Socio-Economic Drivers and Occupational Health Risks of Child labor in Kalar City

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ABSTRACT

The societal and economic problems of child labour, especially in areas affected by poverty and financial insecurity, are serious issues. This study was conducted to study socio-demographic characteristics, educational level, employment status, working hours, and occupational health conditions of child labourers in the city of Kalar, Kurdistan Region of Iraq. This descriptive cross-sectional quantitative approach used 50 children, between the ages of 6-17, who were selected using purposive and convenience sampling techniques. Structured face-to-face interviews were used for data collection, and frequencies and percentages were used for data analysis. The results revealed that 82% of the respondents were men while 18% were women. The highest number of children were between 15-17 years of age (42%) and 11-14 years of age (40%). Most of the participants were school-going, but some had dropped out, and some never went to school; poverty was the greatest reported cause of non-school attendance. The most frequent occupations were those of herders (28%), vocational trades (26%), and street vendors (18%). The majority of the participants were working for their families (72%). In addition, 52% had between 4 and 8 hours of work each day and 22% had over 8 hours of work each day. 12% reported that they had suffered abuse at work and 28% had a health complaint, such as tiredness and back pain. The results indicate the importance of providing financial aid, educational assistance, and better child protection and workplace safety.

KEY WORDS: Child labour, poverty, education, working conditions, occupational health, Kalar City.

1. INTRODUCTION

Child labour is labour performed by a child that denies him/her his childhood, his potential, and his dignity. This disrupts children's learning and has a negative impact on their emotional, developmental, and physical health. The International Labour Organization (ILO) considers child labor as work which robs children of their childhood, their potential, and their dignity" *Landrigan* (*1997*). This section delves into the themes that emerge from the findings of Kalar City. Child labour is an essential issue worldwide, especially in the

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developing regions and in zones going through economic change. It's not just a social problem; it is a multi-faceted form of structural poverty, educational inequality, and economic volatility *Ahad* (*2024*). In the mistaken notion that they will be given a better life, they are frequently turned over to employers, many of whom have very modest incomes themselves. Children who work in domestic service put in long hours while being cut off from friends and family. There are virtually no educational options, and if the children get sick, they are either sent home or left on their own. This practice is frequently encouraged by a culture of "social apartheid," and the notion that employers are in some way serving as benefactors has been characterized as unwavering. As a result, children are being forced to drop out of school and enter the workforce in order to help the family make ends meet in many towns and cities of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), including Kalar City *Radfar* (*2018*). Less than half of all young people end up in the labour market without choice, and that's happening at a young age. This is more noticeable in the industrial areas, the market corner, and street corners in Kalar City. Children who are pushed into the labour market at an early age (6-17 years) are denied the right to an education and exposed to physically demanding and psychologically taxing situations *Miller* (*2010*). The primary aims of this study are to describe the sociodemographic characteristics of these minors, identify the different economic statuses most associated with school dropout, and assess their risk for occupational health issues *Kabir* (*2017*).

2.LITERATURE REVIEW

Poverty consistently comes out as the primary "push factor" in the literature on child labor. Due to the lack of local data on the particular socioeconomic circumstances of children in Kalar, the study is motivated by the fact that children are working and becoming more visible in the city *Haines* (*2007*). Children of working families have been shown to bring in almost 90% of the family's income, and most of them work to meet the basic survival needs *Naidu* (*1985*). While poverty is an important driver of child labour, child labour can be tackled without addressing poverty. Consumer boycotts and international sanctions can only help to solve the problem of child labour when they are not limited to the export sector, where the numbers of children involved are relatively low *Habib* (*2021*). The extent of the overall health of youth working is poorly understood. Most of the available information is the result of studies at a smaller level of children working in the business. Children involved in industry and agriculture show serious growth and development deficits and are susceptible to many diseases and injuries (WHO 1987). There are many reports of poisoning, serious skin and other infections, long-term lung disease, cancer, burns, amputations, skeletal deformities, and immunologic, visual, and auditory impairments. Children working in domestic service

are often victims of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, and child prostitutes are at risk of pregnancy and STDs such as HIV. While children involved in battle may be at risk for getting sick, becoming disabled, or dying in battle, former child soldiers may face hostility, social isolation, and trouble getting along with others *Denov* (*2020*). All children involved in intolerable and hazardous work suffer a life of terror, isolation, hunger, and emotional and physical abuse *Awan* (*1992*). While child labour determinants are being recorded, there is a huge gap in evidence and health statistics on child labour in the informal economy. The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) to end child labour is nearing its target; it is important to record the health impacts of child labour and make this hidden public health problem more visible. This kind of research is essential to guide targeted interventions and policies to safeguard vulnerable children and break the cycle of exploitation *Jones* (*2018*). The current study aims to fill this gap in knowledge by offering evidence to advocate for social intervention and policy change to safeguard Kalra's youth, drawing on the household vulnerability/early labor entry connection.

3. METHODOLOGY

In this study, the method used is Quantitative research; it aims to provide a comprehensive picture of the situation of child labor in Kalar City *Spencer* (*2024*).

3.1 Research Design and Setting

The research design used was a descriptive cross-sectional survey. The study was carried out in Kalar City, the selected urban and countryside areas such as street vending, Vocational/Skilled Trade, Service Sector, Agriculture/Farming, Herding/Livestock, and Industrial/Heavy Labor and daily working hours, wage status (wage laborer), *Islam* (*2022*).

3.2 Participants and Sampling

The sample size (N) is 50.

Inclusion Criteria: Being between the ages of 6 and 17 years old and involved in an economic activity (paid or unpaid).

Sampling Technique: Purposive and convenience sampling techniques were used. The survey was conducted in the workplace (vending, mechanic shops, etc.) with children.

3.3 Data Collection Instrument

The data were collected from a structured quantitative questionnaire that included four main areas:

Socio-Demographic Profile: Gender, age, and family structure (family presence, sibling number).

Education: Is in school, highest grade in school, and the reasons for leaving school (financial, lack of interest, or family pressure).

Work characteristics: Type of employment (street vending, Vocational/Skilled Trade, Service Sector, Agriculture/Farming, Herding/Livestock, Industrial/Heavy Labor), daily working hours, and wage status (wage laborer).

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Occupational Health: Physical symptoms (fatigue, back pain) and experience of the work environment (harassment/abuse).

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

Face-to-face interviews were used for administration of surveys. The researchers then read the questions to the participants and recorded their answers, particularly if they were unable to read the questions, which were the participants' ages. The length of each interview was about 15–20 minutes. The responses were anonymous, and all the respondents were volunteers, to guarantee the anonymity of the minors *Oliveira* (*2019*).

3.5 Data Analysis

The data obtained were analysed descriptively. Percentages and frequencies were used to highlight the trends for age distribution, the dominance of the genders, and the prevalence of certain health complaints. The analysis was carried out on the basis of the correlation between the indicators of the economy (unemployment of parents) and the need for child labour.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical precautions were taken as the participants were vulnerable. Minors provided informed consent (verbally), and guardians and/or shop supervisors were informed about the purpose of the study, if possible. No identification (name or address) of the children involved was obtained to ensure their safety and privacy *Koocher* (*1990*).

4. Results

This is a summary of the results obtained from the data given:

4.1 Demographic Profile

In Figure 1, only 18% (n=9) of the group are women; the majority of the group (82%, n=41) are men. Age: 42% of participants were between the ages of 15 and 17, and 40% were between the ages of 11 and 14. Children aged 6 to 10 years old are the smallest group, constituting 18% “AS shown in Table 1”.

4.2 The Educational status

Enrollment: “85% of people are enrolled, “as indicated in Figure 2”. Out of School: “As shown in Figure 2”, some 10% of children are not in school, including dropouts (10%) and those who never attended (5%). 85% of the school dropouts or non-schooling population attribute their situation to poverty as the primary cause of their school dropout or non-schooling “AS shown in Figure 4”. Distance to school was not an issue, and the other 15% had no interest. “As shown in Figure 5”, the most frequently occurring occupation categories among participants were herding/livestock (28%), vocational/skilled crafts (26%), street vending (18%), and agriculture (16%), while industrial labor was the lowest, at 2%.

4.3 Employment profile

Among the participants, the most common occupations are herding/livestock (28%), vocational/skilled trades (26%), street vending (18%), and agriculture (16%). At 2 percent, industrial labour was the least common.

4.4 Child workloads

The typical proportion of family livelihoods is 72% of employment and only one-fifth (20%) for personal expenses. The majority (52%) work for 4-8 hours per day, with a minority working more than 8 hours a day (22%).

4.5 Health and safety

88% of respondents had not experienced mistreatment at all, “as shown in Table 2”, while 12% had experienced physical or psychological mistreatment. In addition, 28% of participants reported poor health consequences from their jobs, such as back pain and fatigue.

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Table 1. Demographic Profile and Educational Status of child laborers.

Category/ Type of Employment		Count	Percentage
Gender Distribution	**male**	41	82%
	female	9	18%
Age Group Distribution	**6–10 years**	9	18%
	11–14 years	20	40%
	15–17 years	21	42%
Educational Status	**Currently Enrolled**	42	84%
	Dropped Out	6	12%
	Never Attended School	2	4%
Reasons for School Dropout/Non-Attendance	**Poverty**	6	85%
	Lack of Interest	1	15%
	Distance to School	0	0.00%

Table2. Socioeconomic and Employment information of child Laborers.

Category/ Type of Employment		Count	Percentage
Street Vendor		9	18%
Vocational/Skilled Trade		13	26%
Service Sector		5	10%
Agriculture/Farming		8	16%
Herding/Livestock		14	28%
Industrial/Heavy Labor		1	2%
Primary Motivation: Family Livelihood		36	72%
Personal Expenses		10	20%
Vocational Training		4	8%
Daily Working Hours	**Less than 4 hours**	13	26%
	4 to 8 hours	26	52%
	More than 8 hours	11	22%
	No	44	88%

Exposure to Abuse	**Yes (Physical/Psych)**	6	12%
Health Impacts	**No**	36	72%
	Yes (Fatigue/Back pain/etc.)	14	28%

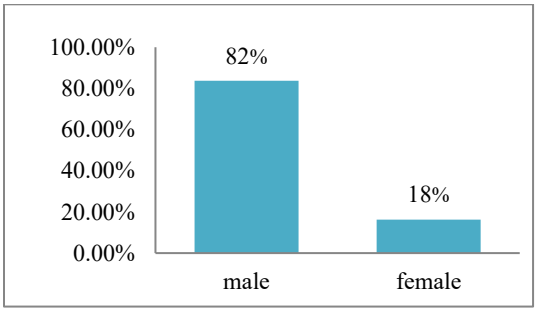


Figure 1. Demographic Profile and Gender Distribution of child laborers.

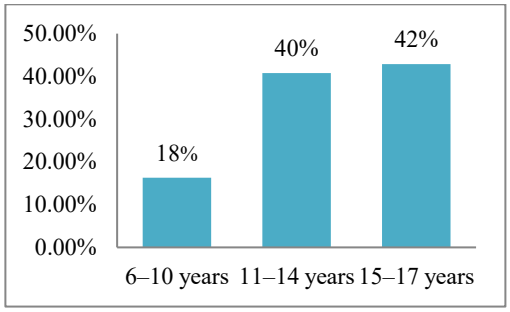


Figure 2. Demographic Profile and Age Group Distribution of child laborers.

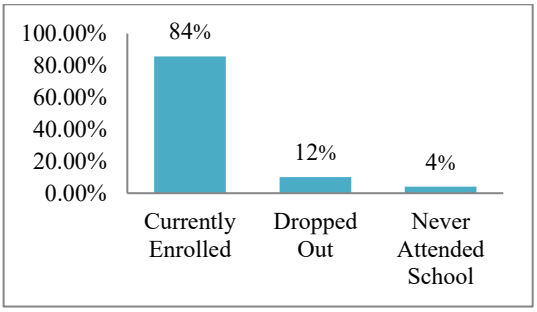


Figure 3. Educational Status of child laborers.

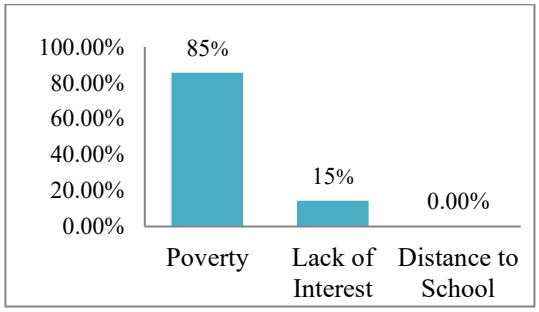


Figure 4. Educational Status of child laborers.

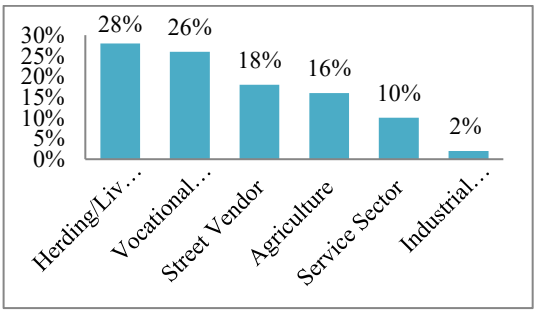


Figure 5. Employment Distribution (%)

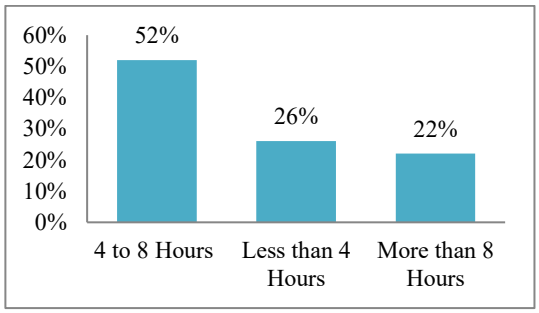


Figure 6. Daily Working Hours (%)

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5. Discussion

Child labour, given the potential for exposure to hazardous working conditions and the impact on children's physical and psychological development, education, and economic activity, is a serious social, economic, and public health issue *Taib* (*2021*). International evidence points to the need to keep children out of work that poses a risk to their health, safety, education, and well-being *Ibrahim* (*2019*). In this study, demographic characteristics, educational status, employment patterns, working hours, and occupational health and safety conditions of the 50 children who were involved in labour in Kalar City in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq were studied. The results suggest that child labour is significantly related to economic necessity, gender disparity in employment, conflicting educational obligations, and occupational health in the studied population *Ibrahim* (*2019*).

5.1 Demographic Profile: Gender and Age Dynamics

The data show that there is a huge gender gap in child labour, with 82% of children in child labour being male and 18% female, “As shown in Table 1”.

The number of children engaged in child labour is very gender-specific, “as shown in Figure 1”, likely because men are expected to engage in outdoor and/or manual activities (herding and vocational work), and women may be expected to engage in domestic activities which are not visible and not captured in this specific data source *Fassa* (*2005*). It seems there is an upward trend with respect to age, in that children's labour force participation grows with age. The highest number of workers are 11–17, 82% of the total workers, “as stated in Figure 2”. This is especially worrisome because 18% of children aged 6 – 10 years are in a critical time for elementary education, the foundation of all learning. There is an increase in the percentage of the 15-17 age group (42%), which shows that children are perceived as economic assets to their families as they are maturing physically *Ambedkar* (*1999*).

5.2 The Educational Paradox: "The Double Burden"

Of the 84% of children in school who are working, one of the interesting findings was that “As shown in Figure 3”, the working children were all involved in what is termed as 'school work.' This is at first sight desirable, but it is evidence of the "double burden" phenomenon *Taib* (*2014*). These children are not required to make a choice between school and the workplace; they're both school and the workplace. Their working hours are likely to bring their educational skills down a peg, however. Of these children, 52% work more than 4 hours a day and 22% more than 8 hours a day “Table 2 illustrates” in effect, they are also working a full or half-shift while at school. This means there is no homework time, no sleep time, no time for play and often accompanied by poor grades and “silent dropout” (enrolled but not learning). Most of those who are not in school are due to poverty (85%) *Corriols* (*2010*). This adds weight to the argument

that child labour is a way of life and not a choice, "As shown in Table 2".

5.3 Occupational Trends and Economic Necessity

There are a variety of employment types, with the largest being Herding/Livestock (28%) and Vocational/Skilled Trades (26%) "As shown in Figure 5". Often, children are kept out of school for long periods as part of the traditional labour of the herders. Labour is often referred to as 'informal apprenticeship,' and some parents may expect that children learn a skill and thus find work due to a lack of formal education. According to the motivation data, the economic aspect of this issue is confirmed, as 72% of children are motivated by 'Family Livelihood ', "as illustrated in Table 2". These children are an integral part of the household economy. They are not going to earn money to make up their pocket money but for their basic needs like food, rent, and debt *Iqbal* (*2023*).

5.4 Working Conditions and Physical Well-being

There is a high level of labour intensity, shown in Figure 6. Just over half of the children (52%) work for 4 to 8 hours a day and almost one in four (22%) work for more than 8 hours. This is because 8+ hours is a violation of the international labour rights of a child at school, and it will exhaust a child mentally as well as physically *Ahad* (*2021*). "As indicated in Table 2", the 28% who reported negative health effects from abuse (fatigue, back pain, etc.) referred to the unseen physical effects of abuse. Work, by itself, regardless of whether it is physically or psychologically harmful, is a type of structural harm *Magammana* (*2025*). A backache at such a young age can lead to physical deformities or other ailments that will impact their productivity and thus extend their engagement in life of poverty as adults *Iqbal* (*2023*).

5.5 Synthesis and Implications

The data implies that there is a Cycle of Vulnerability:

1. Economic Trigger: poverty means that families must use children as a source of income (72% for livelihood) *Caleo* (*2025*).
2. Educational Strain: Children try to attend school (84% of children enrolled), but are too tired after long hours (52% of children work 4+ hours) *Habib* (*2024*).
3. Health Depletion: Physical strain (28% health impact) is noted *Gulzar* (*2009*).
4. Long-term outcome: Low attainment of education and poor health outcomes are likely to result in low skill / low wage employment in adulthood and keep the next generation poor *Alamgir* (*2012*).

6. Conclusion

A descriptive study was conducted to investigate some of the demographic characteristics, educational status, employment situation, working hours, and occupational health and safety conditions of 50 children working in Kalar City of Kurdistan Region, Iraq. The results indicated that there was a higher occurrence of child labour among males (82%) and among the older children (15–17 years) (42%). While the majority of the

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subjects were in school, a significant number were facing a double burden of school and work, as 52% worked between 4 and 8 hours per day and 22% worked more than 8 hours per day. The two largest categories of employment were: herding and livestock activities (28%) and vocational or skilled trades (26%). Children worked because they felt it was necessary, 72% helped their families to earn a living. In addition, 12% said they had suffered from physical or mental abuse and 28% said they had suffered from health issues including fatigue and back pain. In general, the results indicate that the children working in Kalar City are closely linked to economic difficulties and that child labour negatively impacts children's education, their physical health, and prospects. Although most of those involved in the study were enrolled in school, their long working hours may affect their academic achievement, sleep, and socialization. In view of this, concerted action is required to help the poor access education, to make workplaces safer, and to ensure that children are not exposed to hazardous working conditions in their homes. Promote the rights and well-being of children through partnerships between government, families, schools, and community groups. This study can be considered as useful local evidence to guide future studies and targeted measures to combat child labour and ensure children's healthy development, as it is not representative of all children in Kalar City but has a small sample size and is not probability-based.

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پاڵنەرە کۆمەڵایەتی-ئابوورییەکان و مەترسییەکانی تەندروستیی پیشەیی کاری منداڵان لە شاری کەلار

پوختە:

کاری منداڵان بە یەکێک لە بابەتە جدییە کۆمەڵایەتی و ئابوورییەکان ئەژمار دەکرێت، بەتایبەتی لەو ناوچانەی ڕووبەڕووی هەژاری و نادڵنیایی دارایی بوونەتەوە. ئامانجی ئەم توێژینەوەیە بریتی بوو لە لێکۆڵینەوە لە تایبەتمەندییە کۆمەڵایەتی-دیمۆگرافییەکان، ئاستی خوێندەواری، ئاڕاستەکانی کارکردن، کاتژمێرەکانی کار، و بارودۆخی تەندروستیی پیشەیی منداڵانی کارکەر لە شارۆچکەی کەلار لە هەرێمی کوردستانی عێراق.لە ڕووی میتودۆلۆجییەوە، توێژینەوەکە دیزاینێکی چەندایەتیی وەسفیی بڕگەیی بەکارهێناوە؛ نموونەی توێژینەوەکە پێکهاتبوو لە ٥٠ منداڵی تەمەن ٦ بۆ ١٧ ساڵ کە بە شێوازی مەبەستدار و ئاسان هەڵبژێردرابوون. داتاکان لە ڕێگەی چاوپێکەوتنی ڕاستەوخۆ و داڕێژراوەوە کۆکراونەتەوە و بە بەکارهێنانی دووبارەبوونەوە و ڕێژەی سەدی شیکارییان بۆ کراوە. ئەنجامەکانی توێژینەوەکە دەریانخست کە ٨٢٪ی بەشداربووان لە ڕەگەزی نێر و ١٨٪یان لە ڕەگەزی مێ بوون. منداڵانی تەمەن ١٥–١٧ ساڵ گەورەترین گرووپی بەشداربووانیان پێکهێنابوو (٤٢٪)، لە دوای ئەوانیش گرووپی تەمەن ١١–١٤ ساڵ دەهاتن (٤٠٪). ئەگەرچی زۆربەی بەشداربووان لە پرۆسەی خوێندن بەردەوام بوون، بەڵام بەشێکیان دەستیان لە خوێندن هەڵگرتبوو یان هەرگیز نەچووبوونە قوتابخانە؛ لەم نێوەندەدا، هەژاری وەک سەرەکیترین بەربەست لەبەردەم درێژەدان بە خوێندن دەستنیشانکرا. لە ڕووی جۆری کارەوە، ڕەعایەتیکردن و بەخێوکردنی ئاژەڵ باوترین کاری بەشداربووان بوو (٢٨٪)، لە دوای ئەویش پیشەی دەستی و تەکنیکییەکان (٢٦٪) و دەستگێڕی (١٨٪) دەهاتن. سەبارەت بە پاڵنەری کارکردن، ٧٢٪ی بەشداربووان ڕایانگەیاندبوو کە بە ئامانجی پشتیوانیکردنی دارایی خێزانەکانیان کار دەکەن.جگە لەوەش، ٥٢٪ی منداڵەکان ڕۆژانە چوار بۆ هەشت کاتژمێر کاریان دەکرد، لەکاتێکدا ٢٢٪یان زیاتر لە هەشت کاتژمێر لە کاردا بوون. بەڕێژەی ١٢٪ چەوسانەوە و ڕەفتاری خراپ لە شوێنی کار تۆمارکرا، و ٢٨٪ی بەشداربووانیش تووشی کێشەی تەندروستی بووبوون، وەک ماندوێتیی مزمن و ئازاری پشت. لە کۆتاییدا، دەستکەوتەکانی ئەم توێژینەوەیە جەخت لە گرنگیی دابینکردنی هاوکاریی دارایی، پاڵپشتیی پەروەردەیی، و جێبەجێکردنی ڕێکاری تۆکمەتر بۆ پاراستنی منداڵان و سەلامەتیی شوێنی کار دەکەنەوە.

وشە کلیلەکان: کاری منداڵان، هەژاری، پەروەردە، بارودۆخی کار، تەندروستیی پیشەیی، شارۆچکەی کەلار.

محركات الاجتماعية والاقتصادية والمخاطر الصحية المهنية لعمالة الأطفال في مدينة كلار

الملخص :

تُعدّ عمالة الأطفال واحدة من أخطر القضايا الاجتماعية والاقتصادية، لا سيما في المناطق التي تواجه الفقر وانعدام الاستقرار المالي. وقد هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى تقصي الخصائص الاجتماعية والديموغرافية، ومستوى الإلمام بالقراءة والكتابة، وتوجهات العمل، وساعات العمل، والحالة الصحية المهنية للأطفال العاملين في مدينة كلار، ضمن إقليم كردستان العراق. من الناحية المنهجية، اعتمدت الدراسة تصميمًا كميًا وصفيًا مقطعيًا؛ وتكونت عينة الدراسة من 50 طفلًا تتراوح أعمارهم بين 6 و17 عامًا، تم اختيارهم باستخدام أسلوبي العينة القصدية والعينة المتاحة. جُمعت البيانات من خلال مقابلات مباشرة ومقننة، وجرى تحليلها باستخدام التكرارات والنسب المئوية. أظهرت النتائج أن 82% من المشاركين كانوا من الذكور، بينما بلغت نسبة الإناث 18%. وشكّل الأطفال الذين تتراوح أعمارهم بين 15 و17 عاماً الفئة الأكبر من المشاركين (42%)، تلتهم الفئة العمرية من 11 إلى 14 عاماً (40%). وعلى الرغم من أن معظم المشاركين واصلوا مسيرتهم التعليمية، إلا أن بعضهم تركوا الدراسة أو لم يلتحقوا بها قط؛ وقد تبيّن أن الفقر هو العائق الرئيسي أمام استكمال التعليم. فيما يتعلق بنوع المهنة، كانت تربية الماشية هي المهنة الأكثر شيوعاً بين المشاركين (28%)، تلتها المهن اليدوية والتقنية (26%)، ثم الحرف اليدوية (18%). أما بخصوص الدافع وراء العمل، فقد ذكر 72% من المشاركين أنهم يعملون بهدف إعالة أسرهم مادياً. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، عمل 52% من

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الأطفال لمدة تتراوح بين أربع وثماني ساعات يومياً، بينما عمل 22% منهم لأكثر من ثماني ساعات. وأفاد 12% بتعرضهم للتنمر أو سوء المعاملة في أماكن العمل، في حين عانى 28% من المشاركين من مشكلات صحية، مثل الإجهاد العضلي وآلام الظهر. وأخيراً، تؤكد نتائج هذه الدراسة على أهمية تقديم المساعدة المالية والدعم التعليمي، وتطبيق تدابير أكثر صرامة لحماية الأطفال وضمان سلامتهم في بيئات العمل.

الكلمات المفتاحية: عمالة الأطفال، الفقر، التعليم، ظروف العمل، الصحة المهنية، قضاء كلار.