

# Why do we still have Child Labour?

Read these accounts from child workers. Each one is a reason why we still have child labour today. Can you identify the reasons?

"The inspectors never visit the workshop."

"My parents don't have much. We are poor and I have to help the family."

"I want to go to school but we can't afford it and the nearest school is 10 miles away."

"I'm expected to work. The children in my village have always worked in the fields for generations."

"We do what we are told."

"There is always a lot of work for us. The factory owner always asks if my brother is old enough to start."

"We get paid nothing."

"I'm good at sewing. They say it's because I have nimble fingers."

**How did you do?** Read these reasons to find out more...

### **Poverty**

Poverty is widely considered as the top reason why children work at inappropriate jobs for their ages. Children work because their parents are poor; they have to supplement the family income or provide unpaid labour.

### **Culture & Tradition**

In some countries children are expected to work. Remember it was considered normal for children in Britain to work in the cotton mills from the age of 5!

### **In Demand**

Cotton growing is still very labour intensive and so there is a demand for cheap labour. In other types of work like a family business or farming children might be pulled into work because education isn't valued and work is thought to be of more use.

### **Cheap & Obedient**

The relatively low wages paid to children are often a reason why employers prefer them to adult workers. Some children work unpaid, particularly as domestic workers, in conditions that would be termed as "slavery" if they involved adults. Employers find children more obedient and easier to control. Unlike older workers, they are unlikely to initiate protests or form trade unions.

It is also easy for adults to intimidate children. Employers can force child workers into submission when the children are dependent on them for food, lodging and even emotional support. In many parts of the world, it is still considered acceptable for parents to beat their children. Employers take advantage of the public's acceptance of corporal punishment to beat their child workers as a means of controlling them.

### **Nimble Fingers**

Children are considered to be suited to certain types of work and those who use children to work argue this work cannot be performed better by adults. This is just one of many myths used to justify the numbers of children working today

### **Inadequate Laws**

Even though there are national laws in countries around the world which state that no child under the age of 14 may work, the law is often ignored. More than 130 countries have signed an international convention saying that children may not work full-time before they are 14 or 15 years of age. However, in some of the countries concerned, laws on this are confusing or vague and not enforced. Employers can usually find a loophole to justify a young child working for them. Also in some countries they don't have a uniform birth registration system, so many people don't have birth certificates. Children's ages can't be established for certain and without documentation children may be denied access to state services like schools.

### **The Role of Education**

Not attending school is a cause and an effect of child labour. In many countries education is not free and parents still pay a fee for their children to attend primary school, as well as buying books and providing a school uniform. For a poor family this can be a lot of money, alongside the lack of income for the household while a child is at school.

**Compare** these reasons with reasons why children were employed in the cotton mills in Britain 200 years ago. **Have things changed?**