

make them more adept at this work, and that this explains the prevalence of child labour in the carpet industry. Critics - and indeed, weavers themselves - dispute this. They note that it is actually adult weavers who are entrusted with the most elaborate designs, and that it is the docility of child weavers that makes them attractive to loom owners: they can be relied upon to work longer hours under worse conditions and with less remuneration than most adults would accept.

A 1992 study commissioned by India's National Council of Applied Economic Research estimated that 8% of the total work force in the carpet industry were children. A more localized Indian study by the Netherlands Royal Tropical Institute found 13.5% of weavers were children.

b) In what environment or under what conditions is the work done?

Working conditions for weavers vary a great deal between the producing countries as well as within them. However, in the worst cases, child weavers may work 14 - 16 hour days in dark, cramped spaces, several of them shoulder-to-shoulder on one loom. Performing the intricate work under poorly illuminated conditions leads to early deterioration of eyesight, while the lack of ventilation can cause respiratory problems due to inhalation of carpet fibres.

It should be noted that these conditions are not a necessary aspect of carpet manufacture. Many loom owners employ their own children as weavers without subjecting them to the long hours or to conditions that threaten their health. There are also loom owners or factories which operate without child weavers. Where abuse exists, it points to the powerlessness of children in exploitative situations.

There is also a distinction to be made between the work environment in India and Nepal. Weaving in Nepal is carried out in factory-like compounds with large numbers of looms. Forty manufacturers/exporters account for more than 70% of the production. However, in India much of the weaving is carried out in very small operations containing no more than five to ten looms with an estimated 200,000 looms operating in the carpet belt of Uttar Pradesh.

c) What is it about the way children are involved in the industry which makes or does not make intervention to end exploitation necessary or feasible?

The most extreme forms of exploitation in the industry are linked to the system of "bonded" child labour, which amounts to a form of slavery. In India in particular, families from the most disadvantaged tribal areas, or from the lowest castes offer their children to labour recruiters in return for loans. In practice, these children are seldom able to work off the debt since owners can employ a variety of deductions, including at least a year of 'training', to reduce the accumulated worktime of the child. Because the child is usually far from the protection of the family, he/she may also be subjected to serious emotional and physical abuse. UNICEF India estimates that up to half of child labourers in the carpet industry are bonded.

In both India and Nepal this feudal practice has been technically illegal for many years, but it has taken the recent combination of local NGO activism and mounting international public awareness to prompt consideration of outside intervention in order to secure compliance with local and