Safeguarding the future: The dual role of children in nation building and the menace of child labor

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to accomplish three things: (1) to determine the manner in which child labor is exploited; (2) to identify the ecological elements (push and pull) that contribute to the exploitation of child labor; and (3) to determine the challenges that are associated with the management of child labor. It is possible for adults to exploit children through the use of child labor in a number of vocations, including those in the agricultural industry, the garment industry, manufacturing, mining, service industries, and the informal sector. Children's employment is influenced by a number of environmental factors, such as poverty, a dearth of educational possibilities, and a lack of awareness regarding the rights of children. The study discusses a number of elements that operate as pushes and pulls, as well as barriers, that could be encountered when attempting to address the problem of child labor.

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Introduction

As the nation's next generation, children have critical roles to play and assume strategic positions in building and developing the nation. Some critical roles children can play in building the nation include: 1) children are the nation's future. Children will lead the efforts to develop the country in the future. Therefore, they play an essential role in building the nation's future; 2) national development where children will also contribute to the development of their nation. They would participate in development programs to improve the people's quality of life and welfare; 3) future leaders where today's children are tomorrow's leaders. Children are future leaders who will formulate the nation's most critical policies; 4) The backbone of the community where children are also a community force. They can help promote positive social values and contribute positively to society; and 5) agents of change where children can also act as agents of change in society. They can fight for their rights and change the unjust system in society (Siswoyo; 1998; Finley, 2017). Added by Edmont & Pavcnik (2005) found that trade plays an important role in prolonging the high levels of child labour that occur in low-income countries.

Children are indispensable parts of the nation's future. Therefore, limiting the minimum age to start working in a labor force is critical to protect children from mental and physical harm and provide spaces for them to grow and develop properly. Forcing children to labor work would expose them to harm, including: 1) impaired physical and mental growth where children who work at an early age tend to experience impaired physical and psychological development. Heavy work, such as lifting heavy objects, bending, or working for long hours, can interfere with the growth of bones and muscles at the age they should be developing; 2) risk of accidents where those who work at an early age are prone to more significant physical harm such as accidents, injuries, or even death due to hazardous work; 3) exploitation where children workers often receive insufficient or even no pay. The children are exploited and not given the same rights as adult workers; 4) no access to education where children who work at a young age are often unable to get a proper
education. This condition will hinder their development and deprive them of the best opportunities for their future; and 5) cultivating wrong values where children who work at a young age may develop negative values, such as thinking that working is more important than education or personal development (Siswoyo, 1998).

Therefore, children should be provided with the opportunity to grow and develop properly. They need access to quality education and be protected from physical and mental harm that will affect their lives in the future. However, in Indonesia and other parts of the world, millions of children are in the labor force and employed in the formal and informal sectors. Consequently, a country needs to pay more attention to children as the nation's next generation. The nations must guide, provide proper education, and support children in their development to become the nation's future leaders with integrity, quality, and motivation to build their country (Siswoyo, 1998).

Many studies have revealed the negative impacts of child labor, including: 1) impaired physical and mental growth where children who work at an early age tend to experience impaired physical and psychological development. Heavy work, such as lifting heavy objects, bending, or working for long hours, can interfere with the growth of bones and muscles at the age they should be developing; 2) risk of accidents where those who work at an early age tend to be exposed to more significant physical harm such as accidents, injuries, or even death due to hazardous work; 3) exploitation where children workers often receive insufficient or even no pay. These children are exploited and not given the same rights as adult workers; 4) Not being able to access education where children who work at a young age are often unable to get a proper education. This situation will hinder their development and deprive them of the best opportunities for their future; 5) cultivating wrong values where children who work at a young age may develop negative values, such as thinking that working is more important than education or personal development (Siswoyo, 1998). Exploitative employment of children is a harmful practice. In this condition, children are taken advantage of economically by their employers who intentionally provide inadequate compensation, ignore workers' fundamental rights, unfair working hours and wages, and unsafe and unhealthy working environments. Child labor may also fall victim to discrimination and sexual harassment. These poor working conditions can occur in formal and informal sectors. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as poor and migrant families, are more prone to exploitative employment (Kucera & Ronconi, 2016; Hindma, 2012; Orazem, 2005; Nardinelli, 1998).

Literature Review

Theoretical and Conceptual Background

Child labor data: Concept and Previous Research

According to data from the International Labor Organization (ILO), 152 million children worldwide were victims of child labor in 2016. In Indonesia, according to data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), in 2018, there were around 1.6 million working children. However, many are not recorded because they work in the informal sector or households. Agriculture, fisheries, factories, and services industries are some of the sectors that often employ children in their labor force in Indonesia. Many studies of children labor have found the following disheartening findings:

i. According to the International Labor Organization (ILO) report in 2017, 152 million children worldwide are involved in child labor, and more than half (73 million) are in hazardous working environments.

ii. Research conducted by UNICEF in 2019 showed that in Asia and Pacific countries, more than 40 million children were involved in child labor in 2016. Around 28 millions of them were involved in dangerous work such as forced labor, child trafficking, and in the informal sectors.

iii. A study conducted by the Research and Advocacy Unit of Zimbabwe in 2020 showed that many children in Zimbabwe are forced to work due to poverty and the inability of families to meet their basic needs. Child work in Zimbabwe often involves strenuous, dangerous, and inappropriate activities for their age.

iv. A 2019 study in India showed that despite laws prohibiting the work of children under 14, the practice is still prevalent, especially in rural areas. Children often work as agricultural workers, tractor drivers, and workers in the food processing sector.

v. Research also shows that child labor harms children's health and education. Children who are forced to work are often exhausted, malnourished, and injured. The children have to leave school without access to adequate education because they must work.

Government regulations regarding the prohibition of child labor

The Indonesian government has issued many regulations and policies regarding the prohibition of child work, including:

i. Law No. 13 of 2003 concerning Manpower, Article 74 paragraph (1) states that children under 15 are prohibited from working.

ii. Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, Article 15 paragraph (1) states that children have the right to education, and fulfilling this Right should not be disturbed by the obligation to work.
iii. Government Regulation No. 19 of 2016 concerning Child Protection, Article 55 paragraph (1) includes a prohibition on giving jobs that violate children's rights, health, safety, or morals.

iv. Regulation of the Minister of Manpower and Transmigration No. PER.14/MEN/X/2011 concerning Guidelines for the Acceptance and Placement of Child Labor during the Work Orientation Period states that children under 18 are not allowed to be accepted and accommodated in the workplace.

v. The Government of Indonesia's policy related to the National Community Empowerment Program (PNPM) Mandiri Cares for Children has also been established to prevent and reduce violence and exploitation of children, including child labor.

Although the Indonesian government has made significant efforts to enforce laws to prevent acts of child labor, such activities are still practiced in many sectors, including agriculture, plantations, fisheries, and factories. Therefore, more intensive efforts are needed to eradicate child labor practices and protect children's rights to education and protection.

*Child labor* is a child who is under the age of 18 and is forced to work. Child labor is often employed in the informal sector, such as in markets, restaurants, agriculture, and creative industries. The work carried out by these children is usually hard and dangerous, such as working in mines, chopping wood, and working in factories. Child workers also often do not receive a decent wage without access to sufficient health and education services. This condition is detrimental to children's physical and mental development and violates their Right to play and receive an education (Peraturan Menteri Tenaga Kerja dan Transmigrasi no. PER.14/MEN/X/2011; United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child., 1989; United Nations Children's Fund UNICEF, 2017; 2019; 2020; Child Labour: Global estimates 2016; United Nations Children's Fund UNICEF; 2021).

**Exploitation**

Exploitation is an act of abusing resources, labor, or the ability of a person or group for personal or group gain, without regard to the rights or welfare of the person or group being exploited (Marx, 1894). Theories and concepts of exploitation can be viewed from several perspectives, including:

i. Marxism - Marxism identifies exploitation as a result of the social relations in capitalism, in which capital owners use labor as a source of production to achieve maximum profits. For Marx, the main goal of the capitalist production system is to accumulate profits in the hands of the owners of capital while ignoring the rights and welfare of workers. Marxism also describes the concept of surplus value (added value) in which workers are forced to earn lower wages than the added value they produce.

ii. Ethics - Ethics considers exploitation as a violation of moral principles and equality. Exploitation in an ethical context means using another person or group's resources or abilities for one's benefit by harming them or causing injustice. This concept assumes that exploitation violates human rights and essential social values in social life.

iii. Feminism - Feminism views exploitation as a form of gender discrimination. Feminists identify exploitation as a reality in which women experience injustice in their role and status in society. This concept permeated economic and cultural contexts where women were employed at lower wages, took on household duties, and cared for children with limited career options.

iv. Theory of Justice - Justice views exploitation as an injustice in the allocation of resources and a violation of the principles of justice. This concept assumes that exploitation occurs when benefits are given to groups that are already rich and powerful without regard to the interests of other groups that are weaker and in need.

In general, the theory and concept of exploitation illustrate the problem of unfairly taking or utilizing the resources and capabilities of a person or group causing injustice. Whereas exploitation in the world of work usually refers to the abuse of labor rights that occurs when workers are forced to work in unreasonable conditions, receive low wages, and are without access to their rights. Exploitation theory is about profit-taking by those with power or control over economic, political, and social resources. This theory says that these benefits are taken only by a few people or groups in power, and they achieve them by exploiting less powerful people. According to the exploitation theory, this profit-taking is exercised by reducing workers' salaries and wages so that companies or parties can control economic resources and get more significant profits. On the political side, the theory of exploitation also says that those in power can manipulate political policies to take advantage of the people, for example, by increasing the prices of products produced under their control (Humbert, 2018).

It is critical to note here that in the exploitation theory, this profit-taking is not only carried out by large companies or elite groups but can also be exercised by individuals or groups who act as intermediaries in an economic transaction. For example, traders who buy products from farmers at low prices and sell them at higher prices in the market can be considered exploitative. Exploitation theory is closely related to the concept of injustice. Exploitation theory explains why inequality occurs in economic and social systems, where a few people or groups have control over resources and take greater profits without giving equal rewards to the less powerful. Therefore, the theory of exploitation is often used as a basis for pushing for changes in social and economic policies that are more equitable (Powell, 2005).
Bakan (2004) in Child Labor stated that A Global View illustrates a global view of child labor worldwide. He discusses the historical background, social and economic impacts, and the efforts taken by the government, NGOs, and civil society to combat child labor. This book also provides an in-depth analysis of national and international policies and laws regarding child labor and recommendations for solutions to the problem.

**Exploitation of Child Labor**

The exploitation of child labor is the practice of employing children at a young age and forcing them to work in unfavorable or unsafe conditions. It includes forced labor, hazardous work, and sexual exploitation, usually by adults exploiting children's weaknesses. Child labor can have long-term effects on children, including problems with health, education, and development. Consequently, children will find difficulties in finding a decent job when they become adults (Powell, 2005). Moreover, child labor also creates a vicious circle that continues to spin. Preventing the exploitation of child labor requires joint efforts from all relevant parties, starting from the government, institutions fighting for children's rights, social organizations, and the community (Levine & Pitts; 1997). They must work together to identify the best solution to this problem. We can also help in this effort by opting out of products that involve child labor and supporting organizations fighting the exploitation of child labor.

**Research and Methodology**

This research was conducted using a qualitative research approach. Data was taken through observation and in-depth interviews. This research uses a qualitative approach because the researcher emphasises more on observing the phenomenon and examines more to the substance of the meaning of the phenomenon. The researcher also emphasises the process and understanding the meaning of the research results and emphasises the power of the sentences described. This is important because it can be used to understand an event, behaviour, or phenomenon (Mohamed, et al., 2010; Creswell, 2007). Observations were also made at locations where exploitation of child workers occurred. The researchers conducted a literature review of previous research findings to develop conceptual and theoretical frameworks related to the exploitation of child labor. The analysis process involved data reduction and display that led the researcher to draw a conclusion about the topic under study (Mohamed, et al., 2010; Creswell, 2007).

**Result and Discussion**

The results of the study explain that there are several important points that need to be noted and discussed, among others;

**The types of exploitation of child labor**

Many types of exploitation of child labor can occur in various employment opportunities for adults. The following are the research findings related to the types of exploitation of child labor taken from six work settings where there were many child laborers.

**Agriculture:** Children are often asked to help their parents work in their farming fields. These children are forced to work more than necessary, sometimes during school hours. The interviews with parents showed that they did not think it was an exploitation. Instead, parents consider that their practice was actually meant to teach their children to work and help their parents. The interview also revealed that the children were forced to work by their parents.

**Garment and textile industry:** Children are required to work in garment factories. Most of these children are not getting a decent wage and are overworked. These children are also often forced to work more than twelve hours a day and are not allowed to rest. The excuse that children have to work hard if they want to be successful is the justification for using children to work in garment and textile factories for long periods. Minimum control by the authorities has exacerbated the situation.

**Factories:** Manufacturing industries often employ children. These children are sometimes forced to work in hazardous environments, for example, working with dangerous machines without protective gear. The working conditions for children who work in manufacturing appear to be more dangerous than anywhere else. They work without protection gear even though they have no self-safety awareness.

**Mining:** Children are often asked to work in the mines. They often carry out dangerous activities such as digging deep holes and operating heavy equipment. In the West Java Region, many illegal mining (sand and rock excavation) is carried out by the local community or businessmen supported by local authorities. Children work on many dangerous types of work in these illegal sand and stone mines. Children even work from early morning until sunset. This situation is common, and the local community has no problems with it.

**Services:** Service industries such as housekeeping, laundry, and restaurants also employ children. These children are sometimes forced to work in bad and heavy working conditions. Observations carried out by many studies have found that in restaurants and laundries, children work in unhealthy and poor conditions. Although, compared to other industries, children who work in laundry and restaurants have better working conditions.

**Informal Sector:** Thousands of children are working in this sector. They work as buskers, beggars, street musicians, scavengers, shop workers, etc. Children who work in this sector usually have no proper clothing without proper pay.
In all those industries, the mode of exploitation is the same – adults employ underage children with minimum wages and poor working conditions. One way to prevent the exploitation of child labor is to tighten policies on child protection and enforce the law against employers who exploit child labor.

**Ecological factors of working children**

The ecological factors affecting children's work are poverty, lack of educational opportunities, and awareness about children's rights. Conflict and war in an area can also force children to work as they use it to survive. In addition, specific industries such as mining, agriculture, and factories usually employ children at meager wages. All of these factors influence children to work ecologically.

**Driving factors:** Some of the driving factors include;

i. **Economic need:** Children work to help meet the family's financial needs. This situation often occurs when families do not have enough income to meet basic needs.

ii. **The idea of Independence:** Children want to be independent by making their own money. They want to feel as if they are contributing to their family life.

iii. **Limited access to education:** Some children do not have access to education due to economic conditions and other problems. This situation forces them to work in order to earn a living.

iv. **Parent:** Parents often force their children to work, especially if they need extra income to make ends meet.

**Pull factor:** Some of the pull factors include;

i. **Learning experiences:** Children can gain valuable experiences and skills by working. These experiences and skills will help them develop their life skills to survive.

ii. **Opportunity to network:** Working offers an excellent opportunity for children to build networks with new workmates and expand their social life.

iii. **Desire to make money:** Many children work to make money, and a job that pays well will appeal to them.

iv. **Self-confidence:** Children can feel more confident and worthy when they have jobs and can generate their own income. This condition can give them positive expectations about the future.

**The barriers to dealing with the problem of child labor include:**

i. **Lack of awareness and understanding of workers' rights in the work environment.** Lack of awareness and knowledge of workers' rights in the workplace has resulted in various problems and violations against workers. Here are some examples of how this lack of awareness and understanding can affect workers in the work environment:

   a. **Wages and Working Conditions:** Workers may not be aware of their rights to living wages and safe working conditions. Without an adequate understanding of their rights, workers may receive wages that do not meet minimum standards or have to work in unsafe and unhealthy conditions.

   b. **Hours of Work and Rest:** Lack of understanding of rights regarding working hours and rest periods can result in workers being forced to work long hours without adequate rest time. This can hurt worker health and productivity.

   c. **Health and Safety Protection:** Workers may not be aware of their Right to protect themselves from occupational risks and hazards in the workplace. As a result, they may not be provided with adequate protection or training to deal with hazardous situations.

   d. **Discrimination and Unfair Treatment:** Workers may not be aware of their rights not to be discriminated against based on sex, race, religion, or other backgrounds. A lack of understanding of these rights can lead to unfair and discriminatory treatment at work.

   e. **The Right to form an association and collective bargaining:** Workers may not know their Right to join trade unions and bargain collectively with employers. As a result, they may not be able to fight for their interests and rights effectively.

   f. **Protection of Child Labor:** In workplaces involving child labor, the lack of awareness about children's rights as workers can lead to exploitation and abuse of their rights.

ii. **The authorities have no sufficient control over the industry that exploits the workers.**

The absence of adequate control from the authorities and law enforcers on the exploitative employment made by industries is one of the factors contributing to the continued practice of worker exploitation. When controls are ineffective or even nonexistent, exploiters feel free to violate workers' rights without fear of legal action or severe sanctions. The following are some of the impacts and problems resulting from inadequate control by the authorities on worker exploitation:
i. **Increase in Exploitative Practices:** Without strict control, exploiters of workers have become bolder in carrying out practices that are detrimental to workers. They can easily employ children, force workers to work in unsafe conditions, and pay wages below the minimum standard.

ii. **Descendants of Vicious Circles:** The absence of adequate control allows exploiters to operate unhindered, creating a vicious cycle for the workers. Workers will be trapped in a cycle of poverty and exploitation because it is difficult to find better job alternatives.

iii. **Declining Quality of Life of Workers:** Exploitation practices of workers can lead to a decrease in the quality of life of workers. They may be unable to meet their basic needs, such as food, housing, and education, due to low wages and poor working conditions.

iv. **Human Rights Violations:** The absence of adequate supervision can lead to human rights violations against workers, especially children vulnerable to exploitation. Fundamental worker rights such as the Right to a fair wage, to rest, and to work in a health and safety environment can easily be violated.

v. **Growing Corruption:** When controls are ineffective, corruption in the form of bribes and extortion can occur between authorities and exploiters. This situation weakens law enforcement and encourages the continuation of exploitative practices.

vi. **Loss of Public Trust:** The inability of the authorities to address labor exploitation issues can result in a loss of public trust in government institutions and the law. This can cause public dissatisfaction and reduce the credibility of the government.

It is through the implementation of stricter control and supervision that labor exploitation practices can be suppressed, and workers' rights can be better protected. In addition, these efforts can also help create a more just, safe, and dignified working environment for all workers.

**Limited resources and infrastructure to deal with the problem of worker exploitation.**

Limited resources and infrastructure are severe obstacles in dealing with the problem of worker exploitation. When resources and infrastructure are insufficient, handling the problem of worker exploitation becomes limited and ineffective. Here are some examples of possible limitations: (a) lack of funds and budget, (b) lack of trained workforce, (c) limited facilities and services, (d) transport and communication Infrastructure, (d) public education and awareness, (e) limitations in public education and awareness can also be obstacles, (f) communities that do not understand workers' rights and the dangers of exploitation tend not to report or intervene in exploitation cases, and (g) bureaucracy and complicated legal process.

**There is no clear and firm policy regarding protecting workers' rights.**

The absence of clear and firm policies regarding the protection of workers' rights is one of the factors contributing to the exploitation of workers. Clear and firm policies protect workers' rights, regulate the work environment, and avoid labor abuse. The following are some of the impacts that arise when there are no adequate policies to protect workers' rights: (a) vulnerable to Exploitation, (b) unsafe working conditions, (c) lack of worker rights, (d) wage and working hours exploitation, (e) difficulties in law enforcement.

**Intimidation and threats against workers who reported exploitation.**

Workers who dare to report violations of their rights often face various forms of intimidation and threats from employers, direct supervisors, or other parties involved in exploitative practices. The following are some of the negative impacts of intimidation and threats on the workers: (a) fear and insecurity, (b) barriers to reporting, (c) intimidation and threats can be severe barriers to reporting exploitation cases, (d) shutting down in the work environment, (e) repetition of exploitation.

**The absence of strict sanctions for exploitative employers.**

The absence of sufficiently strict sanctions for employers who exploit their workers is one factor causing the exploitation problem to continue. Weak or inadequate sanctions for exploiters can lead to distrust of the legal system and allow perpetrators to continue engaging in practices detrimental to workers. The following impacts may occur as the result of the absence of sufficiently strict sanctions for employers who are proven to have exploited: (a) indeterminacy, (b) no deterrent effect, (c) not justice for the victims, (d) increases the potential for repetition.

**Conclusions**

The driving forces for children to work occur due to various factors, such as poverty, lack of access to proper education, and lack of job opportunities for adults. Children are often forced to work to help support their families or because of their parents' instructions. They can work in the informal sector, such as hawkers or domestic workers, or in the formal sectors, factories, and agriculture. Therefore, it can be said that the driving factors for children to work are economic needs, the desire to be independent, limited access to education, and parental encouragement. While the factors that attract children to work are wanting to have learning experiences, opportunities to build networks, the desire to earn money, and self-confidence. However, working at a young age is prone to
exploitation. Working children may experience physical violence or abuse, work in unsanitary and unsafe conditions, and be financially exploited. They often pay high prices for work because they have no social security or work rights.

As a result, children work, there is exploitation of working children, which can affect their physical and mental development, and they can be trapped in long-term poverty. In addition, their education is also disrupted because they have to work, which can hinder their opportunities for future advancement. Therefore, governments, non-governmental organizations, and communities must protect children's rights and prevent child exploitation in the workplace. The government must implement laws and regulations for child protection and ensure that children have access to quality education and decent employment opportunities. Meanwhile, the community and stakeholders can help by educating and providing assistance in the workplace so that children can be protected. Some suggestions that can be recommended from the results of this research are:

i. Stop the practice of child labor in all industrial sectors by increasing law enforcement.

ii. Provide adequate educational opportunities and accessibility for parents in disadvantaged or poor areas to enable their children to receive an education without working.

iii. Develop training and assistance programs for parents to work in industrial sectors that respect children's rights more and provide better wages so that their children do not have to be employed.

iv. Establish partnerships between companies and community organizations that focus on children's rights to ensure that child labor practices are entirely stopped.

v. Strengthen social and cooperative works between government, society, and companies to create an environment supporting children's rights.

Preventing the exploitation of child labor requires joint efforts from all relevant parties, starting from the government, organizations that have concerns for children's rights, social organizations, and the community. They must work together to identify the best solution to children's problems. It could also be by not choosing products that involve child labor and supporting institutions that fight against the exploitation of child labor.

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Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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