



# Interventions for Child Labor in the Indian Brick Kiln Industry

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## Introduction

- The brick kiln industry in India represents one of the worst forms of child labor, which is a harmful practice prevalent in developing nations across Asia, Africa, and Latin America<sup>6</sup>
- Children often enter the labor market due to poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, lack of family planning, dissatisfaction with the education system, absence of social security, and more<sup>5</sup>
- Struggling families are forced to send their children to work as an extra source of income, often due to debt bondage<sup>5</sup>
- Migrant families and families of lower castes are especially vulnerable to debt bondage, often due to biases stemming from social status<sup>7</sup>
- Intervention policies for child labor have been established by the Indian government in the past, but many of these policies have been misguided and have inevitably failed
- The Indian government must revise their intervention policies, prioritizing effective ways to eradicate debt bondage and increasing resources for impoverished children and families, such as improving unfair wages and educational opportunities

## Methodology

This research surveys literature exploring the dynamics of the brick kiln industry and child labor tendencies within the industry, as well as past intervention policies that have been successful and unsuccessful at reducing the frequency of child labor. The author ultimately offers a series of recommendations that can be applied towards combatting child labor.



Figure 1: Dam, Raj Mayukh. Child Labor & Slavery in Brick Kilns. *Rajmayukhdam.com*. Photograph. 2020.

Image of a child toiling away in the brick kilns.

## Results

### Debt Bondage and the Advance System

- Debt bondage is a practice common to the brick kilns in which families accept advances and must pay them back through intensive work, bonding them for labor
- Children are used as an extra labor source to pay debts
- Families are indirectly recruited, and recruiters target migrant families who are susceptible to their cunning and enticing strategies<sup>2</sup>
- Bonded labor is illegal in India, but has been difficult to regulate and still occurs<sup>2</sup>
- It is important to provide viable alternatives for families who engage in bonded labor; for example, the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act offers work opportunities in villages<sup>2</sup>

### Improving Working Conditions & Compensation

- A primary reason child labor occurs in the brick kiln industry is because families are not paid a living wage
- Salaries are paid by the amount of bricks produced, so parents use children to ramp up productivity<sup>1</sup>
- Kiln owners use these variable salaries instead of fixed salaries to exploit workers; payment per brick is also extremely low<sup>1</sup>
- Despite labor legislation such as the Minimum Wages Act of 1948 applying to migrant workers, there has been no implementation—conditions need to be improved<sup>3</sup>

### Improving Educational Accessibility

- Hazardous child labor is correlated with a lack of education
- Poor parents often do not invest in their children's education because they are unsure whether they will be repaid for their investment<sup>1</sup>
- Recent forms of successful intervention include development of mobile schools and learning activity centers within the brick kilns<sup>4</sup>

## Results (cont.)

### Social Implications

- Often, families who work in the brick kilns are there because of their family's legacy
- Risk of debt bondage is exacerbated by the social and gender discrimination in India<sup>7</sup>
- 90% of workers are from Dalit, minorities, and indigenous communities<sup>7</sup>
- Because of the caste system, intergenerational child labor persists<sup>7</sup>

## Conclusion

- Intervention policies should target debt bondage
- Increasing employment opportunities for migrant workers in rural areas is key
- Building schools, lowering educational fees, and job creation in education are necessary
- Increasing education can reduce caste-based discrimination and illiteracy stereotypes
- Working conditions and wages must be improved

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