods. However, the incidence of child labour is comparatively low in Tiruppur. Unlike the match industry and other child labour industry, the production process is not predominantly with child labour. It



supplements adult male and female labour. Since children are not employed for their 'nimble fingers' in the industry, they are not redundant when they grow into their adulthood. In fact, they acquire some skill to bloom into a worker after some time.

Given this background, our objectives in this report are:

- [a] to locate the incidence of child labour within the nature and organisation of the industry;
- [b] to map the socio economic conditions of the child labour households in comparison to non- child labour households; and

## **The Growth and Consolidation of the Knitwear Industry in Tiruppur**

### **Garment exports in general**

Prior to 1960-61 there was virtually no export of readymade garments from India and in that year they were a modest Rs.0.85 crore. In 1970-71 the value of garment exports was about Rs.30 crore and constituted 2 per cent of total exports and 3.8 per cent of manufactured exports. But since then exports of readymade garments have recorded a phenomenal increase, more so in the 1980s.

### **Knitwear Exports and Tiruppur**

The share of knitwear in the garment exports from the country has been steadily increasing and so is the share of Tiruppur in the overall knitwear exported from the country. At around 20 per cent, (in terms of value of exports), Tiruppur ranks third after Delhi and Bombay. However, these figures indicate only the direct

exports from Tiruppur. Quite a major chunk of exports from Tiruppur is indirect and routed through trading agents in Bombay, Delhi and Chennai.

That cotton knitwear export from Tiruppur has been a key factor in the growth of Indian apparel exports in recent years. This, it appears, is largely due to the growing demand in the advanced capitalist economies for both cotton based garments and knit garments. Two factors have contributed to the growth of knitwear; one it is easier and quicker to produce fabric by knitting than by weaving. Second, knitted fabrics provide easier manoeuvrability in production with regard to design. Cotton based garments which came into vogue when the oil shock of the seventies curbed the production of synthetic fibers, continues to be in demand. This is especially true of cotton knitwear.<sup>6</sup> Hence, it appears that the 'success' of Tiruppur is in addition an outcome of changes in the consumption pattern in the advanced capitalist economies and the geographical division of labour in the world garment industry.

The town of Tiruppur with an area of 43.52 sq.kms is situated in the dry hinterland of Tamil Nadu. With a population of 2.35 lakhs according to the 1991 census and a decadal population growth rate of 41.55 per cent in the period 1981-1991, Tiruppur has undergone a tremendous 'boom' being largely the result of a significant growth in demand for cotton knitwear in the world market.

Piecing together information from available sources <sup>7</sup> we realize that, since the 1960s, Tiruppur has undergone tremendous organizational changes in terms of: (a) the entrepreneurial caste dominating the scene; (b) the size of the units comprising the production structure, (c) the phenomenon of networking among

firms across the industry; and (d) the manner in which capital negotiated with labour to finally assume control over the labour process.

In the early 60's the Chettiar caste was dominating the manufacturing scene in Tiruppur; production then was organized in what was known as composite units. Subcontracting system of production was not prevalent. According to Krishnaswami, during this period, all the factories employed more than 20 workers and were registered under the Factories Act; workers were employed permanently and paid on time-rate basis with statutory benefits. From 1962 onwards quite a few factory level strikes of varying duration and a prolonged industry wide strike finally led to several closures and therefore the decline in the composite unit form of production. The period also witnessed the entrepreneurial rise of the Gounder caste in Tiruppur. Gounders are basically a peasant caste. The rapid depletion of ground water and large investments involved in deepening of wells with its attended uncertainty rendered agriculture not a very profitable proposition. Given the scope to invest in small scale industry, Gounders started investing in knitwear units. These new entrepreneurs who burst on the scene in the wake of prolonged labour unrest, set up small units of production more often than not with their own capital. Quite a few of them had also been employed previously as workers; this experience enabled them to quickly double up as workers in their factories in the event of labour shortage either due to strike, absenteeism or any other. The more interesting part of the organizational change in this period is the manner in which the (Gounder) entrepreneur-employers encouraged their loyal workers to start subcontract units. This encouragement was backed up, very often, with capital and subcontracted orders. This change in the character of production organization had its immediate

impact on the labour front, in that, workers were no longer guaranteed time rate wages with statutory benefits; the dominant mode of payment became piece-rate with hardly any benefits. These organizational changes notwithstanding, almost upto 1980, the knitwear industry in Tiruppur was characterized by low levels of production and largely confined to the local market. Whatever little they had exported, were indirect exports of innerwear to countries like Afghanistan, some African and East European countries. Largely family members with the help of a few workers managed the industry.

Tiruppur started catering to the export market from 1980 onwards and that is also when the industry began to grow. However, much of the exports during the 1980s was indirect exports, in the sense, Tiruppur firms were selling their goods to the international markets through selling agents/export houses situated outside Tiruppur, namely Bombay and Delhi. Upto 1985, the export growth was slow but steady and confined to one outerwear item, namely, T-shirts. From the late eighties the industry diversified very quickly and took up manufacturing as well as direct exports of other outer garments (besides T-shirts), namely, cardigans, jerseys, pullovers, ladies' blouses, dresses and skirts, trousers, nightwear, sportswear and industrial wear.

During the boom that began in the middle of the eighties and peaked in 1993-94, profit margins were in the region of 30 to 40 per cent. Such high levels of margin led to a huge inflow of both capital and labour into Tiruppur. The mad rush almost doubled the number of units. The booming market at that time could sustain both labour and capital. Many new entrants found the high margins tempting and assumed the flow to be eternal. Unproductive investments in huge buildings (both for housing and factories) locked up their existing capital as well as future flows. Such

investments sent land prices soaring. Along with this, the rental charges galloped. Conspicuous consumption found its expression in investments in cars, jewelry etc.

Simultaneously, the mushrooming of small units resulted in unhealthy competition. Firms started undercutting and the importers started playing one producer against the other to squeeze the maximum possible out of them. The phenomenal increase in yarn prices compounded the problem. The cost escalation due to higher input prices, the increase in the working capital requirements due to increased rent, the crash in the price for the output due to unhealthy competition, all these pushed the system on an 'adjustment phase' in the beginning of the nineties. Many new entrants who had worked out their economic and business logic based on a 30 to 40 per cent margin were squeezed out of business. Since their capital as well as future earnings was locked up in unproductive investments like buildings and cars, they had little elbowroom to wriggle out of the squeeze. Further influx of capital into Tiruppur slowed down along with the boom.

Many view 1994-95 as a watershed for the Tiruppur knitwear industry. That was the year when the knitwear exports had begun to taper off. The year brought home truths to many in the industry. The scores of new entrants in the export business who pitched their tents in boom time could no longer pursue their business in the same uneven scales of economy. In the aftermath of the phenomenal input cost escalation, cutthroat competition and price war in exports, manufacturers also received complaints and suffered due to defaults in payments. The great shakeout that followed in the Tiruppur knitwear industry is history now, and to some extent an inevitable antidote that has come about as a technical correction required by the industry. The post 1995 knitwear sector has thus seen the accelerated pace of modernisation taking place within Tiruppur knitwear industry.

The well-established old hands and the cautious new entrants kept away from this fratricidal war. They had not completely locked up their surplus earned during the boom in unproductive investments. Hence they were under no compulsion to continue to produce even under unprofitable conditions in order to rake in some cash to meet their commitments. Only orders that earned reasonable margins were executed. These units used this 'adjustment phase' to consolidate their position in the international market. By then they realised the need for superior technology so as to address the higher value markets. The surplus generated during the boom period was available and their direct exposure to the world market provided them the know-how of the latest in technology, machinery, design etc. Spheres of the production processes, which were hitherto dominated by local machines, were focussed upon like knitting and processing.

### **The Organisation of the Production Process in Tiruppur**

At one level there is a technical reason for the predominance of small units in the knitwear industry—it being classified under the SSI category and hence being (technically) subject to the rules and regulations of the SSI sector. Designation of this sector as SSI, however, masks the common ownership of otherwise spatially separate units of production. This common ownership includes the phenomenon of both horizontal expansion and vertical integration.

Analytically, as we have already mentioned, the entrepreneurs in Tiruppur can be divided into three namely,

- 1) Direct Exporters, (DE)
- 2) Subcontractors and Job Workers to Direct Exporters (SC)
- 3) Ancillary Product Producers (Ancillary)

There are crucial differences in the manner in which the DEs and SCs interact with the market but what is common between the two is that, both handle the final product i.e. the knitted garment. On the other hand, the product of the ancillary producers feeds into the final product of categories (a) and (b). Locating the final destination of each of the producers is crucial to understand the nature and quality of interaction among the different producers.

### **1. Direct Exporter: Manufacturer and/or Merchant**

Direct exporters are those who directly interact with the market. They procure orders from wholesalers or retailers in other countries, manufacture garments either using their own production facilities, or, through subcontracting / job work, and then export the final product under their name.

If they do not own any production facility but have direct access to the market, then they are known as merchant exporters. Manufacturer exporters on the other hand, undertake production as well, apart from their direct access to the market. However, the distinction is not always very clear. Most manufacturers process a substantial quantum of their orders on a subcontract or job work basis while most merchants would have minimum production facilities. Hence, for our purpose, we distinguished exporters with primary interest in trade from those who have begun as manufacturers and continue to be actively involved in production irrespective of their additional role of directly marketing their products in the external market.

### **2. Sub contractors to direct exporters**

These are firms that get orders mostly from direct exporters, process them and sell it back to the direct exporters at margins ranging between 6 and 10 per cent. While most of them cater to

more than one exporter, there are some who cater exclusively to one direct exporter. Crucially, the responsibility of procurement and payment for the raw material and services required for production lies with the subcontractors. Hence the financial commitment and risks are huge for the SCs when compared to another lower category of subcontractors called job workers. Job working firms are relatively small, mostly household units and undertake only stitching operations. Most of their orders are from sub contractors. When the production facilities of the subcontractors become inadequate to meet peak time demand, job workers are entrusted with the job of stitching and are usually paid on a piece rate basis. This enables the subcontractors to maintain their tight delivery schedules. Importantly, what differentiates job workers from subcontractors is that the former are given the relevant raw materials and inputs along with the orders. Additionally, at the height of the season trusted regular workers double up as job workers to meet deadlines.

### **3. Ancillary Product Producers and Ancillary Service Providers**

As we have noted, an entire array of units who do not directly handle the end product of knitwear are involved in the industry. However, their products and services are very crucial to complete the process of production of the final product. These products and services include bleaching and dyeing, printing, embroidery, button manufacturing and fixing, collar making, cone rewinding, label manufacturing, elastic and tape manufacturing, packing and forwarding, among others.

In the absence of a comprehensive data base on the nature and number of units operating in Tiruppur, we had to depend on orally given rough estimates. Rough estimates of the percentage



distribution of entrepreneur-employers among the different categories are as follows:

Direct Exporters	10%
Sub contractors to direct exporters	60 - 70%
Ancillary Product Producers and Ancillary Service Providers	20 - 30%

These three groups of entrepreneurs can be perceived as constituting a pyramid. The subcontractors (SCs) are in the middle sandwiched between the D.E.s at the top and the ancillary product producers at the bottom. This hierarchical structure is dictated by access to the market. While the direct exporters are the nodal points of interaction with the market, the rest are to work in tandem with them. Importantly, this pyramidal structure is not rigid and the conventional power that the top enjoys over the rest is limited to certain extent. The subcontractors and the ancillary producers cater to any number of direct exporters and hence the dependency on any single exporter is minimised. At another level, exporters do have many ancillary units who cater to other subcontractors and exporters apart from rendering service towards their own production. Such complex interconnections in the form of networks complicated the conventional dynamics of a hierarchised production structure. It is crucial to delineate this complexly woven network within the apparent pyramidal structure to understand the functioning of the cluster.

### **Networking in a ‘hierarchised’ production structure**

The need to stick to delivery schedules and maintain internationally acceptable standards in quality, finish, etc., has had its own impact on the manner in which production is organized. It has not led to all operations being brought under one roof.

Even those large enterprises that have all operations under their control through the several separate units that they have instituted under the SSI sector need to rely on outside facilities to fulfill their orders on time. Hence the mere fact of vertical integration of the different processes on the part of the large entrepreneurs does not obviate the need to network with others outside their control.

Seasonality of demand is a major factor that influences level of sub contracting. The degree of sub contracting also depends upon the number of finishing units owned by the direct exporters or in other words, the production capacity. Some of the big direct exporters owned as many as 6 to 7 finishing units in addition to one or more ancillary units like dyeing, calendering, printing, embroidery, etc. Such exporters would have a regular set of buyers who would provide them with orders throughout the year. Tiruppur basically caters to the summer wear demand in Europe and USA. Hence, production peaks during the period September to February and from then on declines steadily till July, after which there is a gradual revival. This seasonality in demand in addition to year to year fluctuation places limits on an individual firm's ability to expand, especially in the case of smaller firms. Entrepreneurs find it advantageous to limit their production capacity to the extent that it would meet their off season demand. The excess demand during peak season would then be met by contracting out to other firms. Though this entails a reduction in profit margins, it not only decreases the need for fixed capital investment, but also reduces risk.

Most direct exporters tend to have regular subcontractors and job workers undertaking production for them. These tend to be generally friends, relatives, or members of the same community.

The decision to accept and execute a particular order depends not only on the capacity available with a single unit but more

crucially, on how much and at what cost that unit can draw upon the capacity available with the cluster as a whole. Very often, entrepreneurs retain the high value but low volume orders for execution within their own units while subcontracting out the standard but low value, high volume orders.

What also needs to be stressed in this context is that the rising technological intensity of the industry at all levels is not labour displacing since this increasing intensity has to do with the overall expansion of the industry. More crucially, the phenomenon of networking among the entrepreneurs implies that,

- (a) the expansion to higher levels of activity itself is made possible to a large extent by networked production organisation,
- (b) the benefit of expansion is shared (though not equally) by all sections of entrepreneurs.

### **Problems of a 'hierarchy' production structure**

While hierarchy in the production structure of Tiruppur is not ruinous or rigid, in that, it does not make it impossible for subcontractors or ancillary producers to move up to the rank of direct exporters, and/or of workers to become entrepreneurs, there are nevertheless several problems that those lower down the hierarchy have to weather and negotiate. To elaborate, yarn constitutes the biggest component of the total cost of production (65-70%). Hence if a firm has to process the entire order, it needs considerable working capital to ensure the smooth flow of operations in different units. This is not possible without assistance from lending institutions. This credit squeeze felt by most small firms, was compounded by the lack of any assistance in this regard from the direct exporters. Since most direct exporters are issued a letter of credit by the foreign buyers, their

working capital needs are taken care of. However, they take cash credit from banks as well under the pretext of working capital requirements. The excess funds are not passed on to the sub contractors, as it ought to be done. Instead, it is channelized into personal ventures unrelated to the industry like house construction, real estate deals, purchase of cars etc.

Added to this is the problem of debiting by the direct exporters. A single order obtained by the direct exporter is split into smaller orders and contracted out to different sub contractors. Assume that one lot of the entire order has not met the quality requirements of the importer and the corresponding amount is deducted from the amount due to the direct exporter. A number of subcontractors felt that instead of passing on the loss to that subcontractor who had taken up that particular portion of the order, the direct exporter would deduct from all the subcontractors. This was because, in the absence of any contact with the importers, the subcontractors had no way of knowing the extent and nature of rejection. Some of them also claimed that even when the direct exporters were responsible for delayed production and hence transport by air freight, the losses thus incurred were recovered from the subcontractors.

Dissatisfaction was also expressed over the delay in payment of the amount due from direct exporters. 6 sample firms (from subcontractors) reported dues running into lakhs of rupees from the direct exporters. One respondent even felt that the money paid by the importer to the direct exporter is lent out through informal credit channels till the payment is made to the subcontractors.

### **Labour in Tiruppur**

According to Krishnaswami, the organizational changes (namely, factory to non-factory units) that accompanied the change

in ownership from Chettiar to Gounder,<sup>5</sup> the institution of subcontract units, the coming into prominence of the piece rate system of payment of wages—all these signify that, the employer’s attempt to organize the labour process in a particular manner “over and above what was technically needed” was done for nothing else but “to attain control over the labour process and to maximize the surplus value extraction”, and further, “since expenses on machinery, raw materials, etc., cannot be reduced much, the employers try to reduce the expenses on labour by way of subcontracting, employing women and children, splitting up of units which would help to avoid legal regulations etc.”

Cawthorne’s study to some extent does problematize the impact of the Tiruppur cluster on labour. She acknowledges that the process of expansion of the Tiruppur knitwear can “also be seen as a generalized process of skill acquisition. Workers have tended to acquire a range of different skills in different workshops accentuated by the demand for labour”. Further because of concentration of units in a cluster “an island of labour shortage (amidst labour surplus) is created”. This coupled with the fact that “knowledge and information (as well as the work itself) are easily acquired in an area where nearly everyone is working in similar kinds of jobs—is in part responsible for the very large number of small one-man firms that get set up by workers who have become highly skilled in the course of working in a number of different jobs.

However, segmentation of the work by gender and age, according to Cawthorne, reveals that both women and children earn much less compared to men because they are concentrated in jobs considered less skilled. For all categories of workers across gender and age, hours worked were frequently on average, 12 hours a day, six days a week, and often even longer when a

particular order had to be completed. Therefore, pitching her argument on the relative ‘cheapness’ of labour for employers, and, comparing the level of wages to that of the regulated mill sector, Cawthorne concludes thus:

“...the situation in Tiruppur is about the ‘classic sweating of labour—long working hours, the intensification of work through the use of piece rate payments and the use of children who are paid a (relative) pittance (although one owner mentioned a kind of productivity trade off in employing children). Both long working hours and the work practices which allow the intensification of the amount of work performed in a given time, means that the labour force is compensating in labour time for the need to improve productivity - the only other route to which is higher productivity machines.”

Labour in Tiruppur, as we see it, needs to be problematized at various levels and not just on the isolated issue of conditions of employment. These include:

- (a) the enormous amount and range of skill and experience that the cluster as a whole encompasses;
- (b) the kind of autonomy that labour (particularly among the more skilled and experienced) has come to acquire, which in turn allows them to negotiate terms and conditions of employment;
- (c) the hope and scope that the industry provides workers, which enables the latter to become entrepreneurs. This fact, to some extent, also conditions the manner in which labour conducts itself, in that, while being militant, labour does not resort to any form of destructive militancy which will undermine the industry.

One immediate impact of this privileging of work experience over education is the justification it provides for the employment

of children. This rationalization of child labour is done by all - employers, parents, unions. The fact that employed children are able to spend a decent amount of money on themselves itself acts as a disincentive to those children who have opted to go to school rather than work. It is however, a fact that formal school education as is currently structured does not provide any scope for (simultaneous) acquisitions of skills.

If membership of unions is taken as the criterion to judge the influence of trade union activity in Tiruppur, then hardly 10 per cent of the workers are unionised. However, it is widely acknowledged that the influence of the unions in Tiruppur, particularly the CITU, which has the largest membership, goes far beyond its enrolled members. But, union activity has been effective, if at all, only as far as wages are concerned in that they have been able to achieve wage revisions every three years. Neither labour legislation nor trade union militancy has been able to address the issues of intensity of work, hours of work, benefits and allowances other than wages, occupational health issues and/or the issue of the employment of children.

Certainly labour in the garment industry of India is 'cheap' as compared to its counterparts in developed countries, and therefore it could be argued that the competitiveness of Indian garment exports (as is true of much of third world exports) is premised on cheap labour. This is not being disputed but then this is true not just of 'informal' industries such as garment but of almost all classes of workers (organized included) when pitted against their respective counterparts in the developed countries. What we feel would be more relevant to discuss in our context is the alternative opportunities available to this labour coupled with an analysis of the context in which migration to Tiruppur of a large number of workers/families has taken place.

## **Labour Relation in Tiruppur**

The changes in the organisation of production in Tiruppur from a factory based system to network production system was due to the labour militancy during the 1960s and 1970s. The restructured production process was more to contain the labour. No worker was legally made permanent and the wage were on a piece rate basis. Legal protections were not extended. However, the booming industry continuously demanded more labour. Unemployment in this town is very rare. Consequently, the new job condition was not a grave threat to labour in the short run. The turnover among labour is high as both the employers and employees are free to enter into a relation and sever it as the situation warrants. The 'flexible' arrangement and the high level of labour demand are the reasons for the high level of labour turnover in the town.

The expanding scope for exports intensified the demand for labour. Labour from the surrounding villages were drawn into the labour market. This supply was grossly inadequate to meet the growing demand. The labour surplus southern districts of the state provided labour to the town when the boom started during the early eighties. Immigration into the town was so high that the population of this town grew by 40 per cent in population between 1981 and 1991.

Simultaneously, children were drawn into the labour market. They were not employed in the entire production process but only in some selected sub processes. The nature of work did not require high levels of skill. But over time, they acquire skills and emerge as full time workers.

Given this context, we try to understand this segment of the industry in Tiruppur. We undertook a survey to concretely



understand the problem of child labour in the knitwear industry in Tiruppur.

### **Survey Method and Sample**

The survey had many components. The important component was the household survey. We have selected the pockets within the town and the rural hinterland that catered to the child labour market of the industry. We surveyed both child labour households as well as non-child labour households in these pockets. About 1000 households were surveyed. Nearly one third of these households were non-child labour households. These non-child labour households are considered as control sample.

Random sampling was used to identify the households that were to be surveyed. A detailed questionnaire was administered. Information on the demographic composition of the households, their material and social location, sources of income from wage employment as well as from other sources were collected.

The second component of the survey was to understand the nature of the industry and its functioning. This was mainly done to locate the problem of child labour within the overall economic context of the region.

The last component of the survey was to understand the educational system, legislation towards abolition of child labour and the reaction of trade unions and parents towards there legislation.

Now let us turn to the results of the household survey. The survey covered 982 households (both child labour and non-child labour) spread across 9 locations in and around Tiruppur town. (Table 1) provides the details of the locations and the number of households surveyed in each of the locations. This total of 982 households comprising of 638 child labour households and 344 non-child labour households.

**Table-1 Distribution of Sample Households across Locations.**

Sl. No	Locations	No. of household surveyed
1	Kanagampalyam	82
2	Pandiyar Nagar	127
3	Sugumar Nagar	117
4	Chettipalyam	78
5	Kumaran Nagar	82
6	Murugan Palyam	125
7	Susipuram	127
8	Velampalyam	117
9	Ambedkar Nagar	127
	Total	982

*Source:* Survey Data.

### **Distribution of Households by Religion and castes**

The surveyed households fall into three religious categories Viz, Hindus, Muslims and Christian. A substantial number of them were obviously Hindus, accounting for 85 per cent of the surveyed households. The rest are Muslims with a marginal presence of Christians (see Table 2).

While the Hindu and Muslim sample households have the same level of child labour households, Christian have a fewer households among this category. This could be due to the fact that the greater importance that this community might give to education for their children.

**Table-2 Distribution of Sample Households by religion.**

Sl.No	religion	Number of Households					
		Child Labour	%	Non-Child labour	%	Total	%
1	Hindus	551	66	286	44	837	100
2	Christian	14	41	20	59	34	100
3	Muslims	73	66	38	44	44	100

*Source:* Survey Data.

When we look into the caste background of the surveyed households, we find that a substantial number of them are from the backward castes (69 per cent). Dalits have significant present with about 29 per cent and other caste have an insignificant present accounting for around 2 per cent of the surveyed households. There are two possibilities for this pattern. While almost all the caste groups in Tamilnadu are classified as backward, we have very few households in the OC category. The second possibility is that whoever have been left out the reservation in the state must have a different economic and social background that they do not fall in the sample at all (see Table 3).

**Table-3 Distribution of Sample Households by Caste.**

Sl.No	religion	Number of Households					
		Child Labour	%	Non-Child labour	%	Total	%
1	OC	9	37.6	15	62.5	24	100
2	BC	463	68	215	32	678	100
3	SC	166	59	114	41	280	100

*Source:* Survey Data.

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When we disaggregate the data as child and non-child labour households across various caste groups, we find that the proportion of child labour households is high among BC castes group as compared to the SC caste group.

### Composition of the Surveyed Population

Our sample of 982 households contain a population of 4416. The average household size for the population as a whole is 4.5. There are variations in the average household size among various caste and religious groups. The highest average household size is reported among Muslims at 5.3. The lowest household size is reported among the Hindu backward caste and scheduled castes (see Table 4).

**Table-4 Distribution of Population across Caste/Religion.**

Sl.No	Religion	Caste	No. HH	Population			Avg. size of HH
				Male	Female	Total	
1	Hindus	OC	15	38	33	71	4.7
		BC	559	1212	1233	2445	4.4
		SC	263	625	529	1154	4.4
2	Christian	OC	9	22	20	42	4.7
		BC	8	18	23	41	5.1
		SC	17	37	46	83	4.9
3	Muslims	Bc	111	295	285	580	5.2
		All	982	2247	2169	4416	4.5

*Source:* Survey Data.

When we compare the average household size among the child labour and non child labour households, we find that the average household size among child labour households is lower at 4.7 as compared to non child labour households at 5.0. There are distinct differences in the average household size among various religious and caste groups as well. The general pattern of lower household size among child labour households holds good for the Hindu backward group and the Scheduled caste group. Importantly, among Muslims, the pattern is the reverse. The average household size of a child labour Muslim family is very high at 9.4 as compared to the non -child labour Muslim family size of 7. Similarly, the average household size of the Hindu 'other caste' child labour household is high at 8.5 whereas the non child labour household among them have a household size of 3.3 (see Table 5 and 6).

**Table-5 Distribution of Population by Religion and Caste, Child Labour Households.**

Sl.No	Religion	Caste	No. HH	Population			Avg. size of HH
				Male	Female	Total	
1	Hindus	OC	4	27	7	34	8.5
		BC	385	895	644	1535	3.9
		SC	162	448	242	690	4.2
2	Christian	OC	5	15	5	20	4
		BC	5	15	5	20	4
		SC	4	23	17	40	10
3	Muslims	Bc	73	448	242	690	9.4

*Source:* Survey Data

**Table-6 Distribution of Population by Religion and Caste,  
Non-child Labour Households.**

Sl.No	Religion	Caste	No. HH	Population			Avg. size of HH
				Male	Female	Total	
1	Hindus	OC	11	11	26	37	3.3
		BC	174	304	573	877	5.0
		SC	101	172	282	454	4.4
2	Christian	OC	4	7	15	22	5.5
		BC	3	3	17	20	6.6
		SC	13	14	28	42	3.2
3	Muslims	Bc	38	88	181	269	7.0

*Source:* Survey Data

Thus, while the child labour households among Hindus have a smaller family size than the non -child labour households, Muslim child labour households have a larger family size. Family size could be having a differential impact among the religious groups so far as decision on sending their children for work. When we say religious group it need not simply refer to their identity but more in terms of other characteristics in the material and cultural spheres of their lives.

### **Absolute Household Size**

In the previous section, we have discussed about the average household size for each of the social groups and religion groups. Now we are considering the actual family size for each of their groups.

One striking feature of the household size of child and non child labour households is that, larger households have a significant share among the child labour households, whereas non child labour households have fewer large families. While only about 8 per cent of non-child labour households have a family size of more than 5, nearly 27 per cent of the child labour households have a family of more than 5 members. Another notable feature is that while about 35 per cent of the Muslim child labour households have 6 or more members in the family, about one fourth of the Hindu child labour households have such large families (see Tables 7 and 8).

**Table-7 Distribution of Surveyed Households by their Size and Religion.**

Sl. No.	HH size	Number of child labour households				Number of non-child labour households			
		Hindu	Christian	Muslim	Total	Hindu	Christian	Muslim	Total
1	3	92	2	7	101	65	3	8	76
2	4	186	3	18	207	125	12	14	151
3	5	136	3	22	161	73	4	12	89
4	6	55	2	6	63	17	0	4	21
5	7	21	1	7	29	3	1	0	4
6	8	15	2	7	24	3	0	0	3
7	9	13	1	4	18	0	0	0	0
8	>10	33	0	2	35	0	0	0	0
9	Total	551	14	73	638	286	20	38	344

*Source:* Survey Data.

**Table-8 Distribution of Surveyed Households by Different Sizes and Caste.**

Sl. No.	HH size	Number of child labour households				Number of non-child labour households			
		OC	BC	SC	ALL	OC	BC	SC	ALL
1	3	1	77	23	101	2	41	33	76
2	4	1	150	56	207	11	92	48	151
3	5	4	110	47	161	2	63	24	89
4	6	2	45	16	63	0	15	6	21
5	7	0	20	9	29	0	2	2	4
6	8	0	17	7	24	0	2	1	3
7	9	0	15	3	18	0	0	0	0
8	>10	1	29	5	35	0	0	0	0
	Total	9	463	166	638	15	215	114	344

*Source: Survey Data.*

The pattern is similar across different caste groups as well. While large families (with six and more numbers) account for almost 27 per cent of the BC child labour households, it accounts for only 8 per cent among non-child labour households. The share of large families is slightly less among SC child labour households at 24 per cent whereas it is again 8 per cent among the non-child labour households.

### **Age and Gender Composition**

When we turn to look into the age and gender composition of the surveyed population, we find some interesting patterns. Let us consider the Hindu backward caste sub population of our survey. In the age group of 19-59, there are 180 males for every 100 females in the child labour households whereas it is completely the reverse among the non-child labour households. For every hundred females, only 14 males are reported among the non-child labour households. Among the scheduled caste child labour



**Table-9 Distribution of population by Caste / Religion / Gender and Age group**

Sl. No.	Religion	Caste	0.1-5		6-11		12-14		15-18		19-59		>59		Total	
			Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1	Hindu	OC	1	5	9	7	6	2	1	1	19	18	2	0	38	33
		BC	53	54	172	182	250	263	98	93	600	600	39	41	1212	1233
		SC	26	31	77	71	140	96	46	40	313	281	23	10	625	529
		Sub total	80	90	258	260	396	361	145	134	932	899	64	51	1875	1795
2	Christian	OC	1	3	5	4	3	2	3	0	10	11	0	0	22	20
		BC	0	3	2	4	5	4	2	1	9	10	0	1	18	23
		SC	1	6	6	7	9	4	2	5	14	23	5	1	37	46
		Sub total	16	12	13	15	17	10	7	6	33	44	5	2	77	89
3	Muslims	BC	16	27	48	47	57	52	40	37	134	120	2	2	297	285
		All	98	129	319	322	470	421	192	177	1099	1063	71	55	2247	2169

Source: Survey Data.

**Table-10 Distribution of Population across Various Age Group and Caste, Child Labour Households.**

Si. No.	Age group	Hindu						Christian						Muslims		
		OC Male	Female	BC Male	Female	SC Male	Female	OC Male	Female	BC Male	Female	SC Male	Female	BC Male	Female	
1	0.1-5	1	0	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1
2	6-11	4	2	34	50	11	13	0	1	1	0	0	2	2	3	
3	12-14	3	1	193	208	96	70	2	2	0	0	6	3	44	26	
4	15-18	1	1	86	75	37	29	3	0	5	3	2	4	38	27	
5	19-59	19	3	557	308	293	128	10	2	1	0	12	8	119	36	
6	>59	0	0	24	3	9	1	0	0	8	3	3	0	1	0	

Source: Survey Data.

**Table-11 Distribution of Population across Various Age Group and Caste,  
Non-Child Labour Households.**

Sl. No.	Age group	Hindu						Christian						Muslims	
		OC Male	Female	BC Male	Female	SC Male	Female	OC Male	Female	BC Male	Female	SC Male	Female	BC Male	Female
1	0.1-5	1	5	52	54	24	30	1	3	0	3	1	6	14	26
2	6-11	7	7	138	132	66	58	3	3	1	4	6	5	46	44
3	12-14	1	0	57	55	44	26	1	0	0	1	3	1	13	16
4	15-18	0	0	12	18	9	11	0	0	1	1	0	1	2	10
5	19-59	0	14	43	292	20	153	0	9	1	7	2	15	15	83
6	>59	2	0	15	38	14	9	0	0	0	1	2	1	1	2

*Source:* Survey Data.

households, there are 228 males for every hundred females whereas among the non-child labour households it is 13 males to hundred females. Among the Muslim population, the ratio goes to 330 males to 100 females in child labour households and only 18 males for 100 females in the non-child labour households. We do not find such a pattern among the other age groups.

Another interesting pattern is the near absence of the population of below 5 years among child labour households, whereas it has a normal presence among non-child labour households.

When we work out the child labour ratio, we find the stark difference between the child and non-child labour households. The highest child labour adult ratio is reported among Muslims at 0.98 and the second highest is among the backward castes at 0.72 for the child labour households. For their counterparts among the non-child labour households, the child adult ratio is 1.69 and 1.3 respectively (see Table 12). It is again surprising to note here that the child population is lower as compared to the adult population among child labour households.

**Table-12 Child: Adult Ratio among Child and Non-child Labour Households.**

Sl.No	Hindus			Christian			Muslims
Child labour Households							
	OC	BC	SC	OC	BC	SC	BS
1	0.45	0.46	0.38	0.23	0.05	0.37	0.39
2	0.51	0.72	0.60	0.60	0.75	0.73	0.98
Non-child labour Households							
1	1.3	1.1	1.1	1.2	0.80	1.04	1.40
2	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.2	1.2	1.15	1.69

*Source:* Survey Data.

## **Migration and Child Labour in Tiruppur**

We have noted in our discussion on the growth of Tiruppur as a knitting center that the town has grown the fastest over a decade and more. There is a huge inflow of labour as well as capital into this town. The ever growing demand for labour due to the boom in the industry has acted as a pull factor. The receding water table in the district and the dry condition in the southern parts of the state has led to an unstable agriculture. This in turn had led to wild fluctuations in employment for agricultural labourers. Migration, both temporary and permanent had been a strategy for the landless and small peasants to circumvent the acute problem of reproduction. Earlier they were moving to fertile areas of the state in search of employment. When the plantation came into existence, many dalit and backward caste labourers had moved to many east Asian countries as well as to neighboring states.

Tiruppur town provided such an opportunity for the labour along with many other towns. This was the time when urbanisation was at its peak in the state. Unlike in many other towns, Tiruppur is one town where one was sure to get employment soon. Hence Tiruppur experienced the fastest growth among all the urban centers of the state. Our survey clearly indicated this huge influx. Nearly 55 per cent of the surveyed households are immigrants to the town as compared to 45 per cent natives. The incidence of child labour is relatively higher among the migrant households as compared to natives. While only 62 per cent of the households about 67 per cent of the migrant households. If we consider the child labour households alone, 57 per cent of the households are migrants and only 43 per cent are natives. Among the non-child labour households, native accounted for 48 per cent of the households and the rest are a migrant (see Table 13).

**Table-13 Distribution of Sample Households by their Migratory Status.**

Sl.No	Status	CLHS*	%	NCLHS**	%	Total	%
1	Native	276	43	168	48	444	45
2	Migrant	362	57	176	52	538	55
	All	638	100	344	100	982	100

**Note:** \* child labour households \*\* non-child labour households.

**Source:** Survey Data.

When we consider the surveyed population, we find that about 54 per cent of them are migrants as compared to 46 per cent of natives. The gender composition of the native as well as the migrant population is more or less the same. The migrant population has a slight unfavorable sex ratio at 1030 as compared to 1044 among natives (see Table 14).

**Table-14 Distribution of the Surveyed Population by Gender and Migrant status.**

Sl.No	Status	Male	Female	Total	%
1	Native	1039	995	2034	46
2	Migrant	1210	1174	2384	54
3	All	2249	2169	4418	100

**Source:** Survey Data.

When we turn to look into the age composition of the native and migrant population, we do not find much of a difference with both the sex distributed more or less at the same level across various age groups. Thus, we do not find any age or gender selectively among the migrant population.

**Table-15 Distribution of Native and Migrant Population  
across Various Age groups.**

Sl.No	Age group	Native			Migrants		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1	0.1-5	46	69	115	52	60	112
2	6-11	153	155	308	166	167	333
3	12-15	219	180	399	251	243	494
4	15-18	71	65	136	121	112	233
5	19-59	515	498	1013	584	565	1146
6	>59	35	28	63	36	27	63
	All	1039	995	2034	1210	1174	2354

*Source:* Survey Data.

Demography pattern of the child labour and non-child labour households does not vary among the migrant and non-migrant population. As we noted earlier, child labour households have predominantly more number of males (in 19-59 age group) as compared to females both among the native and the migrant households. The inverse is also true. The female population (in 19-59 age group) far out numbers the male population in the non-child labour households irrespective of the migratory status (see Table 16 and 17).

Thus, this pattern gender composition among the child and non-child labour households does not seem to be influenced by the huge migrant population.

**Table-16 Age and Gender Composition of Native Surveyed Households.**

Sl.No	Age group	Child labour households			Non-child labour households		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1	Below 5	3	1	4	41	68	109
2	6-11	21	22	43	129	133	262
3	12-14	153	131	284	65	48	113
4	15-18	58	49	107	13	16	29
5	19-59	478	220	698	34	273	207
6	> 59	21	2	23	13	24	37
	All	734	425	1159	295	562	857

*Source:* Survey Data.

**Table-17 Age and Gender Composition of Migrant Households.**

Sl.No	Age group	Child labour households			Non-child labour households		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1	0.1-5	2	1	3	47	56	103
2	6-11	29	47	76	135	118	253
3	12-14	198	193	391	52	50	102
4	15-18	110	87	197	10	25	35
5	19-59	540	269	809	43	287	330
6	> 59	16	2	18	17	24	41
	All	895	599	1494	304	560	864

*Source:* Survey Data.



## **Occupation Profile of Surveyed Households**

The occupation of the head of the household could be one important deciding factor in terms of sending children to work or to send them to school. It is not only the income but also the conviction that the work they are involved would ensure an income to the family as well as skill the children.

The present occupation of the child labour households indicate that it is quite concentrated. Cultivators account for about 27 per cent of the child labour households. Another one fourth of them are employed in the knitwear industry. About one fifth of the child labour households are engaged in disparate jobs. Other occupations are marginal in terms of their share in the surveyed child labour households (see Table 18).

Importantly, it is the same true occupation that account for more than 80 per cent of the non-child labour households. Workers in the knitwear industry account for about 37 per cent of the non-child labour households. Another 30 per cent of the households are engaged in 'other labour'.

As the information on present occupation status does not suggest any variation between the child and non-child labour households, we attempt to locate the problem in the changed occupation profile of the surveyed households.

Even the changes in the occupational profile does not help us to understand the problem. Both the child and non-child labour households have experienced similar occupational shifts. We find a sharp decline in the occupation of cultivators, construction workers, traders and weavers. There is shift from there occupations to knitwear labour and other labour. This pattern holds good both for child and non-child labour households.

**Table-18 Distribution of Sample Households across their present and previous Occupations.**

Sl.No	Occupation	Previous				Present			
		Number of households				Number of households			
		CLHS*	%	NCLHS**	%	CLHS*	%	NCLHS**	%
1	Agricultural labour	3	0.5	1	0.3	5	0.8	4	1.2
2	Cultivator	203	31.8	128	37.2	172	27.0	49	14.2
3	Construction	98	15.4	14	4.1	3	0.5	3	0.9
4	Trade	55	8.6	19	5.5	22	3.4	5	1.5
5	Weaving	98	15.4	71	20.6	51	8.0	30	8.7
6	Knitwear	34	5.3	33	9.6	158	24.8	128	37.2
7	Other labour	90	14.1	55	16.0	131	20.5	100	29.1
8	Service	30	4.7	16	4.7	23	3.6	9	2.6
9	Not available	27	4.2	7	2.0	73	11.4	16	4.7
	All	638	100	344	100	638	100	344	100

**Note:** \* child labour households \*\* non-child labour households.

**Source:** Survey Data.

Thus, neither the pattern of occupation nor their shift in this pattern help us to understand the problem is head.

### **Educational Level of the Surveyed Population**

Educational attainment could be one strong deterring against sending children for work. On the other hand, child labour seriously affects the educational attainment of such employed children. Given this context, it is important to profile the educational level of the population.

The population in general has a low educational status. Only about 6 per cent of the population are educate up to secondary level and beyond. Nearly about one third of the population is unlettered. Primary level education accounts for about 45 per cent of the surveyed population .. Male population is slightly more educated then the female population. While 37 per cent of the female population is unlettered, only about one fourth of this male population is unlettered. About 47 per cent of the males are educated up to primary level and nearly one fifth of them are educated up to middle level. Among the female population, about 43 per cent are educated up to primary level and about 15 per cent are educated up to middle level (see Table-19).

**Table-19 Educational Level of the Population.**

Sl.No	Educational level	Male	%	Female	%	Total	%
1	Illiterate	545	24.7	797	37	1342	30.7
2	Primary	1033	46.8	929	43.2	1962	45.1
3	Middle	479	21.7	318	14.7	797	18.2
4	Secondary	119	5.3	82	3.8	201	4.6
5	Higher Secondary	30	1.4	26	1.2	56	1.2
	All	2206	100.0	2152	100.0	4358	100

*Source:* Survey Data.

Does the educational profile differ across the child and non-child labour households? It does differ but in an important way. The child labour households seem to have achieved a higher level of education as compared to the non-child labour households. While only about 26 per cent of the child labour population remain unlettered, about 36 per cent of the non-child labour population is unlettered. The difference continues up to the middle level. There is a marginal difference in the higher secondary level (see Table-20).

**Table-20 Level of Education by Child Labour and Non-child Labour Population.**

Sl.No	Education	Child labour population				Non-child labour population			
		Male	Female	Total	%	Male	Female	Total	%
1	Illiterate	391	307	698	26.4	154	490	644	36.4
2	Primary	738	508	1246	47.1	295	421	716	40.5
3	Middle	376	174	550	20.8	103	144	247	13.9
4	Secondary	97	27	124	4.7	22	55	77	4.7
5	Higher secondary	19	6	25	0.90	11	20	31	1.7
	All	1621	1022	2643	100.0	585	1130	1765	100.0

*Source:* Survey Data.

This suggest that more of literacy has not prevented this population from sending their children for work. It is important to note here that for both the groups of households, the educational level is low in general. Nearly half of the population is educated only up to primary level. The crucial difference between their two groups is the higher level of illiteracy among the non-child labour households.

The same pattern prevails across various age groups and the caste groups (see Tables 21, 22, 23 and 24).

**Table 21 Level of Education across Various Age groups,  
Child Labour Household Population.**

Sl. No	Age-group	Illiterate		Primary		Middle		Secondary		Higher secondary	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1	Below 5	5	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	6-11	5	13	39	51	5	5	1	0	0	0
3	12-14	21	36	231	215	97	70	2	2	0	1
4	15-18	21	13	84	73	48	44	15	5	0	1
5	19-59	317	240	374	168	222	55	78	20	19	4
6	>59	22	3	10	1	4	0	1	0	0	0
	All	391	307	738	508	376	174	97	27	19	6

*Source:* Survey Data.

**Table- 22 Level Education across Various Age groups, Non-child Labour Households.**

Sl. No	Age-group	Illiterate		Primary		Middle		Secondary		Higher secondary	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1	Below 5	80	115	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	6-11	20	25	231	213	13	12	0	1	0	0
3	12-14	4	5	32	32	75	58	6	8	0	0
4	15-18	3	4	7	14	2	3	9	15	2	9
5	19-59	24	296	22	153	10	69	6	31	9	11
6	> 59	23	45	3	0	3	2	1	0	0	0
	All	154	490	295	421	103	144	22	55	11	20

*Source:* Survey Data.

**Table-23 Level of Education across Various Caste groups- Child Labour Population.**

Sl. No	Age-group	Illiterate		Primary		Middle		Secondary		Higher secondary	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1	OC	14	3	16	6	5	3	6	0	1	0
2	BC	230	217	534	539	264	128	65	22	16	3
3	SC	147	87	188	121	107	43	26	5	2	3
4	All	391	307	738	486	376	174	97	27	19	6

Source: Survey Data.

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**Table-24 Level of Education across Various Caste groups- Non-child Labour Population.**

Sl. No	Age-group	Illiterate		Primary		Middle		Secondary		Higher secondary	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1	OC	4	16	13	17	1	1	0	3	0	1
2	BC	101	330	211	294	61	102	12	32	7	13
3	SC	44	144	79	102	41	38	10	20	4	6
4	All	154	490	303	413	103	144	22	55	11	20

Source: Survey Data.

**Table- 22 Level Education across Various Age groups, Non-child Labour Households.**

Sl. No	Age-group	Illiterate		Primary		Middle		Secondary		Higher secondary	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1	Below 5	80	115	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	6-11	20	25	231	213	13	12	0	1	0	0
3	12-14	4	5	32	32	75	58	6	8	0	0
4	15-18	3	4	7	14	2	3	9	15	2	9
5	19-59	24	296	22	153	10	69	6	31	9	11
6	>59	23	45	3	0	3	2	1	0	0	0
	All	154	490	295	421	103	144	22	55	11	20

*Source:* Survey Data.



**Table-23 Level of Education across Various Caste groups- Child Labour Population.**

Sl. No	Age-group	Illiterate		Primary		Middle		Secondary		Higher secondary	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1	OC	14	3	16	6	5	3	6	0	1	0
2	BC	230	217	534	539	264	128	65	22	16	3
3	SC	147	87	188	121	107	43	26	5	2	3
4	All	391	307	738	486	376	174	97	27	19	6

*Source:* Survey Data.

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**Table-24 Level of Education across Various Caste groups- Non-child Labour Population.**

Sl. No	Age-group	Illiterate		Primary		Middle		Secondary		Higher secondary	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1	OC	4	16	13	17	1	1	0	3	0	1
2	BC	101	330	211	294	61	102	12	32	7	13
3	SC	44	144	79	102	41	38	10	20	4	6
4	All	154	490	303	413	103	144	22	55	11	20

*Source:* Survey Data.

So far we have discussed the various characteristics of the surveyed population. We found that the demographic and age composition of the child labour households varied vastly from the non-child labour households. The migratory character of the households did not affect their demographic features. The occupational profile of the two sets of population were similar. They have experienced similar transformation in terms of change in the occupation. When we turn to the educational profile, we find that child labour households have more literates than the non-child labour households. Size of the household seem to have some impact on the decision to send children for work.

When the children go to work what impact does it have on the income of their household. Is it that poorer households send their children to work and relatively better endowed households decide to send the children to school? What is the size of the contribution the child workers to the total family income are some of the issues that we take up for discussion in the following section.

### **Income level of the Surveyed Households**

To understand the material well being of the households that we have surveyed, we consider the annual income levels. The income ranges in quite wide. A large number of households have an annual income in the range of Rs.20,000 and Rs.30,000. They constitute about 28 per cent of the surveyed households. More or less unequal number of households level in the higher as well as lower income. Only 3 per cent of the households have an annual income of less than Rs.10,000. Nearly 15 per cent of the surveyed households earn Rs.50,000 and more per annum. Another 12 per cent is in the income range of Rs.40,000 to Rs. 50,000 (see Table 25).

**Table-25 Distribution of Households by their Annual Income.**

Sl.No	Income range	No.of households	%
1	Below Rs 10000	29	2.9
2	10,000-20,000	218	22.1
3	20.000-30,000	277	28.2
4	30.000-40,000	188	19.1
5	40,000-50,000	121	12.3
6	Above 50,000	149	15.1
	All	982	100.0

*Source:* Survey Data.

Does the annual income vary between the child labour household and non-child household? It does vary between these two sets of households. It is not that the non-child labour households have higher income levels that discourage them from sending their children to work. Importantly, it is the other way round. By not sending their children the non-child labour households seen to be poorer.

More than four fifth of the non-child labour households earn below Rs.30,000 per annum. More than half of the non-child labour households earn less than Rs.20,000 per annum. On the other hand, only less than one tenth of the child labour households earn Rs.20,000 per annum. More than 60 per cent of the child labour households has an annual income of more than Rs.30,000. Importantly, nearly 22 per cent of the child labour households have an annual income of more than Rs.50,000 ( see Table 26).

**Table-26 Distribution Households by their level of Annual Income**

Sl.No	Annual Income Range (in Rs.)	Child labour household	%	Non-child labour household	%
1	Up to 10000	11	1.7	18	5.2
2	10000-20000	55	8.6	163	43.4
3	20000-30000	176	27.6	101	29.4
4	30000-40000	157	24.6	21	9.1
5	40000-50000	97	15.2	24	6.9
6	Above 50000	142	22.3	7	2.1
	Total	638	100.0	344	100.0

*Source:* Survey Data.

### **Size of the Household and Income**

How does the size of the household affect the income among the surveyed population, We have noted earlier that all the large households were child labour households. We also find that the child labour households have a higher level of income? We have related the size of the household and the level of income. We find that the larger household are at the higher income brackets, large families dominate higher income brackets.

Smaller households with 3 and 4 members account for more than three fourth of the households in the lowest two income slabs, households with 6 and more members constitute nearly 60 per cent of the households that have an annual income of more than Rs.50,000 (see Table 27). If we consider only those households with more than 6 members, then we find that more than 80 per cent of such households are in the income brackets of more than Rs.50.000 per annum.

**Table-27 Distribution of Child labour Households by their Annual Income and Size of Household.**

Sl.No	HH size	Annual Income range (000)											
		<10	%	10-20	%	20-30	%	30-40	%	40-50	%	>50	%
1	3	4	36.3	24	43.6	45	25.5	20	12.7	7	7.2	1	10.7
2	4	5	45.4	15	27.2	70	39.7	62	39.4	34	35.0	21	14.7
3	5	2	18.1	9	16.3	41	23.2	48	30.5	29	29.9	32	22.5
4	6	0	0	5	9.0	14	7.9	16	10.1	15	15.4	13	39.5
5	>6	0	0	2	3.6	6	3.4	11	7.6	12	12.3	75	52.8
	Total	11	100	55	100	176	100	157	100	97	100	142	100

Source: Survey Data.

**Table-28 Distribution of Non-child Labour Households by Their Annual Income and Size of Household.**

Sl.No	HH size	Annual Income range (000)											
		<10	%	10-20	%	20-30	%	30-40	%	40-50	%	>50	%
1	3	10	55.5	39	23.9	21	20.7	3	9.6	2	8.3	1	14.3
2	4	6	33.3	73	44.7	46	45.5	11	35.4	11	45.8	4	57.1
3	5	2	22.1	45	27.6	19	18.8	12	38.7	9	37.5	2	28.6
4	6	0	0	6	3.6	10	9.9	3	9.9	2	8.3	0	0.0
5	>6	0	0	0	0	5	4.9	2	6.4	0	0	0	0.0
	Total	18	100	163	100	101	100	31	100	24	100	7	100

Source: Survey Data.

How much of this higher income among the child labour households is due to the contribution of the children? Or is it that the households are having higher levels of income and this contribution by the children are not very significant? We find that children contribute 20-30 per cent of the family income is about one fourth of the households and in another one fourth of the households child labour income and in another one fourth of the households, the contribution accounts for 30-40 per cent of the family income. In about 18 per cent of the households, children constitute 50-60 per cent of the family income (see Table29).

**Table-29 Contribution Level among Child Labour Households.**

Sl.No	Contribution range	No. hhs	%
1	Up to 10%	4	0.6
2	10-20%	77	12.1
3	20-30%	170	26.6
4	30-40%	163	25.5
5	40-50%	109	17.1
6	50-60%	115	18.0
	Total	638	100

*Source:* Survey Data.

If we consider various income groups of child labour households, we find children contributing from one third to two thirds of their family income is predominant number of houses. The number of households receiving that level of contribution from their children decline in higher income brackets but not very significantly. Even among the households in which children contribute between one third and two thirds of the total income. In the lower status, the share increases to touch 68 percent. This, irrespective of the annual income levels, children contribute significantly to their families.

**Table-30 Distribution of CLHHS by their Annual Income and level of contribution.**

Level of contribution (in %)	Annual Income Range('000)					
	<10	10-20	20-30	30-40	40-50	Above 50
Upto 10	-	-	1	-	-	3
10-20	-	4	10	21	15	27
20-30	-	9	50	61	16	34
30-40	-	17	55	25	31	35
40-50	1	16	24	22	19	27
50-60	10	9	36	28	16	16
	11	55	176	157	97	142

*Source:* Survey Data.

So far we have discussed various characteristics of the child labour and non-child labour population as well as their households. Now let us move on to discuss specifically about the children who are working.

### **Profile of the Child Workers**

The surveyed population included 2128 children and 2290 adults. The share of working children in the total child population is more. There is a specific sample bias as we have selected nearly 70 per cent of the child labour household for the survey. Working children constituted about 52 per cent of the over all child population. Male child workers slightly out number female child workers (see Table31).

**Table-31 Distribution of Children by their Work Status.**

Sl.No	Sex	Working	Not working	Total
1	Male	574	504	1078
2	Female	531	519	1050
3	Total	1105	1023	2128

*Source:* Survey Data.

### **Age Profile of the Child Workers**

A substantial number of child workers in Tiruppur knitwear cluster are from the age group of 12-14. They account for about 60 per cent of the total child workers reported in our survey. The second largest group is from the age group of 15-18 accounting for about 27 per cent. The remaining child workers are from the youngest age group of 6-11.

The pattern slightly changes across gender while only 9.5 per cent of the male child workers are from the youngest age group, it is around 13 per cent among female child workers. On the other hand, in the oldest age group, the male child workers constitute about 29 per cent of their total work force whereas it is slightly lower at 25 per cent among the female child workers (see Table 32).

**Table-32 Distribution of Working Children by their Age and Sex .**

Sl.No	Age group	Male	%	Female	%	Total	%
1	6-11	55	9.5	71	13.7	126	11.4
2	12-14	351	61.1	324	61.0	675	61.1
3	15-18	168	29.2	136	25.6	304	27.5
	Total	574	100.0	531	100.0	1105	100.0

*Source:* Survey Data.

If we compare the age profile of the working and non-working children, the pervasiveness of child labour problems comes out quite clearly. The lowest two age groups viz., below 5 years and 6-11 years account for nearly 72 per cent of the non-working child population. The higher age groups with the case in point. Children from this group constitute only 27 per cent of the non-working children population indicating that most of them from this age group are working (see Table 33).

**Table-33 Distribution of Non-Working Children by their Caste and Gender.**

Sl.No	Age-group	Male	%	Female	%	Total	%
1	Below 5	93	18.4	127	24.4	220	21.5
2	6-11	269	53.2	253	48.6	522	50.9
3	12-14	119	23.5	99	19.0	218	21.8
4	15-18	24	4.7	41	7.8	65	6.3
	Total	505	100.0	520	100.0	1025	100.0

*Source:* Survey Data.



Again, there is a slight difference in terms of their gender location. While the higher age groups among males constitute about 28 per cent of the non-working male child population, it is slightly lower at 26 per cent among the female non-working child population.

### **Caste Composition of the Working Children**

We have noted earlier that the sample contained a substantial number of backward caste and scheduled caste households. In terms of the child population, about 68 per cent of the male children and about 73 per cent of the female children are from the backward castes. The share of the scheduled caste population is about 29 and 25 per cent (see Table 34).

**Table-34 Distribution of Children by their Caste, Work Status and Sex.**

Sl.No	Caste	Working			Not working		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1	OC	13	16	29	6	18	24
2	BC	407	403	811	326	361	687
3	SC	154	122	276	150	135	285
	ALL	574	541	1115	482	514	996

*Source:* Survey Data.

Among the working male children, 75 per cent are from backward caste and about 27 per cent are from the scheduled caste. While 74 per cent of the female working children are from backward caste, the scheduled caste female children account for only 24 per cent. The pattern is more or less same among the non-working child population.

## Occupation of the Working Children

We have noted that a substantial number of workers are from age group of 12 to 14 and working children constitute about 70 per cent of the surveyed child population. Where do these child workers work? Since Tiruppur is a knitwear cluster, most of them would be working in that industry. But do we find any other occupation where children are engaged?

The occupational profile of the working children in Tiruppur suggests that 81 per cent of the male child labour and 84 per cent of the female child labour are working in the knitwear industry. Another important sector that employs child labour is weaving. Nearly about one tenth of the child labour population of our survey are engaged in this sector. All other occupations account for about 10 per cent of the number of total male child workers and about 5 per cent of the female child workers (see Table 35).

**Table-35 Current Occupation of Working Children.**

Sl.No	Occupation	Male	Female	Total
1	Cultivators	15	5	20
2	Trade	2	0	2
3	Weaving	48	54	102
4	Knitwear	469	450	914
5	Other labour	28	9	37
6	Service	1	0	1
7	Not available	11	13	24
8	Total	594	531	1105

*Source:* Survey Data.

A full time wage work means discontinuing schooling by there child workers. Given the age profile of the child workers, most of them would not have crossed their primary education if at all they had been to school. This emerges clearly from our survey. When we look into stage of dropping out by the working children, we find that about 70 per cent of the male and female child workers have dropped out either at the completion of their primary education or some where in between. Nearly 11 per cent of male child workers and 8 per cent of the female child workers had never been to school. Only 17 and 16 per cent of the male and female child workers have dropped out at the middle level education (see Table36).

**Table 36 Stage of Drop Out: Working Children.**

Sl.No	Stage	Male	Female	Total
1	Never to School	65	45	110
2	Primary	405	398	803
3	Middle	100	85	185
4	Secondary	4	3	7
5	Higher secondary	0	0	0
Total		574	531	1105

*Source:* Survey Data.

An important point to note here is that the surveyed population do not seem to discriminate children based on their sex. In many places, it is found that the families prefer to send their male children to school more than their girl children. Hence the educational level of the female population in the Indian context tent to be lower. But in Tiruppur, such discriminations do not happen as any child would eventually end up in the labour market.

Till then, school could be a place where they would be taken care.

We find that most of children drop out of school when they are in the primary level or at the completion of it. But exactly at what standard do they drop out? Is there any watershed in that? We have worked out the cumulative percentage of drop outs at the various class levels.

We find that 4th standard is primary school to be the dividing line when drop out happens intensively, both among the male and female children. About 10 per cent of them did not attend the school. Another 12 per cent drop out when they move to the 3rd standard. About 10 per cent drop here. But at the end of 4th standard, a large chunk of about 36 per cent drop out here. Another 15 per cent at their completion of primary level taking the cumulative drop out per cent to 82 per cent ( see Table 37).

**Table-37 Dropping Out by Working Children:  
Class wise.**

Sl.No	Class	Drop out			Cumulative %
		Male	Female	Total	
1	Never to school	65	45	110	10.0
2	I standard	16	23	39	13.5
3	II standard	48	47	95	22.1
4	III standard	61	42	103	31.4
5	IV standard	196	203	399	67.5
6	V standard	84	83	167	82.6
7	VI standard	64	51	115	93.0
8	Above VI	40	37	77	100.0

*Source:* Survey Data.

Children would be roughly at the age of 10 when they complete this level of education. It seems that they immediately join the work force as indicated by the age profile of the child workers.

It would be interesting here to look into the educational profile of the non-working children. Are they continuing their education? Or is it that they are not old enough to enter the child labour market and bidding their time in school to eventually join the labour pool at a later date?

We find that about 26 per cent of them are not in school. They are not old enough to go to school. Another 53 per cent of them are in primary level and 16 per cent in middle level. This graph itself is suggestive enough to understand the trend. It is pertinent to note here that only about 4 per cent of the children are in the secondary level and just one percent at the higher secondary level.

**Table No 38: Non Working Children by Their Current Education**

Sl. No	Category	No of Children	%
1	Not in School	265	25.8
2	Primary	543	52.9
3	Middle	157	16.2
4	Secondary	39	3.8
5	Hr. Secondary	11	1.1
6	Total	1025	100

*Source:* Survey Data

## Child Workers and Their Years of Service

We have noted earlier that they drop out of school at their primary level of education and the largest section of child workers are from the age group of 12-14. How long have they participated in the labour market? We look into their level of experience. Nearly about one third of them are experienced for more than a year but less than 2 years. Another one fourth of them had been there for more than 2 years and less than 3 years. Proportion of child workers decreases with the increase in the years of experience as they would be part of the adult labour market as they grow old. Only about 5 per cent of them are experienced for less than one year. There is a marginal difference between the male and female child worker in terms of their years of experience.

**Table 39: Child workers by Their Experience**

Sl. No	Years of Experience	Male	%	Female	%	Total	%
1	Less than 1 year	30	5.2	22	4.1	52	4.7
2	1-2 years	164	28.5	172	32.3	336	30.4
3	2-3 years	142	24.7	136	25.6	278	25.1
4	3-4 years	96	16.7	67	12.6	163	14.7
5	4-5 years	70	12.1	48	9.0	118	10.6
6	Above 5 years	67	11.6	79	15.3	146	13.2
7	Not available	5	0.8	6	1.1	11	0.9
8	Total	574	100	531	100	1105	100

*Source:* Survey Data

## Child Workers and their Income Level

We have already discussed the level of contribution of the child workers to their total annual income. Now let us discuss the wage income of the child workers in Tiruppur.

Nearly about one third of the child workers earn a wage income in the range of Rs 6000 to Rs.7200 per annum. About another one fourth of them earn an annual wage in the range of Rs.8400 to Rs 9600 . One tenth of the child workers earn more than Rs. 12000 per annum. The pattern is more or less in the same for the male and female workers indicating no discrimination across gender (see Table 40).

**Table-40 Annual Income Levels of Child Workers.**

Sl.No	Annual Income range (Rs in 000)	Male	%	Female	%	Total	%
1	Less 6	98	17.0	98	18.4	196	17.7
2	6--7.2	192	33.4	177	33.3	369	33.3
3	7.2-8.4	57	9.9	40	7.5	97	8.7
4	8-4-9.6	138	24.0	130	24.4	268	24.2
5	9.6-10.8	4	0.6	9	1.6	13	1.1
6	10.8-12	24	4.1	23	4.3	47	4.2
7	Above 12	61	10.6	54	10.1	115	10.4
8	Total	574	100.0	531	100.0	1105	100.0

**Source:** Survey Data.

So far we have discussed the structure and organisation of knitwear production in the Tiruppur cluster and the results of the survey that we had undertaken among the child and non- child labour population and households. Now let us move on to discuss about the awareness of the ban on employing child labour.

## **Awareness about Child labour**

As far as employers are concerned, the awareness about the law is very high. The Tiruppur Exporters Association had decided that no member should employ child labour and this decision dates back to 1995. Though TEA is powerful in terms of resources, its influence over other segments of the cluster is very poor. There is a vast segment that caters to the local market particularly to the lower and the lowest end of the product market. These manufacturers are very small with few machines. Even the machines are second hand ones. Their turnover is very low compared the direct exporters, merchants and their subcontractors. The market their produce either in the weekly textile market in Erode or sell it to hawkers from all over the country. This is the major segment in which children are employed. They are not influenced by the decisions of TEA. While TEA has initiated many measures in terms of the betterment of the infrastructure of the town, it has just stopped with that resolution. But they ensure that their subcontractors do not employ children. This is not out of any moral commitment. It is more to adhere to the stipulations of their customers from abroad. These customers, when they go to Tiruppur to place the orders and to oversee the progress inspect the production facilities of the exporters as well as their sub contractors. Such customers are under severe pressure in their home market. Lobbying against sweat labour is so high that they inturn bring about pressure on their suppliers. Hence the commitment from TEA. While TEA had started a public school, it has not done anything towards the problem of child labour. When we met some of the leading members of the Association, they were of the opinion that the problem can be solved only with the commitment from the parents of these children. Their argument is that the wage levels in Tiruppur are quite high but the expenditure is tilted more towards entertainment and conspicuous



consumption. When we drew their attention to the fact that the cost of living is quite high and the wage levels are insufficient to meet the basic needs of the workers. Hence they are forced to send their children to work. Their reaction was that higher wages is not the solution. The entire wage gets blown during the weekends. Unless they realise the need to be judicious, then the problem will continue to occur and the children will be continued to be employed by the other sector.

Our discussions with the parents suggested that they are not sure about what will happen to their children in the future. The question was what they will do after school and college education. Instead of entering the market at a later date and struggle to learn the work, it is better that they go to work now, earn some wages and learn the skill in a couple of years to emerge as a full fledged worker. A skilled worker can earn anywhere between Rs 150 to Rs 200 in a day during the peak season and at least Rs100 during the lean season. They consider that getting educated is futile. In many instances, the parents opined that they had started to work when they were young and because of that they could fulfill many of their familial and social commitments. What is wrong if their children go to work. Learning that skill would at least ensure that they would not go hungry. Concern about going with out food was quite high among the migrant workers.

Working children are enamoured by the weekly wages that they get. A substantial part of it is shared with the home. But their pocket money is enough for them to go to a movie during the weekends. Schools are not at all attractive to them. They taste the money when they go for work during the vacations. After a year or two, they and their parents decide to discontinue schooling and go for work. When we asked them whether they are missing their playtime, many responded that they could afford to go to

cinema. That would be impossible if they have to get the money from their parents for the same. Similarly, they can eat out as and when they feel like with the little money that they get for themselves. Many of them also pool their money to hire a vehicle and go for excursions during the weekly off. Because of their access to cash, many are told to be getting into drinking even at a very early age. Though not regularly like the adults, one can spot many young boys in the overflowing liquor shops in the town in the evenings. Since most of the child labour households have a television at home with cable connection, many children are found to spend their late evenings before these sets. When we asked them whether they would be interested in studying along with their work, many responded that they do not know. When they return from the work in the evening they are very tired and hence the doubt. Many girl children spend their wage income on dress material and on cosmetics. Some families have saved out of their girl children's wage income to be spent at the time of their marriage.

Trade unions have strong position against child labour. They welcome the ban on child labour but express serious doubts over its implementation. They have a long and sad experience of having many legal provisions in their favour but had to struggle every time to get at least some of these provisions implemented. Their mode of functioning in Tiruppur had turned from offensive to defensive. The left unions had led prolonged strikes in the industry during the late 1960s. The production was unit based and organising labour was easier than today when the production is network based and the labour is highly mobile. Their membership has not increased along with the increase in the size of the working class in the town. The unions find it difficult even to arrange for gate meetings in the evening. No worker is willing to sacrifice the income from the additional shift. Very poor turnouts had

forced many unions to give up the gate meetings. Unions interfere at the instance of individual workers at the time of dispute between the units and the workers over bonus etc. They are mediators. At a broad level, the unions negotiate with the manufacturers association for periodic wage revisions. They present a long list of demands to the manufacturers association for negotiation. Child labour is included as an agenda but that is never part of the actual negotiation process. Many workers do not want the union to interfere in that issue. They do not want the unions to interfere in many other aspects of labour relation. The left unions argued that effective implementation of land reforms in the state could solve the problem of child labour. If the state wants to regulate this problem, then it would be very difficult particularly in a situation in which they cannot partake actively due to the resistance from the workers.

The state machinery has formed the Coimbatore Child Labour Abolition Support Society under the chairmanship of the district collector. It has started functioning from 1998. The ultimate goal of the society is to empower child labour and their families as to transform them into productive and participative members of an egalitarian social order, where dignity of human labour is respected and each member regardless of rank, class and clan is treated with dignity, equality and respect.

The society has 80 special school centers in the district and these schools caters to about 2020 students. It could successfully send 534 children to the mainstream education. It has also given vocational training to 134 children. About 80 women groups have been formed. About 145 families have been provided with special assistance through IRDP. The society tries to increase the awareness about the problem of child labour through village level meetings, workshops, street theatres, rally, radio programmes,

special drama and seminars. The following table summarises the activities during the past four years.

**Table-41 Awareness Programmes of the Society**

Sl. no	Programme	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99
1	Village level meetings	72	40	14	83
2	Workshop	4	-	-	3
3	Street Theatre	1200	40	22	17
4	Rally	2	1	-	1
5	Radio Programme	-	-	4	20
6	Special Drama	-	-	-	5
7	Seminar				
	Total	1280	82	40	151

The society also conducts health camps for the child labour. It had organised about 75 such camps during the last year. It also conducts other awareness and training programmes and about 10 000 people have participated in various such programmes.

The society has undertaken a main survey and supplementary survey. The survey had identified 356 children in hazardous occupation and 1398 children in the non -hazardous occupation. It has filed 356 cases and has received compensation in not a single case.

Thus what one could infer from this set of information is that the efforts of the administration is insufficient given the magnitude of the problem. Even if they succeed in bringing about awareness among the population, how far the population would react positively in terms of not sending their children for work is a moot question.

## **Conclusion**

What emerges from the above discussion is that the problem of child labour cannot be associated with any one social or economic ailment suffered by the population. It is not that poverty had forced the child labour households to send their children for work. Their income levels in Tiruppur, even without the contribution of their children is much higher than what a small peasant would be earning elsewhere in the state. It is also not that they are unlettered and hence do not comprehend the problem. The child labour households, in fact, have fewer unlettered among them. We could not also associate the problem of child labour only with larger households. It is true that all the larger households covered in our survey are child labour households. But they constitute only about one third of child labour households as all the rest are having small families. Again the problem cannot be associated with the desperate migrants of the industrial town. Though the incidence of child labour is slightly more prevalent among them, the native population also sends their children to work. All these features indicate the complexity of the problem. Selective targeting in terms of schools and anti poverty measures is bound to fail.

In our understanding, the problem could be associated with a wider phenomenon. Social scientists who grapple with the feature of rapid fertility decline in Tamilnadu advance a hypothesis. The hypothesis is that the intensity of relative deprivation drives many, particularly among the lower strata of the economy and society to have multiple strategies. The most important of them is to keep their family size smaller which in turn would enable them to move up in the social and economic ladder. They achieve this at an enormous cost of women's body. Another strategy that is being adopted in places like Tiruppur is to send their children for work.

The wage income of children is not absolutely essential as it might be in places like Sivakasi where the dry agriculture in the hinterland provides very low and infrequent employment for the adults. Here, in Tiruppur, it is more to augment the material resources of the family that the children are sent to work.

Given the complexity of the problem, the State has to realize the growing importance of its regulatory role. Enactment of law is not sufficient for an effective role. While it is 'rolling back' its sphere in 'providing', it has to be more active in the sphere of regulation. Whether the state can regulate without providing is a wider question.

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