

Factors Affecting Child Labor in Iran: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

Background

For decades, child labor has been an important global issue associated with inadequate educational opportunities, poverty and gender inequality. In order to make effective policies to reduce child labor it is important to understand the specific factors that affect it. We aimed to investigate the main factors affecting child labor in Iran.

Materials and Methods

There are authoritative websites on the topic of working children in Iran, including the WHO, UNFPA, UNDP, Web of Science, ProQuest, Medline, Scopus, and CINAHL databases for reviewing studies conducted in Iran. Articles from internal dissertations and Google's databases, SID, Magiran, and Iran Doc during the period 1985 to June 2019 were included. Quality of studies was reviewed by the STROBE checklist. Information was extracted by two blind researchers.

Results

A total of 9 studies were identified (including 17, 219 on child labor), the majority of which were cross-sectional. Affecting factors on child labor and Street children were grouped into four categories such as "Family problems", "Urbanization", "Social and Cultural", and "Personality".

Conclusion

In the contemporary Iranian society, many children, for some reasons including personal, family, social and cultural, and urbanization problems, are involved with important social damages such as child labor. These factors make children vulnerable and endanger the health of the community.

Key Words: Children, Labor, Iran, Systematic Review.

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1- INTRODUCTION

Child labor is defined as the work that deprives children of their childhood, their dignity and potential, and that is harmful to physical and mental development (1). For decades, child labor has been an important global issue associated with inadequate educational opportunities, poverty and gender inequality. The phenomenon of Child Labor or Street Children is one of the problems encountered in most of the large cities in the modern world (2). The expansion of this event is to the extent that it involves similarly developed and developing societies. Street children are defined as follows by UNICEF: all children who have no interest in studying and spending time at home due to the lack or absence of parental supervision, and inevitably work and live on the streets. Based on the definition of UNICEF, the children live or spend a considerable amount of their time on the street (3).

International organization reports show that 168 million children are working around the world (4). It is also estimated that approximately 25 to 90% of street children (defined as people under the age of 18 years) live or work in the streets, and some seek refuge under bridges or railway stations (5). There are several studies on the prognosis and determinants of child labor in developing countries, especially Iran. Iran, as a developing country, is suffering from this phenomenon (6). Half of street children in Iran live in the capital. They spend the daytime and part of the nighttime on the streets, participate informally in economic activities, and experience violence, extortion, rape and abuse in this space (7, 8). The actual numbers of these children are not precisely known and the main reason for the growing trend of this phenomenon in Iran can be attributed to the socio-economic structure resulting from the increase in urbanization and low welfare of citizens (8).

Governmental policies and controversy in data sources about the causes of child labor emergence make it difficult to gather accurate information in this regard (9). Different causes influence the issues related to street children in various parts of the world, including economic poverty in the United States, no family and parentage in San Paolo, and social problems and sex trafficking in Thailand (10). There are also other invalidated factors, such as low income, economic inflation, poor agriculture, attendance of children in school, fertility rate, parental educational level, gender, the absence or presence of father, lack of understanding the concept of street labor children and corresponding determinants (6). The emergence and expansion of street children is an effect of various and complex socio-economic factors.

If this issue is not addressed enough and effective solutions are not provided, this phenomenon will result in harmful and irreversible consequences in the cultural, political, economic, personal, social, family and human dimensions of society. This phenomenon is known as a social problem which in itself is an instance of social damage, and is a predisposing factor of the increase and spread of social damage in modern societies (11). To our knowledge, this is the first systematic review that attempts to summarize current evidence on the impacts of child labor based on specific outcomes. We review the most recent evidence on the impacts of child labor in Iran.

2- MATERIALS AND METHODS

2-1. Search strategy

There are authoritative websites on the topic of working children in Iran, including the World Health Organization (WHO), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Web of Science, ProQuest,

Medline, Scopus, and CINAHL databases for reviewing studies conducted in Iran. Articles from internal dissertations such as SID, Magiran, and Iran Doc during the period 1985 to June 2019 were included. The list of published article's sources were reviewed for further studies. In addition, a manual search was conducted in Google motor engine, Google Scholar, and bibliography of related articles and reviews. Persian and English keywords were used to search related articles. The title and abstract of the articles were reviewed by two separate researchers; then, the full text of the related articles was read and assessed in detail. If there was disagreement between the two reviewers, it was resolved with a third person. Only studies written in English and Persian were considered. Those articles that met our systematic review inclusion criteria were enrolled in the meta-analysis. The keyword combinations were accepted with AND/OR. The search query in Medline (via PubMed) is shown in **Table.1**.

Table-1: Search strategy for Medline.

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("homeless youth"[MeSH Terms] OR ("homeless"[All Fields] AND "youth"[All Fields]) OR "homeless youth"[All Fields] OR ("street"[All Fields] AND "children"[All Fields]) OR "street children"[All Fields]) OR (street[All Fields] AND kids[All Fields]) OR (street[All Fields] AND ("men"[MeSH Terms] OR "men"[All Fields] OR "boys"[All Fields])) OR (("work"[MeSH Terms] OR "work"[All Fields] OR "working"[All Fields]) AND ("child"[MeSH Terms] OR "child"[All Fields] OR "children"[All Fields])) OR ("child labour"[All Fields] OR "employment"[MeSH Terms] OR "employment"[All Fields] OR ("child"[All Fields] AND "labor"[All Fields]) OR "child labor"[All Fields] OR "child labor"[MeSH Terms] OR ("child"[All Fields] AND "labor"[All Fields])) OR ("child labour"[All Fields] OR "employment"[MeSH Terms] OR "employment"[All Fields] OR ("child"[All Fields] AND "labor"[All Fields]) OR "child labor"[All Fields] OR "child labor"[MeSH Terms] OR ("child"[All Fields] AND "labor"[All Fields])) OR ("homeless youth"[MeSH Terms] OR ("homeless youth"[All Fields] AND "youth"[All Fields]) OR "homeless youth"[All Fields]) OR ("child"[MeSH Terms] OR "child"[All Fields]) AND ("sleep"[MeSH Terms] OR "sleep"[All Fields] OR "sleeps"[All Fields]) AND street[All Fields]) OR ("Young"[Journal] OR "young"[All Fields]) AND worker[All Fields] OR ("child"[MeSH Terms] OR "child"[All Fields]) AND ("sleep"[MeSH Terms] OR
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"sleep"[All Fields] OR "sleeps"[All Fields]) AND bus[All Fields] OR ("child"[MeSH Terms] OR "child"[All Fields]) AND ("sleep"[MeSH Terms] OR "sleep"[All Fields] OR "sleeps"[All Fields]) AND train[All Fields] OR ("child"[MeSH Terms] OR "child"[All Fields]) AND ("sleep"[MeSH Terms] OR "sleep"[All Fields] OR "sleeps"[All Fields]) AND ("motion pictures"[MeSH Terms] OR ("motion"[All Fields] AND "pictures"[All Fields]) OR "motion pictures"[All Fields] OR "cinema"[All Fields])) OR ("child"[MeSH Terms] OR "child"[All Fields]) AND beggars[All Fields] OR ("homeless youth"[MeSH Terms] OR ("homeless"[All Fields] AND "youth"[All Fields]) OR "homeless youth"[All Fields] OR "runaway"[All Fields]) AND ("child"[MeSH Terms] OR "child"[All Fields]) AND ("child"[MeSH Terms] OR "child"[All Fields]) OR "children"[All Fields]) OR ("child"[MeSH Terms] OR "child"[All Fields]) AND ("iran"[MeSH Terms] OR "iran"[All Fields]).
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2-2. Qualitative assessment and study selection

At this stage, all articles in the title or abstract (without time limit) with the mentioned keywords with sample age 18 years or less were included, they were entered in the initial list. All the irrelevant articles were deleted and based on this, they seek a qualitative evaluation of the list of articles in the secondary search. After the relevant articles have been determined, they were reviewed by the STROBE tool for title and content overview (12).

This tool assessed methodological quality and includes 22 items and total score was the number of items positively evaluated. Studies were ranked accordingly (poor, fair, good). Questions that deal with different aspects of the method of work, including the necessary study data, such as the title of the article, the study location, study time, sample size, average age of the patients, the type of sampling, and the overall prevalence of prostitution in girls and boys, the reasons for the trend of prostitution, child labor and street children are covered. In order to evaluate the final article, a score was awarded to each question. Any article that earned a score of 8 points could enter the statistical analysis step.

2-3. Data extraction

Information by two blind researchers in the form of the article title, the first author, year of research, sample size, age, and outbreak inprodex was included in the checklist. Eligible entries to the study: after the assessment process and obtaining the necessary grades, all Persian and

English studies that examined the prevalence of prostitution in Iranian children were included in the study (**Figure.1**). All incomplete and irrelevant articles that were received and after reviewing the title, abstract and full text, and after qualitative assessment of the score below eight, were excluded.

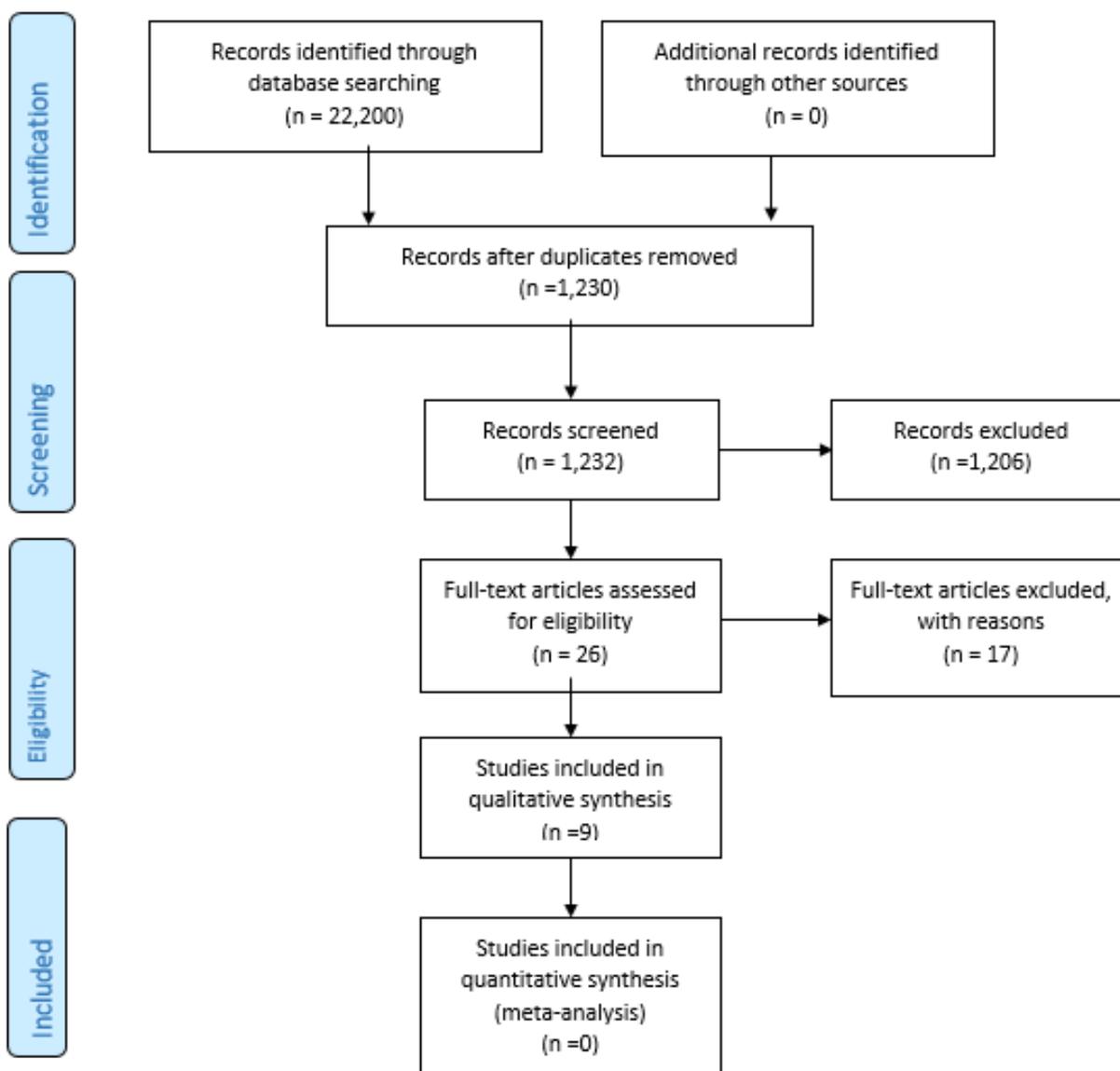


Fig.1: PRISMA flowchart.

3- RESULTS

Finally nine articles entered the systematic review process (including 17,219 child labors). Process of selecting the studies which were included in systematic review is shown in **Figure.1**. Based on the results, factors affecting child labor and street children were grouped into

four categories such as "Family problems", "Urbanization", "Social and cultural", and "Personality" that are listed in the **Table.2**. **Table.3** shows the baseline characteristics of studies included in study. STROBE scores for nine studies are also shown in **Table.3**.

Table-2: Affecting factors on child labor in Iranian children.

Category of problems	Reasons
Family	Discrimination, neglect, physical abuse, fertility rate, parents' education, parent's occupation, parental drug use, violence, hostility and resentment between children and parents, remarriage, death of a parents, divorce, parental behavior with each other, physical punishment, parent in prison.
Urbanization	Immigration, Urban attractions.
Social and cultural	Social traumas, physical punishment in school, to appreciate value of work, attending school or not, child mortality (more than 2 dead children), total fertility (more than two children), mother is working or not.
Personality	Sex (male), was gaining experience, familiarity of child with drugs, conflicts with parents.

(References: 2, 6, 9, 11, 13-17).

3-1. Characteristics of the studies

Hosseini et al. (2) conducted a cross-sectional study in five big cities (Tehran, Mashhad, Ahvaz, Shiraz, Rasht) on 506 street children (482 males and 24 females) with mean age 13.13 years old in 2005. The factors affecting the work were physical punishment at home, corporal punishment in school, hostility and resentment between child and mother or child and father, parental behavior with each other. Homage secondary data on population and housing census was gathered by Iranian Statistical Center in 2011 on 14,859 children aged 10–14. The factors affecting the work were child mortality rate, mother's age (more than 65), child mortality (more than 2 dead children), total fertility (more than two children), mother is working or not, attending school or not, age, urban or rural, gender (boys or girls) (6). Hosseinpour et al. (9) conducted a prospective case-series study on 127 injured children (113 males and 14 females) with a mean age 10.9 ± 3

years in trauma center. The main reason of working was to gain experience (8.7%), to appreciate the value of work (7.9), to supplement family income (11%), to help pay own family debt (57.5%), to pay own schooling (2.37%), to help in own household enterprise (12.5%). Eghlima (11) conducted a cross-sectional study on 500 street children. The factors affecting the work were family expenses, economic factors, paternal abuse, and conflicts with parents, parental addiction, and maternal abuse, urban attractions, avoiding punishment, divorced parents and fleeing from school. Afshani et al. (13) conducted a cross-sectional study in 2013 on 122 street children (92 males and 30 females) with age range from 6 to 14 years old. The factors affecting the work were economic problems, parental forces, escape from house, lack of supervision and to escape the stepmother. Salimi et al. (14) conducted a cross-sectional study in 2011 on 100 male street children with age range between 6 and 15 years old. Significant relationships were observed between

children's street labor and economic poverty, parent's education, social traumas, familiarity with drugs, illegal act suggestions, street disturbance, immoral suggestions, and hours spent working in a 24 h period. Zare Shahabadi et al. (15) conducted a cross-sectional study in 2011 on 210 street children (156 males and 54 females) with mean age 10.07 years old. The factors affecting the work were parental drug abuse, household size, immigration, paternal occupation, maternal occupation, child care, type and family, and monthly income level. Ahmadkhaniha et al. (16) conducted a cross-sectional

study in 2014 on 579 street children (491 males and 88 females) with mean age $13,4 \pm 0.19$ years old. Affecting factors on working were lost both of their parents and divorced parents. Ansari et al. (17) conducted a cross-sectional study on 216 male street children in 2015 (with mean age $12,5 \pm 3.2$ years old. Affecting factors on working were family conflict (including violence), family conflict (including parental drug use), family conflict (including parental drug use), neglect, changes in family structure (death of a parent), changes in family structure (remarriage), discrimination.

Table-3: Baseline characteristics and total STROB scores of studies included in study.

Author, (Reference)	Year	Type of social pathology	Type of study	Sample size	Sample size (%)		Weakness of study	Quality assessment	STORB scores
					Girl	Boy			
Hosseinpour et al., (9)	2014	Child labor	Cross-sectional	127	113	14	Sex distribution is not good	Moderate	18
Homaie Rad et al., (6)	2015	Child labor	Cross-sectional	14,859	7523	7336	The frequency of the trend to child labor is unknown.	Moderate	18
Afshani et al., (13)	2013	Child labor & Street Children	Cross-sectional	122	92	30	Sex distribution is not good	High	20
Zare Shahabadi et al., (15)	2011	Child labor	Cross-sectional	210	156	54	The frequency of the trend to child labor is unknown	Moderate	17
Ansari et al., (17)	2015	Child labor	Cross-sectional	216	216	9	Sex distribution is not good	High	19
Hosseini et al., (2)	2006	Child labor & Street Children	Cross-sectional	506	482	24	Sex distribution is not good	Moderate	17
Eghlima, (11)	2007	Child labor & Street Children	Cross-sectional	500	----	----	Sexuality is unknown	Low	15
Salimi et al., (14)	2011	Child labor	Cross-sectional	100	100	0	Sex distribution is not good	Moderate	18
Ahmadkhaniha et al., (16)	2014	Street children	Cross-sectional	579	494	90	Sex distribution is not good	High	19

4- DISCUSSION

Child labor refers to the employment of children in any work that deprives children of their childhood, interferes with their ability to attend regular school, and that is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful (18). As far as the researchers are concerned, this

study is the first systematic review study in Iran to determine factors affecting child labor and street children. Affecting factors on child labor and street children were grouped into four categories such as Family problems, Urbanization, Social and cultural, and Personality that are listed in the Table.1. Giving grants to non-

governmental organizations is beneficial in supporting these children. These centers can provide counseling, social working and support services, training programs, and professional training programs to prevention of illness in these children and their families are an important step in reintegrating the child into the community, family, and labor market (19, 20).

Children enter into work for many reasons: being born into a poor family and working to earn money to help support them in order to get food or to have somewhere to live, working to pay off money their parents owe, being taken against their will and being used by or sold to corrupt people; it is easier for employees to get children to work in bad conditions than adults. They are also cheaper to employ. Poverty reduction, education are crucial to breaking the cycle of poverty, reducing poverty will mean parents are not forced to send their children to work or sell them to employers in order to survive, etc. (21-25).

Our findings confirm that there are several reasons for children escaping from their home or child labor in Iran. These factors include family factors, individual factors, social factors, cultural factors and urbanization problems. The results of similar studies indicate that the main reasons for the tendency of children to become street children are death of parents, poverty, dysfunctional family, parents' addiction and parental employment. Our findings are consistent with these studies (2, 6, 9, 11, 13-17). Child labor accounts for 22% of the workforce in Asia, 32% in Africa, 17% in Latin America, 1% in US, Canada, Europe and other wealthy nations. Asia, with its larger population, has the highest number of children employed as child laborers at about 114 million (26). The types of child labor vary according to the country's culture and the family culture, rural or urban residency, socioeconomic conditions and existing level of development, among

other factors (27). These children face many challenges in street life, which endangers both their life quality and public welfare. Drug addiction, participation in gang-controlled corruption and prostitution, theft, and other criminal activities are among the most important disadvantages that require proper interventions and timely planning (20, 28, 29).

4-1. Suggestions for future research

The most important strategies of the WHO based on the WHO educational module in health policy approaches in these children are to modify their attitudes and motivate them to correct their behavior in the following areas, which are recommended to be institutionalized by authorities and specialists in Iran:

- 1- Preventing substance abuse by identifying the effects and complications of using these substances.
- 2- Health and fertility and sexual activity in these children: Include training on the use of a condom for any sex, reducing the number of sexual partners, and avoiding sex when the child has an open wound or sexually transmitted disease. Also, contraception education and complications of unwanted pregnancy and abortion are also important issues.
- 3- Child Support Programs: Child support and welfare systems include a range of services (e.g. Family-based services, child support, out-of-home services, and reception services), prevention, and intervention and treatment support (19).

4-2. Study Limitations

There are limited researches on working children in Iran, especially as children are dependent on it. Since these people have nothing to do with health facilities or well-being centers, one cannot cite the exact

figures in this regard. Also, given the severe limitations of researchers in this field, it cannot be said whether in recent years the trend in Iran is rising or decreasing. Other obstacles to the implementation of this systematic review and meta-analysis are the small sample size, the lack of response of some subjects to the questions. Quality of some studies that were included in systematic review was low.

5- CONCLUSION

Street children are at risk of physical and sexual abuse. In the contemporary Iranian society, many children, for some reasons including personal, family, social and cultural, and urbanization problems, are involved with important social damages such as prostitution and child labor. These factors make children vulnerable and endanger the health of the community. Therefore, appropriate services are needed in order to design a proper health plan in this age group.

6- CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors had not any financial or personal relationships with other people or organizations during the study. So there was no conflict of interests in this article.

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