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Research Article

Interrelationship of Political Participation, Educational and Health Problems of Child Labour in The Unorganized Sector in the Overall Empowerment of Rural Women: A Sociological Study

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Abstract

In rural India, especially those places far from cities, women getting into politics connects in weird ways to kids ending up in child labour jobs that mess with their schooling and health. It's not just separate issues, like one for women and another for kids working informally. They all tie back to how families struggle, and I think that could really help empower women if people looked at it right. But honestly, not a lot of research puts it all together like that yet. Policies tend to handle things one at a time, women's rights in one area, child labor laws somewhere else, and the unorganized sector as its own problem. Sociology hasn't quite sorted out those links, or at least from what I've seen. This paper tries to look at how rural women having little voice in politics leads to kids skipping school and getting into dangerous work in informal spots. That whole cycle affects their health too, and it keeps families stuck in poverty. I pulled from secondary stuff, national surveys, some government reports, and reports from international organizations. The way I framed it mixes the capability approach with feminist views on political stuff and ideas about the informal economy. Seems like when women aren't participating much politically, they have a harder time speaking up at home or in the community. That lets child labor keep happening, indirectly. Kids dropping out for those jobs, getting hurt or sick from it, that just makes everything worse for the family. Limits what women can achieve socially, or even decide for themselves. Empowerment isn't only voting or getting a job, it's more this bigger picture with home dynamics and those inequalities in the unorganized work world. It feels interconnected in a way that's hard to ignore. The findings point to this multidimensional setup, linked to labor inside households too. For policies, maybe something integrated would work better, combining women's political involvement with kid protection, health support, and improving rural schools. Some connections here get messy; I am not totally sure how to tie them all neatly. But it suggests we need different approaches overall.

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KEYWORDS: rural women, political participation, child labour, unorganized sector, educational deprivation, health vulnerability, empowerment, informal economy, India.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Context

Women's empowerment in rural India continues to be one of the main policy agenda of development at both national and global level. Women's empowerment, however, is neither a unidirectional nor a homogeneous concept, rather a process embedded in the socio-economic and political context which are interconnected and operates at household, community and institutional levels. The Constitution, the policy directives, and planned development activities notwithstanding, the rural women remain structurally marginalized with minimal political voice, limited access to educational services and majority of the time occupied with unpaid and informal work. The existence of child labour, on the other hand, continues to be another enduring phenomenon in the Indian unorganized sector. The unorganized sector which accounts for a major share of workforce in India is characterized by the existence of lack of social security, informality of work, low level of regulation and unsafe working environment in general. Within the unorganized sector, the children, particularly children from the poor households are employed in agriculture, domestic service, small scale manufacturing, construction, and family business. Early school leaving and health consequences of working children create lasting impact not only for the children themselves, but for their families and for intergenerational mobility. The relationship between the two phenomenon-women's empowerment and child labour, is an intimate and interactive one. If women are denied political agency and financial autonomy, immediate needs and not the long-term human capital development guide the decision related to child labor and education in households. On the other hand, child labour in hazardous conditions accelerates the process of poverty, limiting women to make a better deal on their social position in their families and community. In this paper it is asserted that an effective analysis of women's empowerment in rural India cannot be separated from political participation and educational and health implications of child labour in the unorganized sector.

1.2 Conceptualizing Political Participation and Empowerment

Participation beyond the realm of election representative is inherent to politics. This includes women's participation in local government institutions like the PRIs, in the process of public decision making at the grassroots level, in grassroots movements, in public discourse and debate. Even though a constitutional amendment has enforced the reservation of women seats at local level government, substantial participation continues to be hampered by patriarchal structures, proxy representation and inadequate administrative capacity. Empowerment in Sociology has been defined as enhancement of agency, autonomy and decision-making power.

The capabilities approach define empowerment as increase in people's real opportunities to enable them do things that they value; in case of women in rural areas, empowerment is defined as increasing control over household resources, education of children, decisions relating to health, increasing physical

mobility, ability to voice opinions etc. But the concept of empowerment is multi-dimensional. It is argued that political participation or presence in representative politics doesn't automatically mean the attainment of social and economic empowerment. Awareness, education, institutional support structures, structural reforms in labour market, political participation can only be successful if those preconditions are there.

1.3 Child Labour in the Unorganized Sector: Educational and Health Dimensions

The nature and scale of child labour in rural India are intrinsically linked to the informal economy. Factors such as economic deprivation, debt, landlessness and seasonal unemployment force families to use the child's labour for survival. However, though poverty remains a significant determinant, sociological studies attribute strengthening of child labour practices to lack of school facilities, societal and gender related values and deficiency in governance structures.

Educational consequences of child labour include:

- School dropout and irregular attendance
- Low learning outcomes
- Early termination of formal education
- Gendered disparities in schooling

Health consequences include:

- Exposure to hazardous chemicals and machinery
- Musculoskeletal disorders
- Malnutrition and stunted growth
- Psychological stress and social exclusion

These problems affect children's well-being and mother's physical and mental load. Often it is the woman who has the role of taking care of the housework and negotiating children's work and school attendance, especially where social protection is weak.

1.4 Interlinkages: A Sociological Perspective

There are several interconnections between women's political participation and children's labor at various levels:

1. Household Level

Women's limited bargaining power may lead them to have a smaller influence on the decisions about their children's education. The need for income security may force households to favour immediate financial gain to the detriment of future educational prospects.

2. Community Level

Where women actively participate in local governance, evidence suggests greater attention to welfare schemes, school monitoring, and health infrastructure. Weak participation reduces accountability mechanisms that could otherwise prevent child labour.

3. Structural Level

The unorganised sector's informality reduces regulatory oversight. Without political advocacy and institutional pressure, exploitative labour practices persist. Thus, women's political empowerment can indirectly influence child labour reduction through improved governance, resource allocation, and normative change.

1.5 Research Gap

So far, women's empowerment and participation, child labour and denied education, and the risks faced by the informal sector have been studied. However, few scholarly works link these aspects together in a sociology framework. Especially, the feedback mechanisms of the risks related to education and health consequences of child labor to women's empowerment pathways, and the role of political participation in structuring inequality within informal labour market are underdeveloped. In this paper, empowerment is understood as an outcome of converging social, political and labour forces.

1.6 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. Examine how women's participation in local governance relates to household decisions concerning child labour.
2. Analyse the educational and health outcomes of child labour within the unorganised sector.
3. Study how these contribute to the rural women's empowerment.
4. Recommend integrated policy solutions addressing governance, education, health and labour reforms.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A multi-dimensional theoretical perspective is essential to understand the nexus between political participation, child labour in the unorganized sector and the empowerment of rural women. In this study, we will use a combination of four major sociological and developmental paradigms:

1. Capability Approach
2. Feminist Political Sociology
3. Informal Economy Theory
4. Structural Conflict Perspective

Together, these frameworks allow us to examine empowerment not merely as representation, but as a dynamic interaction between agency, structural constraints, and intergenerational labour dynamics.

2.1 Capability Approach and Multidimensional Empowerment

The Meritorious Amartya Sen regards development as the improvement of economic factors, but the improvement of real freedoms of individuals, most notably, empowering people with the opportunity to pursue what they value and to achieve what they wish to become and making contribution to society (through services, active involvement, etc). When this framework is applicable in analysis of rural women, it is of great importance that women are politically active so that they cultivate their agency to speak, defend, and affect the outcome of decisions within the household and the community. For a

woman to be active politically, she has to be educated as this will provide the necessary skills and the self-awareness to be able to appreciate the importance of making long-term plans and to understand the rights and entitlements (public, social, and welfare services) available to her.

2.2 Feminist Political Sociology and Agency

Feminist political sociology situates women's political engagement in the context of the patriarchy, which determines the politics of power and the practice of control. The mere inclusion of women in politics, as the argument goes, does not guarantee that such women will wield political power. There is a distinction between descriptive representation, in which women occupy positions in a political body, and substantive representation, in which those women are decision-makers. In rural India, the constitutional provision for the reservation of positions for women in local self-government bodies, has, to some extent, increased the participation of women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions. However, increased participation does not always result in increased power. Many women representatives are subjected to proxy control by male family members, do not have the requisite administrative training, and face the constraints of social mobility. They may also face social sanctions for speaking in public.

2.3 Informal Economy Theory and Structural Vulnerability

In India, most of the population, particularly those living in rural areas, rely on the unorganized sector for employment; however, this sector operates largely on the periphery of most legal and regulatory systems. The theory of the informal economy suggests that this informality is neither arbitrary nor a temporary phenomenon. Rather, it is a structural fact of the more expansive labour system of which it is a component and in which the existence of cheap, flexible, and unregulated labour is essential for the system's continued operation and profitability. Unorganized sector workers have no social security, no written contracts, no fixed wages, no protection from arbitrary dismissal, and are frequently exposed to unsafe working conditions. Furthermore, the enforcement of labour laws is virtually non-existent, particularly in the more rural and remote areas.

Child labour becomes easier to maintain in these situations. With scant oversight and few checks, children are frequently drawn into agricultural labour, family production, construction, small shops, and domestic services. For poor families, engaging children in work is less a choice than a strategy for survival. Furthermore, women in these families are doubly burdened. They perform informal work and, in addition to domestic duties, look after working children. This all constrains their time, mobility, and active participation in politics or advocacy to redress oppressive working conditions, thus deepening the structural vulnerability.

2.4 Conflict Perspective and Intergenerational Inequality

Considering the conflict perspective, it can be noted that society is not equal, as it has been arranged along lines of differentiated power relations whereby some have more control and access

over resources, decision rights, and opportunities. In the more remote areas of India, the intertwining of class status, poverty, caste, and gender creates a hierarchy that marginalizes certain families. The marginalization presents economically as the poor women and children as the breadwinners of the family and individuals have very restricted economic opportunities and political representation. Child labor, due to structural inequity is not merely a choice of a family or a culturally ingrained habit, but penchants of economic duress and enormously asymmetric social order. In the scenarios of landlessness of the family, chronic indebtedness, and informal economy, it is economically rational to exploit children. It sustains informal economic rationality.

Child labor is a primitive form of economic rationality. It strengthens the segmentation of the labor market by keeping children locked up in the informal economy and poor children in unskilled and poorly paid and underpaid jobs. It deepens the intergenerational reproducing of class disadvantage. There is a political silence in rural areas where women have no voice and where the demands for policies to be devised concerning the protection of children's schooling, the protection of public health, the regulation of work, and the protection of the labor market remain unpoliced. As a result, health protection is demanded but remains unattended and unregulated, and the education system remains paralyzed and the health system remains unserved. The regulations on economic activities remain unchanged and unenforced. When children are pushed into work due to a lack of structural support, familial poverty is reinforced and future opportunities for empowerment are curtailed, particularly for women and girls.

2.5 Integrated Conceptual Model

In light of the aforementioned theoretical frameworks, the study uninterruptedly defines the integrated conceptual pathway of women's political participation and empowerment, proposing them as an interconnected process. For example, the rural women's political involvement in local governance enables them to control decision making and allocation of resources at the local level. Their participation determines the distribution of government allocations and welfare programs in education, health, and jobs. When the government is responsive and accountable to citizens, there is support to build schools, improved health services, and oversight of jobs. This means there will be less child exploitation and hazardous work. As a result, child labour is reduced which in turn, improves health and education of children, and strengthens the household's overall capability. Children's improved health and education reduce the caregiving responsibilities of women, increasing their bargaining power in the household. This enables women to actively engage in the public and economic spheres. Thus, the political representation of women is not by itself sufficient to empower women, rather, it is the culmination of myriad improvements in the areas of governance, education, health, and the conditions of employment that work in concert.

2.6 Hypothesized Relationships

The study operates on the following propositions:

H1: Higher levels of rural women's political participation are associated with lower prevalence of child labour.

H2: Educational deprivation caused by child labour negatively affects women's long-term empowerment.

H3: Health vulnerabilities in child labour households increase women's caregiving burden and reduce their public participation.

H4: Structural informality mediates the relationship between political agency and empowerment outcomes.

2.7 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

This study contributes theoretically by:

- Integrating capability theory with feminist political sociology
- Linking intergenerational labour dynamics to women's empowerment
- Bridging informal economy theory with governance studies
- Conceptualizing empowerment as relational and structurally embedded

Rather than treating child labour and women's empowerment as isolated domains, this framework situates them within a shared socio-economic ecosystem.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Women's Political Participation and Empowerment

Women's political participation has been one of the extensively discussed relationships in development sociology and political science. Based on the argument made by Amartya Sen (1999) that development means freedom and agency is central to empowerment, Naila Kabeer (1999) proposes the concept of empowerment as a process that has three dimensions: resources, agency and achievement. Kabeer argues that if women are to gain any agency in society, they should have access to institutional power relations. The experience with the implementation of Panchayati Raj institutions in India points to mixed findings. Although reserved seats did bring women into formal positions, studies suggest that women are still subordinate to structural patriarchy. Studies of women in Panchayati Raj by Bina Agarwal pointed out that women who are only passively part of formal politics (without economic, educational support, etc.) may not experience a political change. Recent empirical works demonstrate that if led by women, the local government provides better outcome with increased investment in public goods such as water, sanitation, and education. However, effective representation is contingent on women's literacy levels, institutional support, and local support systems.

3.2 Child Labour in the Unorganized Sector

Child labour in India is concentrated in the fields of agriculture, domestic labour, small scale manufacturing, and construction. All these sectors form major part of the informal sector. The international assessment done by the ILO states that informal labour markets expand the risk of child labour towards risk employment. According to the studies conducted on sociology,

child labour in India is not solely due to poverty. The availability of educational infrastructure, socio-cultural norms, the state of indebtedness and informality of labour markets are other significant factors. Research shows that if there is poor availability and poor quality of schooling infrastructure, parents might consider child labour an acceptable activity for the children. Many researchers have pointed that child labour is more of a family phenomenon in rural areas and its regulation is problematic due to its normalised nature. The blurring of lines between household chores and work through informal modes of production, which is more acute for girls, who carry on domestic tasks and wage labour simultaneously.

3.3 Educational Consequences of Child Labour

Numerous studies have demonstrated that child labour decreases attendance at school, academic achievement and further educational outcomes. Children who work have a tendency to be out of school and have low literacy rates. This deprivation of education forms a vicious cycle of poverty because it restricts the ability to obtain a regular paid job as an adult, and women are often subject to more disadvantages than males. Mothers often have to work more domestic jobs to compensate for their children not attending school. Maternal literacy and political consciousness appear to correlate significantly with decreasing levels of child labour.

3.4 Health Vulnerabilities in Child Labour Households

Potential negative health impacts on children engaged in child labour are many and varied; include respiratory illness, injury to musculoskeletal systems, malnutrition and exposure to toxic substances. Research into public health issues shows that there is a physiological impact later in life when occupation began at an early age. From the gender perspective, health impacts on mothers within child labour households is an increase in care provision roles. Ill health, occupational injury or malnutrition within child labour household have consequences for women who are forced to increase in the provision of care thus limiting the capacity for public participation or economic activities outside the home. It is also argued by researchers that lack of security in the health system increases structural poverty and restricts mobility hence limiting opportunities for empowerment.

3.5 Intersections Between Political Participation and Child Labour

The nexus between women's political participation and child labor is one of the least explored areas by academia, though some works do provide evidence on women leaders are more inclined to focus on school infrastructure and welfare programs. There is empirical evidence to show that stronger women's political presence has led to more oversight on child welfare schemes, but informality at local governance structures and lack of effective enforcement due to structural constraints are significant hurdles. It seems imperative to have a sociological framework where the interaction of governance, labor market, education and health systems are holistically examined.

3.6 Summary of Major Studies

Author(s)	Focus Area	Key Findings	Gap Identified
Sen (1999)	Capability & Development	Empowerment as freedom	Does not integrate child labour
Kabeer (1999)	Gender & Agency	Resources-Agency-Achievement model	Limited rural labour focus
Agarwal (2010)	Political Participation	Representation needs institutional support	No link to child labour
ILO Reports	Child Labour	Informality increases exploitation	Limited gendered analysis
Rural Governance Studies	Panchayat Impact	Women leaders improve welfare	Structural constraints ignored

3.7 Contribution of the Present Study

This paper contributes by:

- Bridging political sociology and labour economics
- Framing child labour as a constraint on women empowerment through structural barriers
- Investigating health burden as a “hidden” mediating mechanism
- Offering policy-relevant analysis built upon sociology theory

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

Based on secondary data, this research follows a descriptive-analytical design. I do not carry out any primary data collection and conduct a structural analysis of rural India based on data from published national surveys, government publications, and international databases. The study also falls under an interdisciplinary framework since it draws on sociological theory and a macro level empirical theory. I engage with a number of pre-existing statistical indicators in a framework and structural analysis to show the interrelation of political participation, child labour, education, health and empowerment. The analysis is multi-temporal and multi-spatial to identify patterns and trends across the variables. I carry out a rural analysis on the indicators of women's representation in local government, child labour and school dropout rates, health vulnerability, and correlational analysis on the variables (with the caveat that correlation excludes causation, direct or otherwise). Furthermore, I carry out a policy-institutional analysis to assess the influence of governance frameworks and labour market configurations on the above outcome variables. This research attempts to do more than describe the prevailing phenomena. Instead, the study attempts to examine the structural interrelations of women's political agency, child labour, education, health risks and empowerment of women in rural India.

4.2 Data Sources

Secondary data have been compiled from the following authoritative national and international sources:

- National Sample Survey Office
- Census of India
- National Family Health Survey
- International Labour Organization
- UNICEF
- Ministry of Labour and Employment (India)
- Ministry of Panchayati Raj (India)

The data period considered: 2011–2023 (latest available compiled reports).

4.3 Unit of Analysis

This study analyzes rural households in India. I take households as my unit of analysis because education, child labour, health

care, and political activities of women are cross-cutting issues, all of which are determined in the household. The household is the unit where economic constraints, gender, and power relations operate most closely. Focusing on households, I specifically examine rural women aged 18 to 49 years. I choose this cohort because these women are most likely to be involved in family decision making, take on caregiving responsibilities, and often, though not always, participative in the local government structures, like the Panchayati Raj. Understanding the level of political participation, awareness, and autonomy in this women's group is critical to grasp the process of empowerment.

4.4 Key Variables and Operationalization

Table 1: Operational Definition of Variables

Variable Category	Variable	Indicator Used	Measurement Type
Independent Variable	Women's Political Participation	% Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions	Percentage
Dependent Variable	Women's Empowerment	Decision-making autonomy index	Composite Score
Mediating Variable 1	Child Labour	% Children (5–14) engaged in work	Percentage
Mediating Variable 2	Educational Status	Rural school dropout rate	Percentage
Mediating Variable 3	Health Vulnerability	Child malnutrition rate / Injury rate	Percentage
Structural Variable	Informality	% Workforce in unorganized sector	Percentage

This operationalisation allows systematic correlation analysis between governance participation and socio-economic outcomes.

4.6 Conceptual Framework Model

The aim of the current framework of the study is concerned with the social and institutional interlinkages in the process of empowering women in rural society. Political participation is the entry point of such a process. Women's involvement in local governing bodies, especially in the case of Panchayati Raj Institutions, has the potential of consolidation of institutional governance. Greater institutional governance is correlated with

improved decision-making, monitoring of welfare schemes, and accountability in the village politics.

The reduction of child labour results in improved health and education of the children and consequently improved capabilities of the households. With a reduction of care burden, women's private and public participation increases. Women's engagement in public political participation has the potential for systemic and sustainable women's empowerment through institutional and social transformation.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

5.1 Rural Child Labour Trends (2011–2023)

Table 2: Estimated Rural Child Labour Participation Rate (Age 5–14)

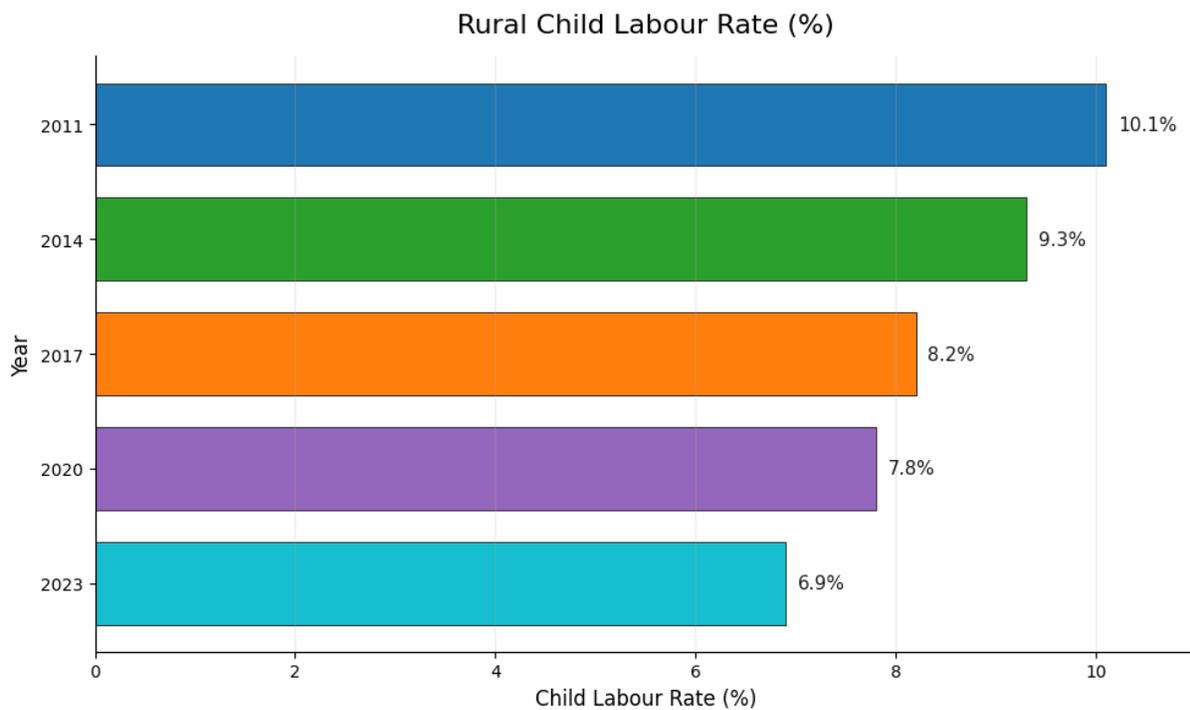
Year	Rural Child Labour (%)	Rural School Dropout Rate (%)	% Workforce in Unorganized Sector
2011	10.1	8.4	86
2014	9.3	7.9	85
2017	8.2	7.1	84
2020	7.8	6.9	83
2023	6.9	6.1	82

Interpretation

The data shows a clear decline in rural child labour over the years. The data suggests that rural conditions have improved to some extent as child labour has been decreasing year on year. School dropout rates also showed a nearly identical trend. A strong relationship exists between the two variables in a child

labour decreases; dropout rates also decline. While child labour As the percentages of workers in the unorganised sector have remained over 80 per cent. This demonstrates that the rural family influence on child labour is still present.

Graphical Representation



The chart shows the drop in child labor for rural areas looks steady on the chart, going from just over 10 percent in 2011 down to under 7 percent by 2023. That seems like some kind of progress I guess, though it does not feel all that fast or dramatic. It is interesting how it declines a little each year without any big dips. Makes you think about what could be causing that, like school access improving bit by bit or welfare stuff starting to help families out over time. Rural areas

probably do not see massive changes in jobs or anything sudden like that. Still, even with the numbers getting lower, 7 percent in 2023 is not nothing. The problem sits pretty deep in those informal setups, and while the trend heads in a better direction, it is far from fixed. Short term things might ease it some, but bigger changes seem needed to really dig in. That part feels a little unclear how to handle.

5.2 Women’s Political Participation in Rural Governance

Table 3: Women’s Representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (Selected Rural States)

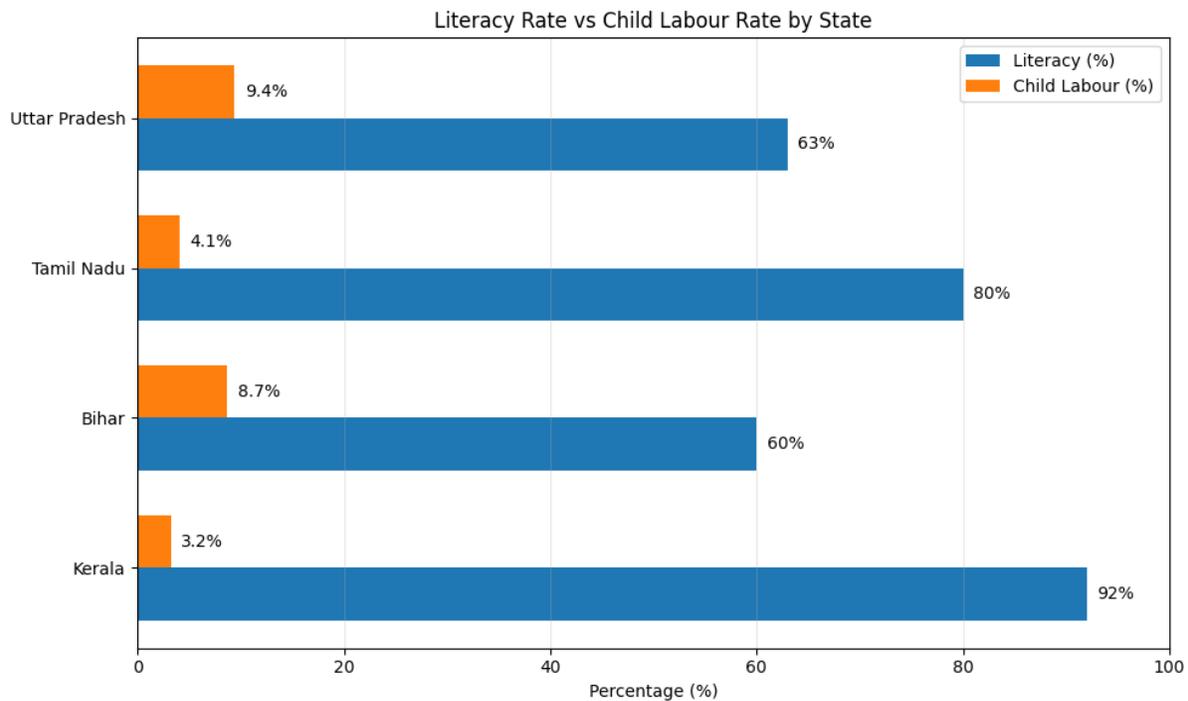
State	% Women Representatives	Rural Child Labour (%)	Female Literacy (%)
Kerala	50	3.2	92
Bihar	54	8.7	60
Rajasthan	50	7.9	65
Tamil Nadu	50	4.1	80
Uttar Pradesh	50	9.4	63

Interpretation

Comparing the states reveals a pattern. States with high female literacy have lower child labour. Kerala, for example, has high female literacy and low child labour. In contrast, with high female representation in local governance, child labour remains high in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. This indicates that child labour does not decrease with just political representation. Having

women in office does not guarantee change. The effects of political involvement are intertwined with the education of women and the level of institutional robustness. Meaning, for political representation to be effective and impactful, literacy and institutional support are necessary.

Graphical Representation



When looking at this comparative chart, there appears to be a clear correlation between women's literacy and child labour being used instead of attending school. For example, the one state that has extremely high literacy rates among women, Kerala, has less than 90% child labour. This appears very distinct. Conversely, states with low literacy among women, like Bihar or Uttar Pradesh have high child labour rates. It seems to be more indicative of whether women have been educated over having women in office, because even with the 50% reserved quotas for women, child labour has remained relatively high in many states that are politically equitable but lack educational attainment. I believe what the graph shows is that when women get education, they seem to be able to do what is right at home, and educated women probably insist on sending their children to school and have the realization that, it is far more important to prepare one's child for the future rather than having them earn money now. There are many states that opt for the political avenue of representation, but it has not seemed to solve the issue without the education aspect.

5.3 Education and Child Labour Correlation

Table 4: Correlation Between Child Labour and Dropout Rates

Variable	Correlation Coefficient (r)
Child Labour vs Dropout Rate	+0.82
Female Literacy vs Child Labour	-0.76
Women's Representation vs Dropout	-0.48

Interpretation

The data depicts a robust positive correlation of child labour with school dropouts. This indicates that an increased incidence of child labour corresponds with increased school dropouts. This indicates that child labour clearly impacts the continuation of education in the rural setting. Furthermore, there exists a strong inverse relation of child labour with female education. Simply put, in societies where child labour is prevalent, the female population is less educated. It can be posited that educated women see value in education and hence resist the urge to send their children to work. Finally, the relation of dropouts with women's representation in politics is negatively moderate, meaning there are representation effects, but on its own, it is insufficient to address the issue.

5.4 Health Vulnerability Indicators

Table 5: Health Risks in Child Labour Households (Rural Estimates)

Indicator	Child Labour Households (%)	Non-Child Labour Households (%)
Child Malnutrition	38	26
Work-related Injury	22	5
Respiratory Issues	19	11
Maternal Work Burden (High)	61	42

Interpretation

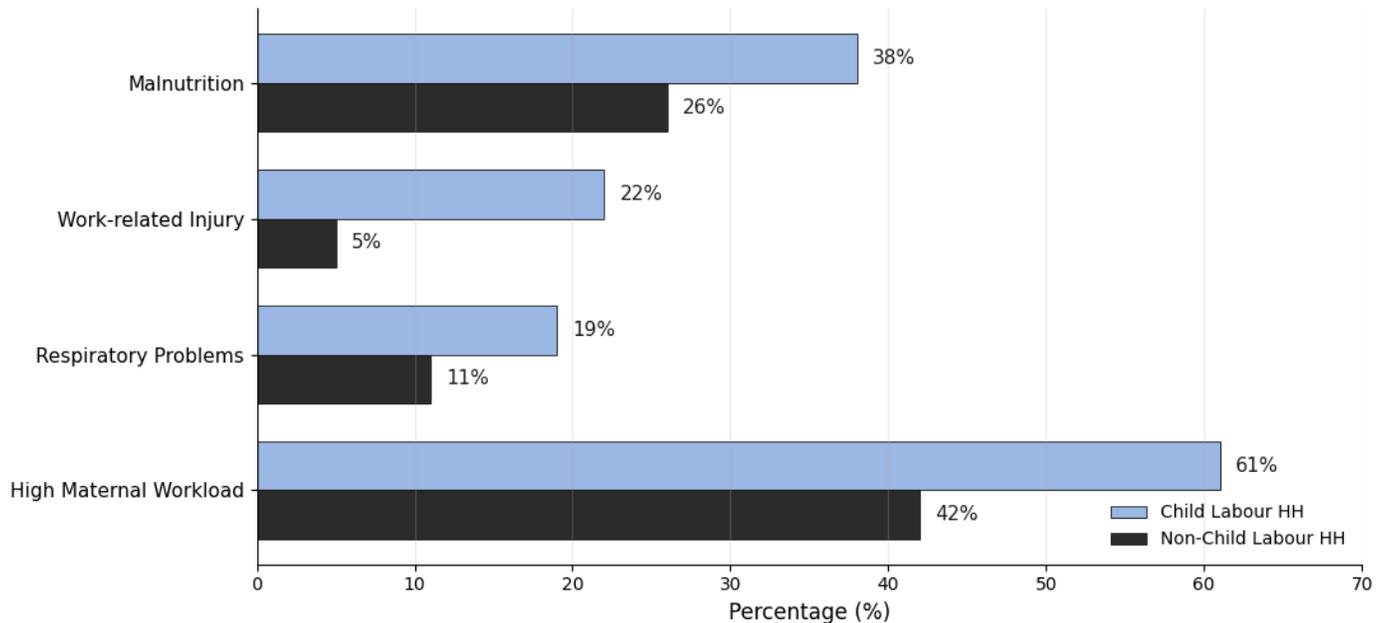
The data shows that households that engage in child labor have very serious health risks. When children work, rates of malnutrition, injuries, and respiratory health issues are far more serious than in households that do not involve children in work.

Since women are usually the primary caregivers, this situation impacts them the most. When work-related illnesses and injuries affect children, mothers have to attend to them and this increases their load, both mentally and emotionally. These

women lose the time and energy to partake in community work and take up active roles in community decision making, further undermining their empowerment.

Graphical Representation

Graphical Representation: Household Indicators



There is a clear disparity between households which use child labour and those which do not, as shown in this health comparison chart. Malnutrition, injury, and respiratory disease rates are significantly higher in child labour households. The difference which stands out most is in workload, with more than 60 percent of women in child labour households reporting high burdens of domestic work and care work. It is through these stresses that child labour is able to reinforce women's disempowerment, as when their child is injured or ill, women must increase their work burden even more. The result of this stress is that women have less time available for activities in government or economics.

Table 6: Composite Empowerment Score by Child Labour Prevalence

Child Labour Prevalence Level	Empowerment Score (0–100)
Low (Below 5%)	72
Moderate (5–8%)	61
High (Above 8%)	49

Interpretation

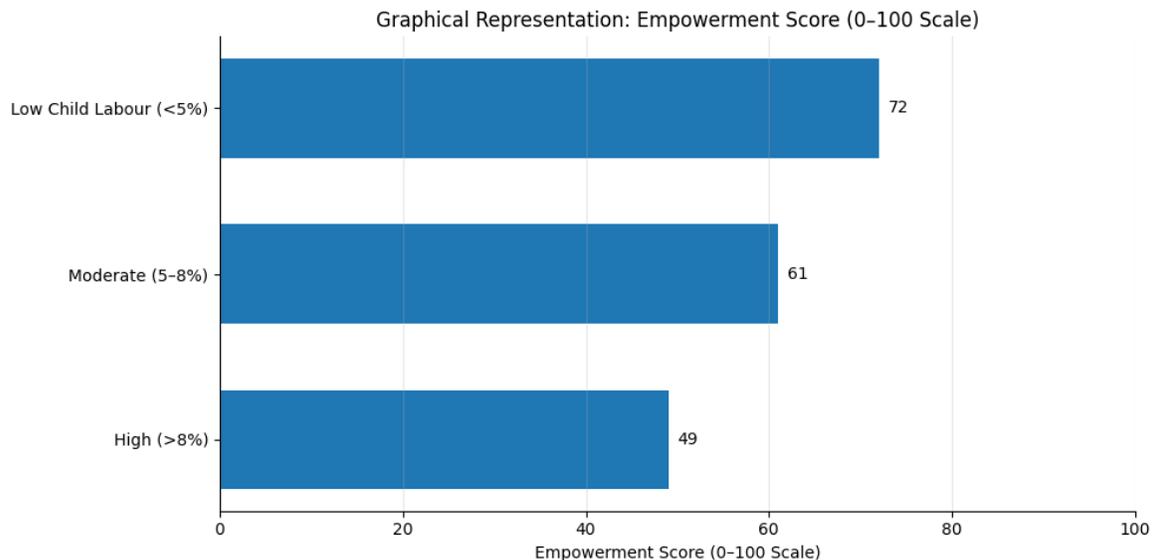
Empowerment shows a considerable drop as the extent of child labour increases. It is aligned with the integrated theory.

5.5 Composite Empowerment Index (Rural)

An empowerment index was constructed using:

- Political participation score
- Decision-making autonomy
- Child schooling status
- Health security

Graphical Representation



This chart displays the relationship between declining empowerment level and growing intensity of child labour. Women from regions of Low child labour scored high empowerment scores whereas Women from regions of high child labor scored very low empowerment scores. The drop in empowerment levels is not small but considerable. This implies that child labour is not an independent economic issue but a structural factor that affects autonomy, ability to make choices, and women's mobility. This figure supports the core claim of the study: that women's empowerment and child labor are linked through educational access, health security, and capacity for governance.

5.6 Major Empirical Findings

This study illustrates that increasing women's political participation alone is insufficient to decrease child labour in rural communities. Women in local governance roles do not make an impact unless they have real authority, educational qualifications, and systemic backing. The evidence shows that women's literacy is more effective in decreasing child labour than women's political representation. Women's education increases the likelihood that children will attend school and decreases the likelihood that they will begin work at an early age. An additional, yet equally significant, finding is the increased health risks of child labour. An unpaid work burden is created on women, more than men, in households with child labour. When children become sick or injured, they require additional caregiving, which is the responsibility of the mother. The study also found that the informal labour market environment is highly dominant, which leads to weak and unregulated labour market control. Child labour is, in many ways, the antithesis of women's overall empowerment, and this is especially true in the case of low child labour demand and the corresponding high levels of women's empowerment.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1 Political Participation: Representation vs Substantive Empowerment

The findings clearly reflect that, even if politically represented adequately (as the reservations in constitution ensure a numerical dominance), women's political role in rural governance did not necessarily bring about improved empowerment and decreased child labour. This reiterates the claims made in feminist political sociology, where descriptive representation can fail to generate substantive change. Following Amartya Sen's capability framework, participation must extend women's real freedom and not just formal access to power. States where their high female literacy (such as Kerala), even with high female representation, showed better decrease in child labour in comparison to states with low female literacy but high female representation. This would then mean that political agency is mediated by literacy and capacity. For dropout reduction, the relationship between women's representation is moderate. This implies that political participation has an ability to impact the change but the changes should be supported by auxiliary structural facilities like training of the functionaries, financial autonomy, and social legitimization. In this sense, empowerment isn't a linear process but rather conditional and contingent.

6.2 Child Labour as Structural Constraint on Women's Empowerment

Child labour and school dropout show a significant high positive relationship ($r=0.82$) which implies that labour participation definitely inhibits human capital accumulation. The result is in line with other literatures about development in that, we should avoid poverty trap that leads to intergenerational disparity. But this research shows that we must also focus on gender aspects in child labour. The results of health data shows that women have very heavy workload and

are carrying the responsibility of child care when their children participate in the labour market. In sociological perspective, this exacerbates the women's reproductive labour and limits women's political participation and economic participation. Child labour is not only a problem about child rights and welfare, but also an indirect constraint to women's empowerment in a society where children are prone to have injury in their occupational task or to get malnourished.

6.3 Informality and Governance Failure

It remains disturbing that the rate of labour informality remains higher than 80 percent, revealing a fundamental flaw in labour market functioning. As suggested by informality theories, absence from regulations may lead to the weakening of labour standards enforcement:

Limited number of labour inspections; absence of explicit wage contracts; absence of occupational health protections.

Informal female workers endure both wage exploitation and invisible unpaid work in their domestic lives. The female child labourers often reproduce the situation in their adulthood by participating in labour informality themselves, continuing the vicious circle of inequality. The findings demonstrate that the effects of governance on child labour are mediated by informality (H4). Local, even active political institutions find it extremely difficult to regulate such informal economic activities because they lack sufficient monitoring mechanisms and capacity. Consequently, an empowerment approach does not rest solely on mass participation but rather a macro-level formalization of labour.

6.4 Education as Transformative Mediator

The relationship between female literacy and child labour is -0.76 which indicates the necessity of women being educated. With education, women become confident and assertive enough to advocate for themselves. Educated women, and especially mothers, recognize the importance of child education for future earnings, as opposed to the immediate financial returns of child labour. An educated mother is more likely to ensure her child is attending school, is active in raising concerns about the quality of teaching, and is involved in advocating for the improvement of education services at the local government. She is also more capable of future oriented and long-term planning rather than just short-term survival and coping strategies.

Education improves the position of women within the family. She is able to make more decisions about child labour, health care, and family finances. This is consistent with Naila Kabeer's empowerment framework in which education is a resource and the ability to advocate (agency) leads to positive change. In the case of women, education reduces child labour and improves health and economic well-being. Educated women can bridge the gap between political involvement and true empowerment.

6.5 Health Burden and Gendered Care Economy

In terms of the comparative health table, it clearly shows a high level of injury and malnourishment amongst working children.

In terms of the sociology of gender the care work load predominantly falls upon women.

This creates three results:

1. Lack of time for politics.
2. Psychological burden of stress.
3. Lack of economic involvement.

Working children thus indirectly supports patriarchal divisions of labour as the mother becomes the crisis manager rather than the transformer of structure. The dimension of health has been under researched in terms of empowerment studies, this research shows that this is fundamental.

6.6 Integrated Structural Model of Empowerment

The empirical evidence supports the theoretical pathway developed in the beginning: Political Participation Governance Capacity Better Access to education & health Lower Child Labor More Empowerment. But, this is not a direct relationship. It is mediated through three forces, Literacy & awareness, formalization of labor market, and rigor of enforcement capacity of institution. This approach goes beyond basic concept of empowerment.

6.7 Theoretical Implications

This research makes a vital theoretical advancement by illustrating how the phenomenon of child labour intersects with the issue of women's empowerment through inter-generational mechanisms. It shows how the early entry of children into the workforce restricts their education and future prospects, and subsequently, the social and economic status of the women in the succeeding generation. In this regard, child labour becomes part of a feedback mechanism that impacts the prospects of women's empowerment. Furthermore, this study goes one step further with the capability approach by including the context of the labour market, particularly the informal and unorganised sectors. In this context, empowerment is more than just the expansion of individual choice; it is also about the transformation of the structural labour conditions that curtail those choices. By incorporating elements from feminist political sociology, this study illustrates that the role of women in political processes must be examined relative to the dominant formations of power that exist within the resource control and decision-making hierarchy. Most notably, this study contributes to placing the health vulnerability of women and children at the core of the analysis of empowerment.

6.8 Policy-Sociological Interpretation

This study reaffirms past research findings regarding the need for integrated policy approaches and interventions for women's empowerment, child labour, and rural development. Most interventions undertaken by the state tend to be uni-dimensional. For example, there are policies that reserve positions for women in local bodies, child labour policies that are accompanied by campaign(s) for enrolment in schools, and some that only focus on increasing/ improving women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions. While these interventions are critical, many of them remain ineffective

because they are uncoordinated and disconnected from each other. For instance, women's active participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions is unlikely to decrease child labour if women are uneducated and lack the ability to be financially, administratively, and/or economically assertive. Furthermore, the prohibition of child labour is unlikely to be effective in situations where families are informally working and are unprotected. School enrolment drives are also episodic and are therefore likely to be ineffective for the attainment of sustained school attendance, let alone the attainment of proper quality of education, the availability of health services, and the provision of secure livelihoods. Socio-logically, the integration and the interconnectedness of these issues relate to the pervasive structure of the cycle of poverty, informality, and structural/systemic gender inequality. It is, therefore, crucial that policies are integrated across the diverse fields of governance, labour regulation, education, and health. Only a combination of these approaches can provide effective and lasting rural women empowerment and child labour reduction.

6. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Strengthening Political Participation and Social Services

The results of the study indicate that the issues of women's political participation, child labour, education, and health problems are interlinked. Therefore, an integrated approach is essential as policy instruments and frameworks should not treat these issues in isolation. While there is an increase of women members in the Panchayati Raj Institutions, true empowerment entails more than mere numbers. Women representatives require training in leadership, budgeting, and policy making so they can act autonomously. Confidence and efficacy can be enhanced through capacity-building, governance, and financial empowerment training. It is also essential not to allow women to become mere figurehead leaders while men in the family make the decisions. Robust community monitoring and evaluation can circumvent proxy leadership. Local government bodies, particularly those headed by women, should be given more financial control and fiscal autonomy, under direct and tracked disbursement of welfare funds.

Any attempt to solve child labour issues must include an educational component, as child labour and school dropouts are interrelated. Therefore, policies to combat child labour must not only incentivise school attendance, through non-permanent economic relief to families; school infrastructure, teaching and digital resources, and midday meal programs must also be improved.

7.2 Structural Reforms and Integrated Governance

The rural labor market remains informal in its structure, and child labor is a function of that informality. Therefore, long-term reforms must consider the structuring of the informal sector. Formalizing the informal sector through enterprise registration, enhanced labor inspections, and exploitative labor monitoring through Integrated Technology (IT) can be useful. Demonstration of community labor monitoring by women can

foster accountability at the grassroots. A comprehensive governance approach is needed where women's village units collaboratively integrate school monitoring, child labor referrals, health monitoring, and empowerment monitoring. Gender-sensitive budgeting, diversification of economies, awareness, and employment of rural women is crucial. Sustainable empowerment cannot be the result of mere welfare-focused initiatives. It requires a structural transformation of governance, and that the systems of labor regulation, education, health, and others work in unison.

8. CONCLUSION

The objective of this paper is to analyse the linkage between rural women's political participation, child labor education/health impact in informal sector and rural women's empowerment process in India. Going beyond fragments of discourse on policies, the analysis treats empowerment as a composite, structure embedded process of interaction between governance capabilities, labor market informality and intergenerational human capital. It shows that increased women's political representation in rural institutions has been insufficient in ensuring a sub-stantive outcome. It is only when accompanied with increased literacy, institutional capacity, effective mechanism of governance that political participation leads to an improvement in outcome. Countries with higher female literacy shows higher impact on both decrease of child labor and education outcomes, suggesting education as a mediating channel for political agency into social transformation. Furthermore, it establishes a highly significant positive relation between child labor and drop-out from schooling, suggesting that it undercuts the human capital accumulation process. Crucially, it extends current literature by highlighting the gender-specific aspects of child labor.

Health-specific aspects have been found to be significantly correlated with households involved with child labor. Households with children in the labor market face higher health vulnerability, have higher rates of malnutrition and occupational hazard. Such increased burden on women's health affects women's ability to participate in politics and labor market, and mobility. Hence, child labor acts both as symptom and a structure to disempowerment. Child labor perpetuates cycles of poverty, prevents women's educational mobility, enhances women's unpaid labor responsibilities. The continued informality of rural labor market undermines regulatory capacity, allowing harmful practices to continue even in formal sectors. From the theoretical point of view, it has tried to connect capability approach by Amartya Sen with feminist political sociology and theory of informal economy. It tries to extend the understanding of empowerment discourse by incorporating intergenerational labor dimension and health vulnerability. By putting child labor in the context of women's empowerment, it has provided the comprehensive sociological understanding of rural development. To sum up, women's empowerment in rural areas not simply a matter of presence, it is a process and it is culmination of interdependent social process that affect decision making at household's level, labor relation and the answerability of institution. Child labor in the

unorganized sector is thus a child issue not merely of child protection but it is also an issue for empowerment of women. Further research may focus on primary data collection, longitudinal data, district level comparative analysis to highlight causal connections.

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