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Child labor in Tehran, Iran: Abuses experienced in work environments

Saeedeh Jalili Moayad^a, Seyed Hossein Mohaqeqi Kamal^{a,*}, Homeira Sajjadi^b, Meroe Vameghi^b, Gholamreza Ghaedamini Harouni^b, Sara Makki Alamdari^c

^a Student Research Committee, University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences, Tehran, Iran

^b Social Welfare Management Research Centre, University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences, Tehran, Iran

^c West Texas A&M University, Harrington Amarillo Center 380C, Amarillo, TX, USA

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ABSTRACT

Background: Child labor is exploitative and harmful and deprives children of opportunities for a healthy life. Nonetheless, child labor is prevalent worldwide. Abusive working conditions are common, especially in developing countries.

Objective: This study was designed both to measure the prevalence of abuse in work environments and to identify possible risk and protective factors for such abuse in child laborers in Tehran, Iran. **Method:** The researchers conducted this cross-sectional study from September 2018 to May 2019 in Tehran and recruited 250 children from seven child labor support centers.

Results: The results demonstrated a relatively high rate of abuses experienced in work environments among Iranian child laborers: 77.6 % of children experienced at least one type of abuse, with emotional abuse (70.4 %) as the most frequently experienced abuse followed by neglect (52 %), physical abuse (5.8 %), and sexual abuse (3.6 %). Furthermore, living alone or with a single parent (OR = 3.15, CI 95 %: 1.33–7.45) was a risk factor, while working in home jobs (OR = 2.08, CI 95 %: 1.19–3.63), being male (OR = 0.19, CI 95 %: 0.06–0.55), and being older (OR = 0.32, CI 95 %: 0.17–0.60) were the protective factors of abuses experienced at work among child laborers.

Conclusion: The findings of this study have implications for designing and implementing early interventions to provide less harmful work environments for child laborers. Further, advocacy efforts to prevent and eliminate child labor should be pursued.

1. Introduction

Child labor is a critical social concern in many countries especially in developing countries (International Labor Organization [ILO], 2017; Kamruzzaman & Hakim, 2018; Mohaqeqi Kamal, Ghaedamini Harouni, Basakha, & Makki Alamdari, 2019; Öncü, Kurt, Esenay, & Özer, 2013). It is defined as any kind of work done by children that deprives them of their potential, dignity, and personal development, as well as being harmful to their physical and mental health (ILO, 2020). Child labor is totally different than chores around the house. There are no reliable international statistics regarding child labor. However, the latest estimates presented by the

* Corresponding author at: Social Welfare Management Department, School of Education Sciences and Social Welfare, University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences, Kodakyar Ave., Daneshjo Blvd., Evin, Tehran, 1985713834, Iran.

E-mail address: hosseinmohaqeq@gmail.com (S.H. Mohaqeqi Kamal).

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ILO indicate that 152 million children globally – 64 million girls and 88 million boys– are child laborers globally, accounting for almost one in ten children worldwide. Over 95 % of these children are in developing countries (ILO, 2017). Nearly half of these children are involved in hazardous work that directly endangers their health, safety, and moral development (ILO, 2011). Child labor is directly related to child maltreatment. According to World Health Organization (WHO), child maltreatment is defined as the abuse and neglect which occurs to those who are under 18 years old and includes all forms of neglect, negligence, physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, exploitation, and sexual abuse, which causes potential or actual harm to the child's development, health, dignity, and survival (WHO, 2020). Therefore, child labor is one type of child maltreatment as it involves neglect and/or abuse, and is harmful for children's health, development, and dignity. Bowling, Camus, and Blackmore (2015) discussed that workplace neglect and abuse includes physical and non-physical mistreatment performed by individuals like employers, colleagues, and clients within the work environment. Consideration of child labor as a form of child maltreatment has been supported in the existing literature. In studying maltreatment experiences of Kenyan children, Morantz et al. (2013) considered child labor- excessive domestic or paid work- as one form of maltreatment threatening children's well-being. Similarly, Segal (1992) and Pierce and Bozalek (2004) distinguished between familial abuse and societal abuse and considered child labor as one of four forms of societal child maltreatment alongside with child beggary, child prostitution, and child marriage.

Due to their smaller size, dependence, and developmental immaturity, children are more vulnerable than adults to harmful working conditions as unhealthy environmental factors can negatively affect their development and growth (ILO, 2017). In addition, children often work in conditions in which work-related abuse is more likely to happen (Banday, Chakraborty, D'Cruz, & Noronha, 2018). The violence in child labor is often systematic and part of a collective work culture, which includes physical brutality, shouting, use of degrading language, and occasionally sexual abuse. Children are also less likely than adults to physically resist abuse or make complaints, making them more vulnerable (United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF], 2006).

According to the 1989 Conventions on the Rights of the Child, children have the right to health care, a balanced diet, education, recreation, and an adequate standard of living (United Nations Human Rights, 1989). Children have the right to protection from exploitation, discrimination, abuse, and neglect (United Nations Human Rights, 1989). Child labor is intrinsically abusive and should be eliminated in all forms. Until this goal is met, efforts to mitigate the harm of child labor have value. To that end, this study examined working conditions and work environment abuses among child laborers. Despite the presence of a robust body of literature on the subject of child labor, more research to examine child laborers' working conditions is warranted. Some studies examined abuses related to working children in developing countries. For example, Öncü et al. (2013) studied different kinds of abuse in 595 working children in Turkey and found that 62.5 % of the children were subjected to at least one form of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse at their workplaces. Similarly, Audu, Geidam, and Jarma (2009), Gharaibeh and Hoeman (2003), and Pinzon-Rondon, Botero, Benson, Briceno-Ayala, and Kanamori (2010) found considerable prevalence of economic exploitation and workplace abuse in forms of physical, verbal, and sexual abuse among working children in Latin America, Nigeria, and Jordan respectively. Interestingly, in a developed country, a study in the United States with more than one thousand adolescent workers reported that one-third of participants experienced workplace violence in terms of verbal threats, physical attacks, and sexual harassment (Rauscher, 2008).

In Iran, various studies have examined child labor (Khakshour, Ajilian Abbasi, Sayedi, Saeidi, & Khodae, 2015; Khankosh, Amini Rarani, & Nosratabadi, 2020; Moradi, Sajjadi, Vameghi, Kamal, & Ghaedamini Harouni, 2016; Pasdar, Darbandi, & Nachvak, 2014; Roshanfekr et al., 2020; Sajedi et al., 2016) in areas of anger management, social trust, nutritional status, substance abuse, and child development among child laborers; however, none of them has addressed the issue of work environment abuses, particularly its prevalence and associated factors. This paper was designed to address this gap by studying the prevalence of work environment abuse and its associated factors among the child laborers in Tehran, the capital city of Iran.

UNICEF (2006) offers a conceptual framework for analyzing work-related abuse related to child labor in four areas: victims' characteristics (e.g., age, sex, body size, and education); perpetrators' characteristics (e.g., sex and age of employers, colleagues, and clients); factors related to the working environment (e.g., whether working alone, working shifts, working hours, working sector, and risks related to the work's tasks and activities); and household status (e.g., economic status, living arrangements, and parental status) (UNICEF, 2006). Studies in developing countries also considered similar factors. For example, studying working children in Turkey, Öncü et al. (2013) found being male, extended working time, and family factors such as divorced parents and low family income as significant factors associated with physical or sexual abuse. Similarly, Pinzon-Rondon et al. (2010) studied 584 children working on the streets and reported longer working hours as well as residing with their mothers as factors directly associated with economic exploitation and workplace abuse. In a study with 316 girls in Nigeria, Audu et al. (2009) found that younger age, lower education, extended working time, and having two or more jobs were risk factors for being sexually assaulted. Examining a comprehensive list of potential factors is out of the scope of this study. Based upon the UNICEF's framework, the literature review, and an understanding of the context of Iran, this study measured the following characteristics: child's age, sex, nationality, level of education, work condition - such as working at night shift and the work sector- as well as parents' employment status and living arrangements for consideration.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants and procedures

This cross-sectional study was conducted from September 2018 to May 2019 in Tehran. The researchers administered individual interviews with child laborers from seven non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to complete a questionnaire. These NGOs are child labor support centers which deliver services such as free education for this group of children. There are nine active NGOs in Tehran providing such services that mostly are located at the south of Tehran. The researchers used single-stage cluster sampling. That is, first,

they contacted the managers of all nine NGOs to request access to survey the children they serve; seven of them agreed. In this kind of sampling, all members of these NGOs were targeted. These seven NGOs served almost 1500 children under 18-years-old during 2018–19 academic year. In this study, only child laborers who worked in a specific place were considered. That is, those who work on the streets were excluded from the study. Due to the exclusion criteria, 430 children were eligible to participate in the study. Of those eligible, 257 volunteered, indicating the participation rate of nearly 60 %. Of the 257 children who volunteered, 250 fully completed the questionnaire with no missing data which were used for analysis. Prior to data collection, a pilot study with 15 children was conducted to ensure relevance and clarity of the questionnaire.

To collect data, first, the researchers approached the NGO managers, and explained the study. If the managers agreed to allow their agency to participate in the study, they were asked to verbally explain the study, its goals, and procedures to the children they served. If children were interested, they were asked to provide parent/guardian/trusted adult permission. Those children with at least one parent or guardian were asked to provide parental/guardian permission from that individual. Children who were willing to participate were asked to take the study information sheet to their parents or guardians and get their written permission. In the case of a child who had no parent or guardian, she/he was asked to nominate a trusted adult, whether from the NGO or from anywhere other than the work environment, to provide the permission (Worku, Davis, & Morrow, 2016). Further, children provided a verbal or written assent depending on their age and ability to read and write before the interview.

Following these steps, a staff member of the NGO scheduled a time for the interview with both the child and the interviewer. The interviewer showed up in the scheduled times at the NGO (e.g., an empty classroom or library) to conduct the interview. Each interview took between 15–20 min. Prior to the interview, children were reminded that the participation was voluntary, and respondents could choose whether or not to respond to any question or could leave the study at any time with no penalty. The study had minimal risk for participants. Children were told that all the collected information is anonymous and confidential. The children's employers were not aware of the study. It was also asked of the children not to talk about the study with their employers or co-workers to prevent unwelcome and unintended consequences. No incentives were provided for participation. The interviewer (Jalili) was a master's level student in social welfare and social work with experience in working with child laborers. The Ethical Committee of the University of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation Sciences, Iran approved the study (IR.USWR.REC.1397.137).

Table 1
Descriptive Characteristics of the Participants.

Variables	N (%)
Sex	
Male	192 (76.8 %)
Female	58 (23.2 %)
Educational level	
Elementary school	118 (47.2 %)
Middle school	62 (24.8 %)
High school	70 (28 %)
Nationality	
Iranian	96 (38.94 %)
Afghan	154 (61.06 %)
Living arrangements	
Living with parents	209 (83.6 %)
Living with mother	29 (11.6 %)
Living with father	5 (2%)
Living with relatives	4 (1.6 %)
Other	3 (1.2 %)
Family housing status	
Owner	42 (16.8 %)
Tenant	208 (83.2 %)
Mother's education	
Illiterate	105 (42 %)
Elementary	105 (42 %)
High school	31 (12.8 %)
College/University	6 (2.4 %)
Father's education	
Illiterate	87 (34.8 %)
Elementary	106 (42.4 %)
High school	40 (16 %)
College/University	10 (4%)
Head of family's employment status	
Employed	214 (85.6 %)
Unemployed	36 (14.4 %)
Employer's gender	
Male	217 (86.8 %)
Female	33 (13.2 %)

2.2. Measure

Data was collected using a closed-ended questionnaire that included two sections: a socio-demographic checklist and the Child Work-Related Abuse Scale (CWAS). The socio-demographic checklist consisted of questions about the children (i.e., sex, age, educational level, and nationality—Iranian or Afghan), family status (i.e., life arrangements—whether living alone or with a single parent—and parents' employment status), and working conditions (i.e., working sector and working shift). The CWAS, developed and validated by the researchers, consists of 23 items with four dimensions: emotional abuse (9 items), physical abuse (7 items), neglect (4 items), and sexual abuse (3 items). The researchers confirmed face validity and content validity respectively with 7 and 15 experts from the fields of health, sociology, psychology, social work, and social welfare (Jalili et al., 2019). Confirmatory factor analysis also verified factor validity of the scale (Jalili et al., 2019). The scale showed strong Cronbach's alpha of 0.84. Each subscale had high internal consistency: Cronbach's alpha of 0.71, 0.71, 0.80, and 0.71 were found for each of the dimensions of emotional abuse, neglect, physical abuse, and sexual abuse, respectively. A 3-point Likert scale with the options of 0 (No, never), 1 (Yes, occasional) and 2 (Yes, frequent) was used for each item. Children who answered 1 or 2 to at least one item were considered abused in general and in the related dimension. In this case, the outcome variable was dummy coded as abuse experienced in work environments coded as a 1 for those who experienced any kind of abuse and with a code of 0 for respondents who did not report any exposure to abuse.

2.3. Statistical analysis

For univariate analysis, descriptive statistics for study variables were provided. For multivariate analysis, the researchers used logistic regression to determine unadjusted and adjusted relationships between predictors and the outcome. Using a chi-square test, independent variables were selected for inclusion in the model based on their significance level. Throughout this study, a p-value less than 0.05 was considered as statistically significant. All tests were run using SPSS version 21.

3. Findings

3.1. Demographic statistics

The average age of children who participated in the research was 14.61 ± 2.23 years. The majority (76.8 %) were males. Nearly half (47.2 %) were in primary school. The majority (83.6 %) of children lived with both parents. Approximately 42 % of mothers and

Table 2
Working Conditions of the Participants.

Variables	N (%)
Working sector	
Service	183 (73.2 %)
Home jobs*	47 (18.8 %)
Industry	20 (8%)
Job status	
Permanent	163 (65.2 %)
Temporary	87 (34.8 %)
Work at night shifts	
Yes	157 (62.8 %)
No	93 (37.2 %)
Unpleasant odor in the workplace	
Yes	49 (19.6 %)
No	201 (80.4 %)
Workplace lighting	
Good	236 (94.4 %)
Poor	14 (5.6 %)
Working with chemicals	
Yes	32 (12.8 %)
No	218 (87.2 %)
Work-related illnesses and occupational accidents	
Yes	164 (65.6 %)
No	86 (34.4 %)
Restroom in the workplace	
Yes	162 (64.8 %)
No	88 (35.2 %)
Annoying noise in the workplace (e.g., metal turning)	
Yes	68 (27.2 %)
No	182 (72.8 %)
Work in extremely hot environments (e.g., bakery)	
Yes	75 (30 %)
No	175 (70 %)

Note. *Home jobs are different than chores. These jobs are done for money, for an employer who is usually not a family member, and the child completes the tasks in his/her home.

35 % of fathers were reported as illiterate. In addition, the children stated that the most important reason for working was to help the family financially (85.6 %). Around 18.8 % of fathers and 1.2 % of mothers of labor children were reported as having drug abuse issues and 10.4 % of them had a history of imprisonment. Only one-sixth (16.7 %) of the families of working children owned a house/apartment, and the rest lived in rental homes. This picture clearly reveals the poor socio-economic status of these families. [Table 1](#) shows the descriptive characteristics of the participants.

3.2. Work environment

The majority (65.2 %) of participants had permanent jobs, and 73.2 % of them worked in the service sector. Children in the service sector were engaged in jobs related to cleaning, fruit sales, bakeries, butcher shops, clothing stores, grocery stores etc. Home jobs include work or tasks ordered by employers - who are usually not a family member. Children complete home jobs in their home to receive money from the employer and are different than chores around the house. Examples of home jobs include sewing, packing socks and clothes, cleaning legumes and vegetables, making handicrafts (e.g., carpets), etc. Children in the industrial sector were engaged in jobs in auto repair shops, motor manufacturing, car polishing, metal turning, and the brick kiln industry. Because some of the child laborers in the study were studying during the day, they were more likely to work night shifts. Making handicrafts, sewing, packing, and selling were some of the occupations that children did during night shifts.

More than a third of the children's work environments lacked a restroom (35.2 %), directly affecting their health and safety. About two-thirds (65.6 %) had a history of illnesses and occupational accidents related to their work environments such as losing a hand. Nearly 13 % worked with hazardous chemicals such as paint in their work. One-third (33.3 %) of the children worked in hot environments such as bakeries and the brick kiln industry. These findings indicate that the child laborers are working in unhealthy environmental conditions. [Table 2](#) shows the working conditions of the study participants.

3.3. Abuses experienced in work environments

The results showed that 77.6 % of children were exposed to at least one type of abuse at their work environments: 70.4 % reported emotional abuse, 52 % experienced neglect, 5.8 % reported physical abuse, and 3.6 % had experienced sexual abuse. Most emotional abuses were related to discrimination at work such as lower payments and/or more workload than others. In terms of neglect, the respondents mainly complained about the lack of appreciation for their positive work. The most often reported physical abuses were being shaken or pushed. Those who reported sexual abuse at work frequently pointed to verbal sexual abuse. In response to the question of "who is most bullying you at work?", the most frequent responses of children were co-worker (10.8 %), followed by employer (10 %) and client (6.4 %). Only 16.4 % of the children kept their pay for themselves, with the rest surrendering their payments to their parents. Some Afghan children sent most of their monthly payments to their families and relatives in Afghanistan. Four children (1.6 %) worked to compensate their father's debt to the employer. [Table 3](#) shows the abuses and their dimensions.

Table 3
Abuses Experienced at Work.

Abuses experienced at work	N (%)
Psychological abuse	(70.4 %)
Humiliated or ridiculed with bad names	33 (13.2 %)
Insulted at work and/or treated as an idiot	74 (29.6 %)
Treated with anger	71 (28.4 %)
Threatened with getting burned	54 (21.6 %)
Threatened with having wages cut	117 (46.8 %)
Threatened with being fired	52 (20.8 %)
Treated with discrimination (Less wages and more workload)	133 (53.2 %)
Forced to lie or steal	100 (40 %)
Demanded more work than what expected (e.g., employer's personal work)	78 (31.2 %)
Neglect	(52 %)
Underappreciated the positive work	112 (44.8 %)
Not allowed to take a snack when hungry	56 (22.4 %)
Prevented from accessing medical services	79 (31.6 %)
Not allowed to see their visitors	7 (2.8 %)
Physical abuse	(5.8 %)
Punished with kicks or slaps	14 (5.6 %)
Punished with whips or hoses	18 (7.2 %)
Pinched	5 (2%)
Ear twisted	18 (7.2 %)
Shaken and pushed	19 (7.6 %)
Not allowed to have a break when needed	13 (5.2 %)
Sexual abuse	(3.6 %)
Verbal sexual abuse (e.g., sexual jokes)	19 (7.6 %)
Groping	6 (2.4 %)
Rape	3 (1.2 %)

3.4. Factors associated with work environment abuses

A logistic regression analysis was conducted to identify possible associations between independent variables and abuses experienced at work (Table 4). Using Chi-square analysis, variables with a p value less than 0.05 were entered into the multiple logistic regression model. The variables entered into the model were sex, age, working sector, and living arrangement (living with parents or not) and explained between 15.2 % (Cox and Snell's R square) and 22.8 % (Nagelkerke's R square) of the variance in abuses experienced in work environments. Hosmer-Lemeshow test demonstrated goodness of fit for the model ($\chi^2 = 4.71$, $p = 0.78$).

The results indicated that child's sex, living alone or with a single parent, child's age, and kind of work were significant factors associated with work environment abuses. That is, living alone or with a single parent (OR = 3.15, CI 95 %: 1.33–7.45) was a risk factor, while working in home jobs (OR = 2.08, CI 95 %: 1.19–3.63), being male (OR = 0.19, CI 95 %: 0.06–0.55), and being older (OR = 0.32, CI 95 %: 0.17–0.60) were the protective factors of abuses experienced at work among child laborers (Table 5).

4. Discussion

This study was designed to determine the prevalence of abuses experienced in work environments, and to identify possible risk and protective factors for such abuse among child laborers in Tehran. 250 child laborers participated in the study. A considerable number of children experienced at least one kind of maltreatment with emotional abuse and neglect as the most frequently reported ones. Unhealthy working environment has been an integral part of the labor among the participants. Being male, being older, and working in home jobs were associated with a fewer child maltreatment incidents. Living alone or with a single parent was identified as a risk factor that exposed the child to more likelihood of maltreatment.

The results of the present study revealed that 77.6 % of child laborers were exposed to at least one type of abuse in their work environments with the most frequently reported dimension as emotional abuse (70.4 %) followed by neglect (52 %), physical abuse (5.8 %), and sexual abuse (3.6 %). The prevalence of the abuses experienced in work environments among child laborers was found to be 25 % in a similar study conducted by (Pinzon-Rondon et al., 2010) in the Latin American cities of Bogotá, Lima, Quito, and São Paulo, 62.5 % in the study of (Öncü et al., 2013) in Turkey, and 77.7 % in the study implemented by Audu et al. (2009) in Maiduguri, Nigeria. Although the reported prevalence of abuses experienced in work environments in the current study was greatly different than the study of Pinzon-Rondon et al. (2010), it was very close to the findings of the other two studies (Audu et al., 2009; Öncü et al., 2013). In the study of Öncü et al. (2013), of 62.5 % reported abuses experienced in work environments, the majority was related to emotional abuse (53.6 %) followed by sexual abuse (25.2 %), and physical abuse (21.8 %). The differences in overall or dimension-specific reported abuses experienced in work environments between aforementioned studies and the current study can be attributed to methodological dissimilarities (e.g., scales used) or to contextual differences in different countries (e.g., nation-wide child labor policies and child labor nature).

Table 4

Chi-square Analyses of Variables Associated with Abuses Experienced in Work Environments.

Variables	Abuses		p-value
	No (N = 56) N (%)	Yes (N = 194) N (%)	
Sex			0.003
Male	52 (92.8 %)	140 (72.1 %)	
Female	4 (7.2 %)	54 (27.9 %)	
Nationality			0.129
Iranian	26 (49 %)	70 (34.7 %)	
Afghan	27 (51 %)	117 (65.3 %)	
Educational level			0.501
Elementary school	17 (25.7 %)	53 (27.3 %)	
Middle school	15 (22.7 %)	47 (24.2 %)	
High school	24 (48.4 %)	94 (48.5 %)	
Living arrangements			0.001
Living with parents	51 (91 %)	36 (18.6 %)	
Living alone or with a single parent	5 (9%)	158 (81.4 %)	
Parents' employment status			0.449
Employed	48 (84.1 %)	166 (86 %)	
Unemployed	9 (15.9 %)	27 (14 %)	
Working sector			0.002
Service	52 (92.8 %)	131 (67.5 %)	
Home jobs	1 (1.8 %)	46 (23.7 %)	
Industry	3 (5.4 %)	17 (8.8 %)	
Employer's sex			0.2
Male	52 (92.8 %)	168 (86.6 %)	
Female	4 (7.2 %)	26 (13.4 %)	
Work at night shift			0.19
Yes	88 (56 %)	69 (74.2 %)	
No	45 (44 %)	48 (25.8 %)	
Age	16.11 ± 1.98	13.45 ± 2.78	0.001

Table 5
Multiple Logistic Regression Results.

	B	SE	Wald test	OR	P-value	OR (95 % CI)	
						Lower	Upper
Sex*	-1.65	0.54	9.18	0.19	0.00	0.06	0.55
Working in home jobs**	0.47	0.28	3.59	2.08	0.02	1.19	3.63
Living alone or with a single parent***	0.99	0.43	3.76	3.15	0.03	1.33	7.45
Age	-1.02	0.32	10.38	0.32	0.01	0.17	0.60

Notes. OR: odds ratio; SE: standard error; CI: confidence interval; *female = 0 & male = 1; **home jobs = 0 & not in-home jobs = 1; ***living with parents = 0 & living with no or a single parent = 1.

Working in home jobs, being male, and being older were the protective factors of abuses experienced at work among child laborers. Working out of the child's home in environments such as the streets, in industry, and in service sectors may be especially dangerous for children because, without family present, unrelated adults may easily take advantage of them. Girls are much more vulnerable to discrimination, exploitation, and abuse compared to boys (McKibbin & Humphreys, 2020; Pinzon-Rondon et al., 2010). Alongside deprivation of education and recreation, child labor is more likely to expose girls to the risk of being a victim of sexual abuse than boys (Bradbury-Jones, Morris, Sammut, & Humphreys, 2020; Helton, Carbone, Vaughn, & Cross, 2020). According to studies of Gharaibeh and Hoeman (2003) and Öncü et al. (2013), as children grow older, the likelihood of being abused decreases. That means that it is advantageous for children to avoid full-time jobs as much as possible and, when work is necessary, to engage only when they are older. Young children may have a limited capacity to confront abusive conditions at the work (Rauscher, 2008). Further, living alone or with a single parent was a risk factor of abuses experienced in work environments among child laborers. This is consistent with the existing literature indicating that child laborers with divorced parents or living with their mothers are more likely to be a victim of abuse and exploitation (Öncü et al., 2013). Identification of these risk factors may offer an opportunity for prevention of work environment abuse for labor children.

One strength of this study is that contributes to the existing literature by covering a region (Iran) with few internationally published studies on child maltreatment. Its big sample size also makes it strong. Another strength of the study is that the researchers used a scale they developed and validated for the context of Iran, which makes it more culturally sensitive. Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. As it was cross-sectional, the researchers were not able to examine the causal association between variables. Further, three-quarters of the sample consisted of boys, thereby limiting the sample's representativeness. All participants were recruited through NGOs protecting child laborers in Tehran. This negatively affected the sample's generalizability as many child laborers may not receive services through these centers and many do not live in this city and so, the sample is not nationally representative. Finally, because this study was based on self-report data through in-person interviews, it may have been less likely that respondents would report experience of sexual abuse because of its sensitivity and cultural taboos.

The study has implications for those who work in the areas of child labor. Given the high prevalence of child abuses in working environments, educating employers regarding the abusive behaviors, legal consequences, and the rights of children is critical to improve their understandings of their responsibilities, and consequently to prevent child maltreatment. The government should develop and enforce workplace abuse prevention strategies like regular inspections to keep the employers accountable (Öncü et al., 2013; Rauscher, 2008). It is also necessary for NGOs, volunteers, and social activists who work directly or indirectly with child laborers to be aware of potential abuses experienced in work environments and their risk factors. This will help to provide more effective child abuse prevention, treatment, and advocacy services for child laborers. For example, prioritizing their services, NGOs working with child laborers can allocate more resources for educational empowerment of girl laborers, younger children, children working in out of home jobs, and those living alone or with a single parent. These NGOs and social activists' advocacy efforts can also be targeted to improvement of industry and service sector work environments in which child laborers are more likely to be involved. Most importantly, it is crucial to prevent and eliminate child labor through collaboration between the government and civil society organizations (Makki Alamdari, 2010). Improving social welfare systems through providing conditional cash assistance and health, unemployment, and life insurance is necessary to prevent child labor through protecting poor families (Makki Alamdari, 2010).

For future research, an examination of the abuses experienced in other work sectors such as agriculture will add to a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences and abuses facing child laborers. Another important avenue of inquiry will be an exploration of children's understanding of their own capabilities to confront abusive behavior. This may inform the development of effective practices to empower child laborers to combat abuse in work environments. Finally, because child labor is inherently exploitative and abusive of children, more studies are needed to examine effective advocacy efforts and policy implications in developing countries to prevent or eliminate child labor in all forms.

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Declaration of Competing Interest

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