Counting of Child Labour:
- Some Concepts and Practice

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Extended Abstract

This paper describes practical challenges in researching marginal and elusive population and innovative approaches to overcome some of such bottlenecks. It also describes how methodological complexities can be simplified by using some clear idioms. Survey of Child labour in developing country is always a challenge.

Main problem arises in defining the universe for the sample survey of child labour. Second problem arises during estimating required sample size for the sample survey because of lots of conceptual ambiguity.

Defining universe for Child labour, in developing country like India, is difficult because child labour can be found in households, roadside dhabas, railway platforms, pavement etc. Again, they can be orphan, or beggar or homeless or staying with family creates difficulties in preparing the sampling frame. Interviewing such children is another challenge, needs proper attention. On the other hand, lack of clear understanding leads to major non-sampling error in the estimation. Finally, ambiguity or lack of understanding between sample size and its linkages with appropriate sampling design lead to enormous sampling error in the estimation.

This paper is based on personal experience of real life projects in India. During each study or review, authors have encountered methodological dilemmas due ambiguity regarding proper sampling procedure or measurement problem due to ambiguity in definition and how it has sidelined the final outcome.

Sample survey of 'laboring children' and 'child labor' should be understood from the perspective of its scope embedded around the terminology. The primary objective of the **Child Labour Survey (CLS)** is to measure the prevalence of child labour. The target population of CLS is the **total population of children exposed to the risk of child labour**. This has necessarily to be based on random sampling. On the other hand, primary objective of the **Labouring Children Survey (LCS)** is to investigate characteristics and consequences of child labour. The target population of the LCS is the **labouring children,** may be drawn purposively.

Barriers of counting child labour arise in developing country like India can be describes in two ways- one is due to various conceptual disparities and another is due to methodological bottleneck and/or ignorance. This paper consists of three sections- first section describes conceptual disparities. Second section describes the methodological issues. And the third one actually consolidates earlier sections and provides some guidelines to overcome both.

A. Conceptual Disparities

Different concepts or classification and its overlap actually create lot of confusion.

Census of India actually defines what is termed as 'Work' and then cross tabulate it against age group. 'Work' is defined in Censuses as 'participation in any economically productive activity'.
Further it has instructed enumerators not to include a specific type of work: "a man or a women who is doing household duties may be producing or making something only for the domestic consumption of the household and not for sale. Such a person is not a worker, even though from his or her point of view the activity is productive". The census data thus may suffer from an undercount.

Such a definition includes children working inside the household and children working in self-employment. It is true that many activities, which children undertake and which are necessary inputs in the (economic) management of the household, will not be included under the heading 'work'. Children looking after cattle or collecting firewood may often do this for household consumption, but this work may also lead, directly or indirectly, to production for sale. The census organisation has been aware of a possible ambivalence that could have led to arbitrary entries by the enumerators. This restriction would obviously apply also, and in its significance even more so, to the work contributed by children.
Primary survey many times include children who are often engaged in household chores, without hampering normal schooling and normal entertainment, into child labour category. In this context, some people argue

that children indirectly contribute to the household income and they refer to the concept of the economically active population adopted by the International Conference on Labour Statisticians in 1982. At the same time classifying boys work vis-à-vis girl's work mystify the concept of economically active population. Age of the child is also a crucial factor in defining child labour. For different purposes, age limit for engaging labour force has been relaxed.

A clear conceptual frame of mind will help to prepare a complete sampling frame and will reduce many sampling and non-sampling error.

B. Methodological Dilemma

Conceptual disparities described above actually lead to methodological dilemmas. It is very difficult to choose one method over others due to overlapping nature of definitions or concepts. This section will discuss limitations of adopting particular methods in estimating child labor and its consequences.

So far authentic source of magnitude of child labor in India is Census of India and National sample Survey (NSS). Census of India and NSS defines work as any economically productive activity and then cross classify against age. But when we talk about child labour, it is altogether is another connotation. Other data collected through smaller sample surveys, using different concept and comparing with national level data, suffers from serious limitations.

1. Universe Selection

In statistics the "universe" refers to the population or group of individuals being studied. The two parameters that typically define the universe of in child labor surveys are the age group of respondents and the definition of "economic activity."

2. Sampling and Non-Sampling Errors

In all household surveys, sampling errors mainly occur due to wrong selection of sampling frame (incomplete or wrong compilation), inappropriate sample size or inappropriate design. Appropriate adjustment for design effect is rarely made.

Non-sampling errors generally arise due to the interpretation of questions by respondents, the capacity and willingness of respondents to provide the correct information, and the inability to contact sample cases. A proper training of interviewers also reduces some potential non-sampling error. Due to lack of sufficient training and de-sensitisation of interviewers produce havoc due to their pre-conceived ideas. Non-sampling errors may impact the quality of child labor data because of the illegal nature of many children's work. Parents may be hesitant to answer questions honestly, and children may not be able to provide accurate responses.

Secondary information on child labour is mainly available from 'formal sector' and it can be sampled easily. But the main chunk of the labouring children is engaged in informal sector, which is usually underreported are difficult to trace. Informal enterprises or business units are mostly unregulated and therefore, not counted officially. If children are working under a hazardous environment, households also do not reveal the status, add to non-sampling error.

C. Consolidation

Some illustration of this paper will be supported by case studies.