

“The Two Sides of Child Labor: Resources, Education, and Future Development”

By Runqi Tan

In daily life, almost all goods and services rely on those invisible, low-paid laborers. People enjoy the conveniences of modern technology but overlook the children who work quietly behind the scenes. Child labor is often seen as a human rights violation, but in some families, children's work is necessary for survival. Globalization and economic pressures intertwine into a complex social reality, and in this context, simply banning child labor is not the solution. The analysis demonstrates that child labor should not be banned altogether, but should instead be subsidized through policies, education, and resources to improve working conditions and provide opportunities for future development. By analyzing different perspectives, the sections below will explore the need for basic workers in society, the importance of child laborers' income for low-income families, how the government can help these children through education, and how subsidies can help child laborers out of poverty.

Work experience is the foundation for future careers for all children, not just those from poor families. Although child labor is often viewed as a social problem, some believe that work experience has a potentially positive impact on these children's inner growth and future employment. Michael Bourdillon, in ‘Ignoring the Benefits of Children's Work’, mentions that child laborers not only acquire skills but also learn through practice how to cope with the complexities of the workplace and develop problem-solving skills. These early work experiences play a crucial role in children's future entry into the labor market, especially if they do not have access to formal education. According to Bourdillon and Carothers, although child laborers may face unfair treatment and poor working conditions, the experience they gain from it. Basic work

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skills and interpersonal competencies are often important factors in their ability to successfully adapt to the world of work as adults. Without these experiences, many child workers may face greater employment challenges because they cannot work with others, manage their time, or work under pressure. Thus, while child labor needs more attention and reform, it may not be wise to ignore the opportunities for career advancement that it may present in specific contexts. This view is also supported by other scholars. Sasmal and Guillen point out that the experience of child labor work can help them to better adapt to social and workplace challenges as adults. Especially for children from poor families, early work experience can be the key to getting out of poverty. However, these children's experiences must be combined with appropriate education and benefits to recognize their potential.

Child labor serves not only as a way for children to gain work experience and build resilience but is also a necessary option for families in underdeveloped areas. In many such regions, it is both a key means of subsistence and a tradition deeply embedded in the local culture. While child labor is often seen as a manifestation of social problems, in many low-income families, children's work is a necessary means of survival, filling income gaps, and even supporting, to some extent, the basic functioning of the socio-economic base. Bourdillon points out that poor families in many developing countries depend on children's labor for their livelihoods, as it allows them to meet essential needs and reduces household vulnerabilities. In some regions, this phenomenon stems not only from economic necessity but also from a deep-rooted cultural heritage that values children's contributions as a way of fostering self-reliance and resilience within the family and community. Despite the negative impact of child labor, policymakers who overlook these complex cultural and economic factors may fail to address the

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full extent of the hardships faced by these families, as well as the nuanced reasons that sustain this practice in their societies.

Inadequate educational resources and lack of social security leave child labor as the only realistic option for a large number of children. In these regions, poor families often rely on their children's income to pay for necessities such as food, medical expenses, and school fees. The absence of affordable education means that children are often left with limited alternatives beyond labor to contribute to their household's needs. Bourdillon and Carothers point out that child labor is not always 'forced,' but rather serves as a necessary survival strategy for families, especially where a basic social safety net is lacking. For these families, children's labor provides essential income that acts as a final line of defense against financial and health risks, and a critical means to support overall family survival. Without adequate social security systems or accessible educational resources, simply banning child labor may place these children and families in even greater economic distress, heightening their vulnerability and reducing their options for resilience. Additionally, such a ban could inadvertently increase child poverty and inequality, as struggling families would be left without viable means to sustain their livelihoods.

To reduce the long-term effects of child work, the government should provide adequate educational resources to help children from poor families escape from early labor. Free and quality educational resources are crucial for poor families, which usually lack sufficient financial support to pay for their school's tuition fees and learning materials. On the other hand, education not only provides them with the necessary knowledge and skills but also breaks the intergenerational transmission of poverty by increasing their social mobility and radically reducing child labor. Sasmal and Guillen point out that poor families often face the problem of not being able to afford their children's education, which makes the children have to choose to

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enter the labor market instead of continuing their schooling. So the provision of educational resources especially free education for children from low-income families, can break this vicious cycle. By creating a better education system, children will have the opportunity to receive better preparation and enhance their future employability, thus avoiding the negative effects of early labor. Bourdillon also emphasizes that although income from child labor is crucial to many poor families, education remains the key to changing the future of a child. Not only does education provide children with more career options, but it can also increase their social mobility. Through state financial assistance and increased school resources, children can learn in a worry-free environment rather than being forced into the labor market. Furthermore, the popularization of education can also help society as a whole to raise its productivity and economic level, thereby solving the problem of poverty at its root. Additionally, the government should increase investment in education, especially for remote areas and poor families, to ensure that every child receives a comprehensive education, thus effectively reducing child labor.

Although improving educational resources is crucial in addressing child labor, the economic pressure on poor families remains one of the main causes of child labor. In addition to providing educational support, the government needs to help these families with their economic difficulties through direct grants. Bourdillon and Carothers argue that poor families often rely on child labor income to survive and that simply banning child labor may not be realistic; instead, the burden should be alleviated by giving the families economic grants. This would enable families to reduce the need to rely on child labor, allowing children more time to pursue education and escape the plight of poverty. Radfar et al. also suggest that the government can help poor families improve their living conditions through direct cash grants, social security, and job training programs, thereby preventing their children from entering the workplace too early.

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By providing families with basic livelihood security, children can focus more on their studies rather than being forced to work. This not only reduces the incidence of child labor but also effectively breaks the cycle of intergenerational transmission of poverty in the long run, helping more families achieve economic independence and social progress. It is therefore important for the government to introduce more policies to provide sustained economic support to poor families and to promote social equity and development.

Although child labor poses many social problems, it is important to recognize that in some cases, providing these children with the proper resources and support may be an effective way to improve their lives. Society's need for basic workers makes child laborers indispensable in some families, and their income is vital to the survival of poor families. At the same time, the government needs to provide these children with adequate educational resources to help them break the cycle of poverty, and subsidized measures can buy them more time to learn and develop. Most importantly, the work experience of child laborers, even in difficult circumstances, provides the necessary foundation for their future careers. It is significant to emphasize, however, that all these measures need to be premised on protecting the basic rights and interests of children and ensuring that their working conditions are safe and humane. Through policy, social cooperation, and the provision of a comprehensive support system, reducing child labor simultaneously offers these children the opportunities they need for growth and development. Not only does this responsibility represent an investment in the long-term development of our society's future, but it also extends to child laborers.

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