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GENDER DISPARITIES IN CHILD LABOR AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NEPAL

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Abstract

Child labor continues to be a significant problem in Nepal, particularly in rural areas where poverty and restricted access to education contribute to the perpetuation of the cycle of economic deprivation. The purpose of this study is to investigate the gender differences in child work and the consequences such differences have for the improvement of Nepal's economy. Utilizing information obtained from the Nepal Living Standards Survey (NLSS) conducted in 1995, this study illustrates the numerous ways in which gender influences decisions about child work and schooling. Particular attention is paid to the role that poverty, access to credit, and household characteristics have in these decisions. As a result of the findings, it appears that girls are more likely to be engaged in household work and less likely to attend school in comparison to males. This has ramifications for Nepal's economic development in the long run. In order to address these discrepancies and to promote gender equality in school and the labor market, policy solutions are presented throughout this article.

Keywords: Child Labor, Gender Disparities, Economic Development, Education

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Introduction

The International Labor Organization (ILO, 1996) stresses the fact that millions of children in developing nations, including Nepal, are involved in labor activities that considerably impede their educational achievement and overall development. Nepal is one of these nations. Child labor is especially prominent in rural areas of Nepal, where families are forced to rely on their children's labor as a means of sustaining their living (Ersado, 2005). This is because rural areas are characterized by pervasive poverty and poor access to educational opportunities. This dependence on child work frequently contributes to the perpetuation of cycles of poverty and restricts the opportunities available to children for upward social mobility.

Taking into consideration these obstacles, the purpose of this study is to investigate the extent of gender discrepancies in child labor within Nepal and to evaluate the wider implications that these disparities have for the economic development of the nation. To be more specific, it examines the ways in which boys and girls are affected differently by child labor, as well as the ways in which these disparities influence the access that they have to education, the development of their skills, and the future economic prospects that they have. This research makes use of information obtained from the Nepal Living Standards Survey (NLSS) conducted in 1995 in order to provide empirical insights into the socioeconomic reasons that are the driving force behind child labor and to investigate the long-term economic effects that these labor practices have on Nepalese society.

Gender Disparities in Child Labor

In Nepal, gender is a significant factor in determining whether a child is enrolled in school or engages in labor. In comparison to males, the NLSS data indicate that girls are more likely to engage in domestic work and less likely to attend school (Ersado, 2005). This disparity is especially evident in rural areas, where girls are frequently required to assist with domestic chores and provide care for their younger siblings due to traditional gender roles and economic necessity, whereas boys are more likely to be enrolled in school or employed. While 79.3% of males in urban areas attend school, only 74.7% of girls do so, according to the data. In rural areas, the disparity grows, with 65.5% of males attending school and 46.1% of girls (Ersado, 2005). The gender difference in school attendance is also reflected in employment rates, with girls in rural areas being more likely to be employed (50.8%) than boys (42.9%).

These discrepancies underscore the economic constraints that compel girls to enter the workforce at a young age and the deeply ingrained gender roles that prioritize boys' education over girls.

The Role of Poverty and Access to Credit

In Nepal, child labor is significantly influenced by poverty, primarily in rural areas. The NLSS data suggest that households in the lowest wealth quintile are more likely to send their children to work, with 39.6% of children in the poorest households actively engaged in labor, compared to 10.5% in the wealthiest households (Ersado, 2005). This implies that families are compelled to prioritize their immediate economic requirements over their long-term investments in education due to poverty.

Additionally, decisions regarding juvenile labor and education are significantly influenced by credit availability. Higher rates of school attendance and lesser rates of employment are linked to credit availability in rural Nepal. The data indicates that households that have access to credit are more likely to send their children to school, as credit can be utilized to regulate consumption and decrease the necessity for child labor (Ersado, 2005). Nevertheless, the gender bias in educational investment is evident in the fact that the impact of credit access is more pronounced for males than for girls.

Household Characteristics and Domestic Responsibilities

Child labor and schooling decisions are greatly influenced by household features, especially the presence of young children and the mother's employment status. In Nepal, the likelihood that older siblings—especially girls—are working is positively connected with the number of young children living in a household. This is due to the fact that girls are frequently expected to take care of their younger siblings, which restricts their educational opportunities (Ersado, 2005).

Decisions about child labor are also influenced by the mother's employment status. Children, particularly girls, are more likely to work in households where the mother works outside the home. This is especially true in cities, where older children are forced to take on household duties due to a lack of childcare options and extended family networks (Ersado, 2005).

According to the data, 18.2% of girls in urban Nepal are employed when their mother works outside the home, while 13.2% are not.

Results and Discussion

In Nepal, there are notable gender differences in child work and education, according to the NLSS data analysis. The main conclusions on employment rates and school attendance by area and gender are compiled in Table 1.

Table 1: School Attendance and Employment Rates by Gender and Location

Category	Boys (%)	Girls (%)
Urban Areas		
School Attendance	79.3	74.7
Employment Rate	15.4	18.2
Rural Areas		
School Attendance	65.5	46.1
Employment Rate	42.9	50.8

The table clearly illustrates the gender gap in both school attendance and employment rates, particularly in rural areas. While boys in urban areas have a higher school attendance rate (79.3%) compared to girls (74.7%), the gap is even more pronounced in rural areas, where only 46.1% of girls attend school compared to 65.5% of boys. Similarly, girls in rural areas are more likely to be employed (50.8%) than boys (42.9%), reflecting the dual burden of domestic work and paid labor that many girls face.

The results also highlight the role of poverty and access to credit in shaping child labor and schooling decisions. Households in the bottom wealth quintile are significantly more likely to send their children to work, with 39.6% of children in the poorest households engaged in labor compared to 10.5% in the wealthiest households. Access to credit, on the other hand, is associated with higher school attendance rates, particularly for boys. This suggests that economic interventions, such as expanding access to credit, could help reduce child labor and improve educational outcomes, especially for girls.

Implications for Economic Development

The economic development of Nepal is significantly impacted by the gender gaps in child labor and education. Economic growth is fueled by the development of human capital, which is mostly determined by education (Barro, 1991). Nepal is restricting its potential for economic growth and sustaining the cycle of poverty by denying girls an education.

The job market clearly shows the long-term effects of gender differences in schooling. According to Glick and Sahn (2000), women with lower levels of education are more likely to work in low-paid, informal sector employment, which restricts their economic mobility and adds to the gender wage gap. In order to advance gender equality and sustainable economic growth in Nepal, it is imperative that gender gaps in education and child labor be addressed.

Policy Recommendations

The following suggestions should be taken into consideration by Nepali authorities in order to alleviate gender gaps in child labor and education:

i. Increase Access to Education: Provide incentives for families to send their children, especially girls, to school and increase funding for rural schools. This could involve conditional cash transfers, school nutrition programs, and scholarships.
ii. Increase Credit Access: Give rural households, especially those in the lowest wealth quintile, more access to credit. By doing this, families would be able to invest in their children's education and lessen the financial constraints that drive kids into labor.
iii. Encourage Gender Equality in Education: Put in place initiatives that question established gender norms and highlight the importance of education for girls. Campaigns for neighborhood awareness and collaborations with nearby organizations may fall under this category.
iv. Offer Childcare Support: To assist working moms and lessen the load of household duties on older children, especially girls, childcare facilities should be established in metropolitan areas.
v. Expand Women's Opportunities in the Labor Market: Fund education and vocational training initiatives that give women the tools they need to break the cycle of poverty and obtain better-paying employment.

Conclusion

There are considerable gender differences in child labor and education in Nepal, which is a significant hurdle to the country's economic progress. Nepal has the ability to promote gender equality, increase the development of human capital, and encourage sustainable economic growth if it addresses these discrepancies through focused policies and investments. For the purpose of ensuring that every child has the opportunity to realize their full potential, the findings of this study highlight the significance of tackling the fundamental factors that contribute to child labor, particularly poverty and gender bias.

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