

**ABSTRACT SUBMISSION - ISCI 2022 “Children’s rights  
and opportunities in an unequal world: research, policy and intervention”**

**The name of the author:** Andrea C. Khan

**Institution, (department):** University of Ottawa - School of International Development  
and Global Studies

**City, (state), country:** Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

**Contact (email):** akhan298@uottawa.ca

**ORCID:**  <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4102-8467>

**Theme**

- Children’s rights indicators

**Subtheme**

- Rights of children and adolescents

**Paper**

**Title:** Business, Human Rights and Child Labour in India’s Cotton Industry

**Abstract:**

**Thematic importance**

Safeguarding children including adolescents from underage labour is key to child development. This study aims to determine how to measure the effect of employment practices in businesses on child labour for research and policy intervention. Over two decades, normative views on what constitutes business responsibility have broadened from corporate social responsibility to the responsibility of conducting business in accordance with human rights. Yet, despite international and national advancements in laws, a rise in voluntary private regulation, and third-party certification standards it remains challenging to halt the trade and import of goods tainted by child and forced labour.

**Introduction and objectives**

Children in developing countries work for businesses operating in global supply chains that produce the goods ending up on our store shelves, including garments. This research on India’s cotton sector highlights challenges of developing children’s rights indicators for monitoring, auditing and certification beyond the first tier of the supply chain. The research question is: How do the employment practices of businesses with or without certification affect child labour risks in the cotton industry “from farm to fabric” in Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat? A business’ child

labour risks are defined as any risks that its operations may lead to adverse human rights impacts related to children below age 18 in employment.

## **Method**

This study includes data collection in India. Surveys and interviews are conducted with (a) businesses including cottonseed, cotton and textile producers, standard-setting bodies and social enterprises. Interviews with (b) child rights organizations, labour groups, social actors and governments, and (c) farmers and labourers collect data on alternative opinions of business and child labour practices. A desk review of business policies and reports examines supplier codes of conduct, child labour and human rights policies, annual reports, corporate social responsibility and sustainability reports. Themes are extracted from each survey, interview and desk review, and compared across business categories and states to validate a package of culturally-relevant indicators to analyze business and child labour practices.

## **Results**

Business and non-business participants shared their perspectives on supply chain management, corporate social responsibility, certification standards, child labour policies, compliance monitoring and disclosure, and the role of government public policies and regulators to reduce child labour risks in communities. These perspectives are in contrast with Tier 1 garment producing companies and the child labour specificity, governance and compliance criteria used by organizations and practitioners to examine business impacts on child labour.

## **Conclusions and implications**

The results of this study can lead to a better reflection of social norms and transnational laws in the selection of child labour indicators to improve business and human rights research and policy interventions. The study will produce empirical evidence on the impact of business and human rights interventions on child labour including hazardous work. The findings will be useful to develop more effective policies and programs, including for jurisdictions that have passed or are considering supply chain legislation, through mandatory disclosure laws (e.g., California, UK, Australia) or human rights due diligence laws (e.g., Canada, France, Netherlands and Germany).