

JUVENILE AT RISKS: PRECARIOUS SITUATION OF CHILD SEX WORKERS IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY

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ABSTRACT

Child labor is one of the Philippines' most crucial problems, and emanates from a range of economic and social factors. This research was undertaken to describe the precarious situation of child sex workers in Cebu, Davao, Manila, and Pampanga who are in the tourism industry. Rooted on the Push-Pull factors theory and a descriptive design, it utilized an archival data-gathering method. The data were compiled from the researches done previously on child labor in the tourism industry in the Philippines that included 1046 respondents from the four provinces. Findings revealed that as they work in the establishments and streets, many of these child sex workers are 17 years old (49%), Catholic (88%), female (64%), born in the city/municipality where they work (38%), eldest child in the family (33%), have 3-4 siblings, and are living with their families (48%). A big bulk (67%) of them work to give financial support to help their families or they want to earn easy money. A good number (36%) of them work in bars/pub houses/nightclubs/gay bars/discos, and as entertainers (37%). The higher paid child sex worker earn an average of Php 900.00 per day. At the extreme high end, a few earned an average of Php 5,000 a night but their average daily earnings is only Php 400. Seven hundred-two (51%) are happy with their present jobs, while 678 (49%) also experience pain as they work. All child sex workers covered in the study were offered some form of assistance from the government, NGO's, the Church, and school, like scholarship, jobs, and livelihood, but only 440 or 42% of them were ready to accept help. The process of reducing, if not eliminating, child labor is a vision that requires the commitment and cooperation of the government, employers, trade unions, and other sectors of society.

Keywords: *child labour, child sex trafficking, poverty, precarious employment, tourism*

INTRODUCTION

The 2011 Survey on Children conducted by the National Statistics Office (NSO) revealed that out of the 29.019 million Filipino children aged 5-17 years old, about 18.9 percent or 5.59 million, were already working, which is higher than the 4 million Filipino working children reported in the 2001 survey funded by the International Labor Organization (ILO). In this survey, children aged 5 to 17 years who worked for at least one hour during the past 12 months were considered working. These working children represented 18.9 per cent of the total children 5 to 17 years old. Among the 5.59 million children at work, 3.028 million were considered as child laborers, and 2.993 million were reported to be exposed to hazardous work environments, comprising 54.5 per cent of the total working children.

In the Philippines, a child is defined as a person below the age of emancipation, which is 18 years. In this regard, child labor, in this article, refers to children who reported to have worked in hazardous work environment regardless of the number of hours they spent at work, or those who have worked for long hours, that is, more than 20 hours a week for children 5 to 14 years old, and more than 40 hours a week for children 15 to 17 years old. Child labor is work that denies children of their childhood, their potential, and their dignity, and that is detrimental to physical and mental growth (ILO, 2011). Based on the 2011 Survey on Children of the Philippine Statistics Authority, of the 2.993 million working children, about 95% of them are in hazardous work in farms and plantations, in dangerous mines, on streets, in factories, in tourism, and in private homes as child domestic workers.

The tourism industry is major contributor to the world economy. According to the estimates of the World Tourism Organization (WTO), international tourism alone has generated billions in receipts over the

years. For many countries, international tourism has been an indispensable source of foreign currency earnings (NUWHRAIN-APL-IUF & ILO, 2001). In the Philippines, tourism is one of the major industries which the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) noted to be positioned at the epicentre of global travel and tourism growth and development over the years. In 2017, the total contribution of Travel & Tourism to the country's GDP is 21.1%, generating 19.2% of total employment, and 7,796,500 jobs (WTTC, 2018).

Around the world, very young children work in all kinds of hotels, catering, and tourism occupations, particularly in family-based enterprises. Child work is particularly prevalent in semi-organized and informal occupations. Because of the extraordinary degree of irregularity of the industry, the low pay and status of most employees, and the lack of controls operating in its unofficial fringes, young people are found everywhere within it, especially in the developing world. In fact, ILO estimated that at least 100 million children worldwide perform tasks classifiable as "labor" to earn money for themselves or their families (NUWHRAIN-APL-IUF & ILO, 2001).

In the Philippines, the tourism industry has proven to be a lucrative one for child workers because of the great demand for their services as waiters/waitresses, cooks, dancers, bar hostesses, receptionists, janitors, and prostitutes, among others. While many of them do not earn regular wages, they earn from commissions (usually from drinks), or earn retainers per performance (usually as dancers). The lowest paid among the children in hotels and restaurants are those who have no direct contact with customers, notably the kitchen crew (i.e. cooks, dishwashers and other kitchen helpers). The highest paid are the dancers, bar hostesses, and receptionists, occupations requiring constant customer contact and where the primary qualifications are physical appearance and youthful charm (NUWHRAIN-APL-IUF & ILO, 2001).

Child workers in the tourism industry are often viewed as victims of sexual exploitation. These children are thought to be engaged in commercial sexual activity because of their employment, motivation, and self-image of the worker. There are also working children who are associated with the "street"; children working in the informal, open-air economy—in markets, at tourist sites, on beaches, in amusement arcades, transport terminals, and shopping malls—are described as "street children". This term, consciously or otherwise, implies that they are vagrants, not that they work or earn (NUWHRAIN-APL-IUF & ILO, 2001). It can be clearly observed that child labor is one of the Philippines' most crucial problems, and emanates from a range of economic and social factors. Unless something is done to stop child labor, the issue will continue to affect the lives of many families across the country.

This study was founded on the Push-Pull factors theory. This theory suggests that circumstances at the place of origin (such as poverty and unemployment) repel, or push people out of that place, to other places that exert a positive attraction, or pull (such as a high standard of living or job opportunities) (Edralin, 2007). Current researches on child labor done in Asia and Latin America have consistently presented a group of factors that make children more vulnerable to labor exploitation. Generally, these forces which push and pull these children to work can be divided into two categories: (1) those at the individual or family level; and (2) those operating at the community or societal level (Edralin, 2007).

With the end in view of helping in combating of child labor in the tourism industry, this research was undertaken to describe the precarious situation of child sex workers in Cebu, Davao, Manila, and Pampanga who are in the tourism industry. Specifically, it aimed to: (1) determine the socio-demographic characteristics; (2) identify their work situation; (3) analyze the joys and pains they experience as child sex workers; (4) present actual cases of the experiences of the child sex workers; (5) describe the assistance extended to them by various groups; and (5) recommend courses of action to combat child labor.

RESEARCH METHOD

This descriptive study used an archival data-gathering method which depended on the information gathered from the various researches done previously on child labor in the tourism industry in the Philippines, particularly in Cebu, Davao, Manila, and Pampanga, by the National Union of Workers in the Hotel, Restaurant, and Allied Industries (NUWHRAIN-IUF) which was funded by the IPEC-ILO.

A total of 1,046 respondent child workers in Cebu (237), Davao (115), Manila (500), and Pampanga (194) were included in this study. Other secondary data, such as brochures, newspaper clippings, laws and ordinances, reports from NUWHRAIN-IUF, research studies, and other related documents were also collected and analyzed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-demographic profile of child sex workers

Table 1 shows that working in the establishments and streets, many of these child workers are 17 years old (49%), Catholic (88%), female (64%), born in the city/municipality where they work (38%), eldest child in the family (33%), have 3-4 siblings (31%), and are living with their families (48%). In terms of academic background, 81% of these child workers have stopped going to school. They reached high school but did not finish it (45%) or had gone to elementary school (36%). Majority (53%) of the child workers still have parents who live together. About 42% of their mothers are housewives while their fathers work in the service sector (26%). For those child workers whose parents are working, their main work is being a vendor (market, cigarettes, flowers, balut, palamig), working as wage laborer in sugarcane plantation/other farms, having own farm/subsistence farming, and working as wage laborer in a non-agricultural business, among others. A big bulk (67%) of the child workers works to give financial support to their families to help their families, or they want to earn easy money (19.92%). They possess different types of skills, like high-speed sewing, pattern-making, sewing (dresses, curtains, and pillow cases), basic cooking, toy-making, use of computer software, candle-making, bracelet-making, and cosmetology.

Table 1. Socio-demographic profile of child sex workers in the tourism industry

Socio-demographic profile	Cebu	Davao	Manila	Pampanga	Total	%
17 years old	126	67	250	75	518	49
Catholic	193	105	450	177	925	88
Female	165	74	294	139	672	64
Born in the city/municipality of work	75	36	229	62	402	38
Eldest child in the family	74	39	161	72	346	33
Number of siblings: 3-4	41	19	234	35	329	31
Live with their families	139	62	190	116	507	48
Stopped going to school	173	80	442	162	857	81
Did not finish high school	90	32	251	100	473	45
Had gone to elementary school	40	85	205	43	373	36
Parents still live together	138	54	268	101	561	53
Mothers are housewives	105	46	204	90	445	42
Fathers work in the service sector	49	16	158	55	278	26
Give financial support to their families	139	70	381	113	703	67

Source: NUWHRAIN-APL-IUF & International Labour Office (2001). In the Heat of the Night: Combating Child Labor in the Tourism Industry. Manila, Philippines: International Labour Office.

Work profile of child sex workers

Table 2 presents the work profile of child sex workers in the tourism industry. A good number (36%) of the child workers work in bars/pub houses/nightclubs/gay bars/discos, and as entertainers (37%). The owners of these establishments are Filipinos, with 30-100 workers. Their places of work are in the city (60%). For 61% of the child workers, this is their first job. The age they started working was at 15 years. They render work from evening to early morning (65%), and on ordinary days they work 10 hours per day, for six days a week (34%). The child workers have also been in their jobs for only a year, although there are children who have been in their jobs for 5 years, as well as for only a month.

Table 2. Work profile of child sex workers in the tourism industry

Work profile of child workers	Cebu	Davao	Manila	Pampanga	Total	%
Work in bars/clubs	91	55	164	73	383	36
Work as entertainers	109	39	151	92	391	37
Work in the city	191	93	200	151	635	60
Present job is their first job	147	70	307	120	644	61
Started working at age 15	70	34	41	54	199	19
Render work from evening to early morning	149	52	342	142	685	65
Number of days worked per week: 6 days	84	41	159	74	358	34
Do not want to stay in their job	146	66	405	127	744	71
Influenced by friends to be in their job	134	56	257	102	549	52

Source: NUWHRAIN-APL-IUF & International Labour Office (2001). *In the Heat of the Night: Combating Child Labor in the Tourism Industry. Manila, Philippines: International Labour Office.*

Earning enough money is what motivates the children to unwillingly sacrifice their childhood and education to the demands of work. The higher paid child worker average Php 900.00 per day. At the extreme high end, a few child worker claimed that they earned an average of Php 5,000 in a single night. However, their average daily earnings is only Php 400.

A large percentage (52%) of the child workers were influenced by their friends (52%) to work. But there were those who were trafficked by illegal recruiters, or forced by their parents or relatives, to work in this kind of job. Noticeably, 71% of the child workers do not want to stay in this kind of job for a long time. They are especially worried about their future. They know that as each day passes, their youth and beauty fades, their body becomes depreciated, and so does their “value” in the marketplace. Moreover, they will not stay because the job is tiring, they have low earnings/no benefits, they do not want to be shamed by their children, and some are now engaged in business.

These child workers, similar to any other human beings, also experience joy and pain in their lives. Seven hundred-two (51%) are happy with their present jobs, while 678 (49%) also experience pain as they work Table 3. There is that mixed feelings, of sometimes feeling happy and sometimes sad. Since they are children, they can be easily be happy or sad. Their happiness and sadness center on their sense of achievement, affection, and acceptance. Achievement pertains to successes in work, number and extent of activities, and the ability to overcome problems and challenges. Affection refers to the extent by which the child worker feels loved and respected. Acceptance refers to the extent by which the child worker feels that he belongs and is seen as a valuable human being.

The happy moments in their lives as a child worker come from a feeling of affection (37%), followed by a feeling of acceptance (33%), and lastly by a feeling of achievement (30%). They are primarily happy because they have higher Income, regular source of living, and are able to meet many people as they work. Other reasons for their joy are the occasions when they are with their family or receive letters from their family, when they have true friends that love them, and when they have money and they can buy what they want or support their family. Some girls mentioned that they are happy when they were accepted as they are, or loved by a special someone like a boyfriend/girlfriend.

On the other hand, the sad moments in their lives come from lack of affection (42%), followed by rejection (36%), then by failure (23%). These child workers are unhappy, specifically because they do not have a decent job, lack sleep, and have less income. They also complain about their work and working conditions where they experience shame, impolite customers, and the possibility of getting infected with AIDS. The other factors mentioned are the gossip, envy, conflict with friends, strict manager, and fatigue. They also miss their families and friends. Others feel bad when they were disowned by their family and friends because of their kind of work. Worse are those children who were abused by their customers.

All child workers covered in the study were offered some form of assistance, but only 440 or 42% of them were ready to accept help at the time that such help was being extended to. Specifically, those who offered assistance to them were from the government, NGO’s, the Church, school, and counsellors them (Table 4). There are about 606 or 58% of the child workers who refuse to accept outside assistance. Their

Table 3. The joys and pains experienced by the child sex workers

Work profile of child workers	Cebu	Davao	Manila	Pampanga	Total	%
JOY						
Achievement	59	47	0	103	209	30
Acceptance	40	35	124	35	234	33
Affection	62	26	137	34	259	37
PAIN						
Failure	72	31	0	51	154	23
Rejection	46	46	105	44	241	36
Lack of Affection	33	33	156	61	283	42
JOY/HAPPINESS						
Higher Income	77	71	93	129	370	59
Meet Many People	42	2	26	21	91	14
Source of Living	62	30	51	20	163	26
No. of Respondents	166	118	261	184	624	
PAIN/SADNESS						
Not a decent job	19	20	30	18	87	37
Lack of Sleep	14	9	32	20	75	32
Less Income	13	9	28	22	72	31
No. of Respondents	69	68	261	120	234	

Source: NUWHRAIN-APL-IUF & International Labour Office (2001). *In the Heat of the Night: Combating Child Labor in the Tourism Industry. Manila, Philippines: International Labour Office.*

Table 4. Stakeholders and type of assistance offered to child sex workers

Stakeholders	Cebu	Davao	Manila	Pampanga
Government	Livelihood	Livelihood	Livelihood	Livelihood
NGO	Jobs	Jobs	Jobs	Jobs
Church	Prayers	Prayers	Prayers	Prayers
School	Scholarship	Scholarship	Scholarship	Scholarship
Labor Unions	Fight for their rights			

Source: NUWHRAIN-APL-IUF & International Labour Office (2001). *In the Heat of the Night: Combating Child Labor in the Tourism Industry. Manila, Philippines: International Labour Office.*

resistance can be attributed to a number of factors. They refuse to leave their job because they are proud that they are self-reliant and need not depend on others financially. There are a few workers who mentioned their wariness in accepting help, because such offers before, only brought disappointment and further abuses.

Child sex workers up close: Four case studies

From the hundreds of documented cases of child workers in the tourism industry, four cases, one from each province are presented below. They illustrate the precarious work-life of a child who is vulnerable to exploitation due to poverty, dysfunctional family, sexual abuse, and low level self-concept that lured them to work in the tourism industry.

Case 1 - Lani, 16 years old, GRO, Cebu

Lani sees to it that she takes time out from her painstaking job of being a GRO. At work, unscrupulous customers harass her, touch her private parts, and make sexual advances. She spends her free time healing the insults and the shivers she has to endure in entertaining a customer.

If she could only complain, she would have a thousand times. But her job entails providing total enjoyment to a customer. And when the customer has already ordered something, all she can do is oblige.

Nine months ago, she gave up a housekeeping job in the hope of earning more. She got what she wished for, but at the cost of the mean treatment she gets from customers. She currently earns P300 per day.

The third in a brood of six, Lani was born in Tagbilaran City. Her father is a contractual worker in Hong Kong while her mother is a plain housewife. When her parents separated, she saw the need to help support the family. She sacrificed her studies for a tiring 8:00 p.m. to 4:00 a.m. job, hoping for a better life. "My father seldom sends us money because he already has a family there," she narrates. (Minsan lang kami binibigyan ng perang Itay ko kasi may iba na syang pamilya doon.)

But things were not as she expected. Her life is more difficult now, having to deal with rowdy customers. There are also bickerings with her fellow GROs. She seldom sees her sisters, so she could only seek refuge in a videoke establishment in Cebu City.

Lani is ashamed of her job, but on a positive light, she says that she has learned to be independent and has developed self-confidence.

She hopes for the time when she will be able to wean herself away from an ill-reputed job. She thinks it is possible only when she eventually gets married. "When I get married, I don't want to be here anymore. I just want to stay at home," she ends. (Kapag nag-asawa na ako, ayaw ko na dito. Mas gusto ko nasa bahay na lang ako.)

Source: NUWHRAIN-APL-IUF & International Labour Office (2001). In the Heat of the Night: Combating Child Labor in the Tourism Industry. Manila, Philippines: International Labour Office.

Case 2 - Leonor, 15 years old, freelance sex worker, Davao

As a child, she was mocked that she was born out of wedlock and that the father she knew is not the real one. She grew up feeling worthless, and became timid and shy. So when the very first person who ever showed interest in her came, she gave him everything – her love, her trust, and her innocence.

Sixteen year-old Leonor was born in Sta. Maria, Davao del Sur. She is the middle child in a brood of five. Her parents live together but they do not work.

At a tender age of 14, she entrusted her virginity to a 21 year old unemployed neighbour, her boyfriend then. Her mother was fuming mad when she discovered about Leonor's relationship with the man. Young and rebellious that she was, Leonor fought for their relationship believing it was pure and true. Sadly, the boy did not take her seriously and dumped her for another girl. Distressed and miserable, she thought that since people treated her worthlessly, she might as well make it real. With low self-esteem, she ventured into prostitution.

Wearing her sexy dress, she goes to places where people gather with the hope of finding a customer. She looks for customers seven days a week with no fixed hours. She just works whenever she feels like working. She normally charges P200, and if she gets lucky, she earns P500 per night.

Leonor is tired of this job and of society's negative perception of her. "I just need the money, that's why I am here," she explains in her native dialect. (Kinahang lan lang dyud nako ang kwarta maong naang ko diri.)

She does not plan to stay for a long time in this job. She wishes to live a decent life for her and her future children.

Source: NUWHRAIN-APL-IUF & International Labour Office (2001). In the Heat of the Night: Combating Child Labor in the Tourism Industry. Manila, Philippines: International Labour Office.

Case 3 - Michelle, 17 years old, guest relations officer, Manila

Michelle, 17, considers her childhood years in Pangasinan as the happiest in her life. She has fond memories of her father who spoiled her no end. That's why she was devastated when her parents separated during her high school days. She felt bad about her father, who stopped sending them money for support, forcing her to quit school after graduating from high school.

As the eldest in the family, Michelle decided to look for work to augment the family income. Her mother's income as a meat vendor was barely enough to satisfy their daily needs.

Michelle has been a guest relation officer (GRO) for one-and-a-half years already. She entertains customers and shares their table whenever they visit the club. Some customers request to take her out for sex. She decides to go out with them, especially when she is in dire need of money to support her brothers and sisters. In some instances, she even persuades her client to take her out just to earn more money.

Her work has afforded her with the means of acquiring the material things she wants in life. More importantly, being exposed to different people from all walks of life, has made it easier for her to adjust to the different situations. Michelle feels a certain degree of self-actualization for having been able to send her brothers and sisters back to school.

What Michelle longs for is the day she would see her dad again. According to her, she and her father did not have any contact from the time he left them. "Nami-miss ko na ang papa ko kasi malapit ako sakanya at binibigay niya lahat ng mga luho ko. Pero nang maghiwalay sila ng nanay ko, nagbago lahat" (I miss my dad terribly. We were very close, and he gave me everything I wanted. But when they separated, everything just changed).

Michelle now looks forward to continuing her studies. With the financial support she provides, Michelle hopes that her brothers and sisters can finish their schooling too "kasi alam ko at ng mama ko na sila na langa ng tanging pag-asa naming sa buhay" (because my mom and I know that they are our only hope in life).

Source: NUWHRAIN-APL-IUF (2000). At Your Service: Combating Child Labor in the Tourism Industry. Manila, Philippines: International Labour Office.

Case 4 – KC, 15 years old, sex worker, Pampanga

KC was raised in a family with twisted values. Both her parents were jobless, and her aunt was a pimp. Thus, KC grew up knowing that she should earn her own money to be able to buy her needs and wants. "I am happy especially when I have money to buy things," when she describes how she feels earning her keep. (Masaya, lalo na kapag may pera akong pambiling kung kung anu-ano.)

At age twelve, she was sexually abused by her aunt's friend. The incident introduced her to what she considers a "lucrative" career. Initially, she resisted. "I was miserable during the time when my aunt first sold me! Because my aunt forced me to work in the club," she recalls. (Miserable noong mga panahong ako ay ibinebenta! Dahil pinipilit akong magtrabaho ng tiyahin kosa club.)

Now fifteen year old, she is like a real pro mastering the tricks of her trade as a sex worker in Angeles City, Pampanga. She has been using contraceptives and is able to discourage customers from doing sadistic sexual practices with her.

KC's aunt is a real pimp who capitalizes on young girls that she sells for sex. They hang out near clubs and approach customers who seem receptive to this trade. She confides that the sex trade is rewarding to pimps like her aunt, and sex workers like her deserve commissions. She earns P70.00 on the average, the price of a popular hamburger meal. She goes out every night from 11:00 p.m. to 3:00 a.m.

Selling her body is the only convenient job KC knows, and she has no immediate plans of retiring from her job. Lately, she has learned to smoke and drink.

KC resents the fact that her friends are starting to avoid her, but she understands that nobody wants to have an ill-reputed girl for a friend. She now simply limits her circle of friends within her coworkers. In dealing with people, she is aloof. She thinks lowly of herself. She says "Nobody will take me seriously." (Walang seseryoso sa akin.)

No help is available for KC, and she knows of no other means of earning. Thus, she is not remorseful that she has to go on with her job. She says sadly: "I chose this life, there were bad influences, I left my parents and now, here I am – miserable." (Ito ang pinili kong buhay, napabarkada ako, nalayo sa mga magulang at ngayon... heto... miserable.)

Source: NUWHRAIN-APL-IUF & International Labour Office (2001). In the Heat of the Night: Combating Child Labor in the Tourism Industry. Manila, Philippines: International Labour Office.

Recommended courses of actions to combat child labour

Deeply rooted in the economic and social and cultural causes, the process of reducing, if not eliminating, child labor is a vision that requires the commitment and cooperation of the government, employers, trade unions, non-government organizations, and other sector of society.

1. **The corporate social responsibility of the employer.**

The employer can help ensure child protection in the workplace by utilizing three key strategies, namely: 1) developing a child-safe and child-friendly work environment; 2) effective screening of employees and exclusion of known offenders, especially in “child-related employment”; and 3) prompt reporting of cases to proper authorities or designated agency (NUWHRAIN-APL-IUF, 2005).

2. **The social responsibility of the trade union.**

The trade unions must uphold the guidelines indicated by the Stockholm Declaration and Agenda for Action of August 1996. As part of the organized labor movement, trade unions, including NUWHRAIN, have the following general responsibilities: 1) promoting and defending human, democratic, workers', and trade union rights; 2) supporting efforts towards general social development that actually benefits workers and their families who compose the biggest part of the Philippine society; and 3) strengthening the labor movement at the local, industry, national, and global levels (NUWHRAIN-APL-IUF, 2005).

3. **The responsibility of the employee.**

It is the moral obligation of every employee to protect children. As a human being, and as a member of the international community, the employee is also bound by the UN declarations that seek to protect human rights, especially the rights of a child in this case. As a Filipino, an employee is also expected to obey Philippine laws for child protection (NUWHRAIN-APL-IUF, 2005).

4. **The responsibility of the government.**

First, efforts have to be made towards ensuring political will and commitment to policy reforms to address the root causes of child labor. This will also mean strict enforcement of the laws, and greater vigilance on the part of the citizens, so that erring parties are brought to justice. Second, link Anti-Child Labor Action Programmes with poverty alleviation and efforts to provide quality education. This can come in terms of providing adequate economic and employment opportunities to parents and adult members of the poor families of these children. At the same time, appropriate skills and livelihood training necessary for entrepreneurship and/or employment must be given to these parents and adult family members (Edralin, 2007).

CONCLUSION

Despite the existence of a national and local legal regulatory framework governing child labor, and the efforts of institutions and individuals to stem this growing national problem, the number of child workers continue to rise steadily every day. The incidence of abuse, exploitation, and maltreatment of child workers is seen as a necessary evil in the economic survival of families, industries, even the nation. It can be clearly observed that child labor is one of the Philippines' most crucial problems, and emanates from a range of economic and social factors. Unless something is done to stop child labor, the issue will continue to affect the lives of many families across the country.

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