



ETHIOPIA

Child Labour Analysis in Ethiopia

What are the causes and consequences of child labour in Ethiopia?

Research Manager: Vincenzo Vinci, Social Policy Specialist

Author: Center for Evaluation and Development



EDITORIAL INSIGHT

Reviewers commended this piece of research for providing a comprehensive mixed methods overview of the issue of child labour in Ethiopia and the underlying vulnerability factors associated with this practice. It shows, through extensive statistical analysis, the complexity of factors behind individual and household decisions, including the significance of the educational status of heads of households and the role of gender in decision-making about schooling and child labour.

Reviewers also praised the rich mapping and holistic overview of the policy recommendations outlined by stakeholders drawing upon the qualitative and quantitative research findings, as well as the report's helpful reflections on the role of migration in child labour, a topic about which much remains unknown.



Ethiopia has a rapidly growing economy, a young population and a high prevalence of child labour. In 2015, a national survey found that nearly 43 per cent of children aged 5–17 years in Ethiopia were engaged in some form of employment or family labour.

Child labour is understood to be work that is detrimental to a child's potential, dignity, physical and mental development, and well-being. It has also been shown to be economically inefficient in the longer term, due to the transfer of income from child to parent, at a cost to the child's education and future earning potential.

This research, commissioned by UNICEF Ethiopia, aimed to generate new evidence on child labour, assess the effectiveness of existing strategies and programmes, and propose future policy recommendations. The results provide a comprehensive picture of the drivers and impacts of child labour in Ethiopia.

PURPOSE

Child labour is a multifaceted issue that calls for integrated, evidence-based solutions. Although Ethiopia has ratified international conventions on child rights and has national legislation and policies in place to protect children, the issue remains a major concern. In this context, UNICEF and the Center for Evaluation and Development (C4ED), based in Germany, conducted a mixed methods research study to better understand the vulnerability factors associated with child labour in Ethiopia.

APPROACH

The research draws on analysis of secondary quantitative data and primary qualitative data concerning vulnerable, 'hard-to-reach' children in Ethiopia. A literature review was also conducted to assess previously identified causes and consequences of child labour, and associated welfare implications.

Survey data analysis

Quantitative analysis was largely based on data drawn from the Ethiopia National Child Labour Survey (NCLS) 2015, with additional data captured from the National Labour Force Survey 2013. The research also used descriptive techniques and regression analysis to determine the most important reasons why a child may get involved in child labour. This included examining how factors, such as the child's age, gender and family situation, may affect the degree to which a child is attending school or working, or combining both school and work.

The study also assessed the relationship between the number of hours spent by children on work and at school each week, as well as the effect of child labour on total years of schooling completed overall.

Interviews with vulnerable children

Major household surveys, such as NCLS, tend to overlook some of the most marginalized children, for instance, those who are homeless, have a disability or are not living with a parent. To address this evidence gap, a qualitative analysis was conducted to capture information from hard-to-reach children. In-depth interviews were carried out with girls and boys aged 7–17 years, employed in activities such as waste collection, street vending, domestic work, shoe shining and child prostitution. In addition, stakeholders from federal, regional and local authorities and organizations were consulted.

My grandmother was responsible for raising me. She was very old and had no capacity to help me out ... I am working and living on a street because there is no one to help me out and fulfil the things I need for survival.

– Hadush, aged 10, a street vendor in Mekelle



What could be gained by eliminating child labour?

As a final analysis, the researchers examined the prospective social and economic benefits of eliminating child labour, looking at the likely impacts on both current and future generations of children.

KEY FINDINGS

Poverty is a major determinant

Poverty emerges from the research as a key driver of child labour: overall, children from wealthier households are less likely to be working. The likelihood of a child being involved in family labour increases in rural areas, particularly in households that own more land or livestock.

Interviews with hard-to-reach children also identified poverty and the need to survive and support their families as the most important circumstances associated with child labour.

Age and employment are correlated

As may be expected, the proportion of children in work increases with age. By the age of 14 years (the end of compulsory schooling), 60 per cent of children in Ethiopia are working. Age is significantly related to whether and to what extent a child works. Up to the age of 12 or 13, children are less likely to be working only and are more likely to be attending school only or combining both work and school.

As children get older, they have a greater role in making decisions regarding work. Analysis of the NCLS data revealed that more than 25 per cent of working children aged 14–17 years had made an autonomous decision to work, compared with 10 per cent of working children aged 5–11 years. Nevertheless, more than 70 per cent of working children aged 14–17 reported that their families had made the decision for them – evidence supported by many of the stakeholders interviewed.

Schooling is affected

The literature review confirmed that child labour is well recognized as having a negative impact on a child's education, in terms of both school attendance and academic achievement. This was supported by the quantitative analysis, which showed that children involved in child labour complete fewer years of education and are more likely than their non-working peers to lag behind in school. Of the 25 hard-to-reach children interviewed, just 6 children were enrolled in school, with only 1 child attending full time.

When examining the impact of hours worked on school attendance using quantitative data, however, the researchers found that children who worked up to 20 hours per week were also the children most likely to be going to school. Results thus suggest that policy on child labour in Ethiopia should focus on children who work for in excess of 20 hours per week – since this is the threshold beyond which school attendance drops.

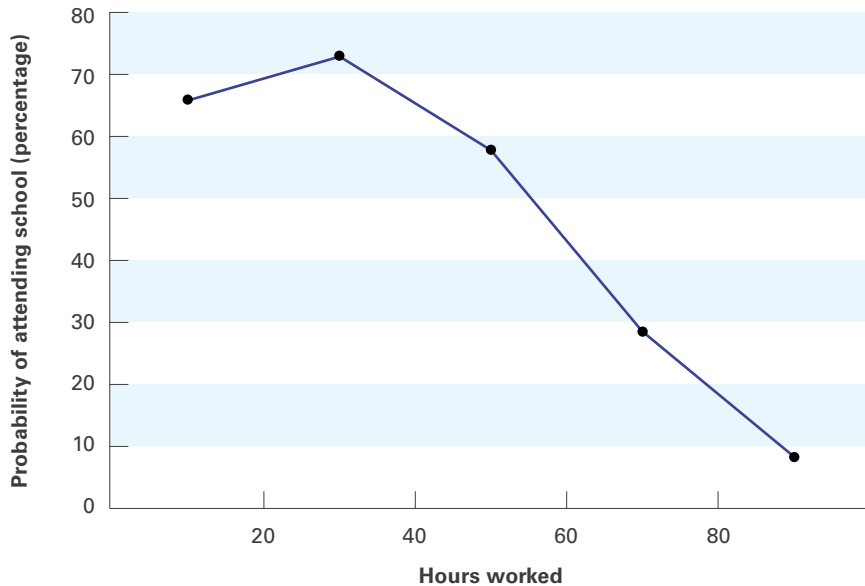


There are no children that work because they want to. They work because of the pressure by their families or because of the difficult situations that they face.

– Employee of the Bureau of Women and Children's Affairs, Addis Ababa



FIGURE 1
School attendance versus hours worked



Source: Designed graph.

Family circumstances have an influence

A child's family background is also a strong determinant of their involvement in child labour. For example, a child living with parents who believe in the importance of education, or with a head of household who has a higher level of education, is more likely to attend school. Also, the older the head of household was when they first started working, the less likely it is that any children in the household will be involved in child labour. This suggests that child labour has intergenerational effects, and that action to reduce child labour now will benefit future generations of children.

Interestingly, children in households headed by a single adult (as a result of bereavement or divorce) are less likely to be involved in child labour. In fact, the lowest rates of child labour were found among children in single-parent households headed by the mother. Empowering women to play a stronger part in household decision-making could therefore contribute to reductions in child labour rates.

Migration also affects child labour. Analysis of the NCLS data revealed that children in households that have migrated, particularly from a rural setting to an urban area, are more likely to be involved in child labour than children in non-migrant households. Many of the children interviewed reported they had moved to the city in search of a better life and that they had aspirations for self-improvement.

Child labour is also a coping mechanism in households facing idiosyncratic shocks such as adverse impacts on household finances or on the health of a family member.

The impact can be long term

Failure to complete school can affect a child's future earning potential, and child labourers face hazards that affect their health, development and well-being. In addition, working children are more likely to suffer injury or illness because of their work.

Children from rural areas sometimes leave their home in search of a better life in the city. Hence, there are no relatives who can take care of them and they opt to work to survive.

- Former street child in Hawassa



Interviews with hard-to-reach children revealed their exposure to verbal, physical and sexual abuse, and to the risk of drug abuse and addiction. In addition, marginalized children faced risks as a result of adverse work conditions, long working hours and dealing with heavy loads or dangerous materials. Long-term consequences included ongoing health issues and disability, anxiety and mental health problems.

Tackling child labour can bring about improved outcomes for children, including improved earning and income-generating capacity through greater participation in education, less illness and fewer injuries, improved mental health, and better family welfare.

BOX 1 **KEY RECOMMENDATIONS TO TACKLE CHILD LABOUR**

- Raise social awareness of child rights and the effects of child labour on children's health and well-being.
- Improve the enforcement of existing laws to prevent and punish abuse of children.
- Support families in meeting their most basic needs.
- Focus on providing high-quality education and making education available to all.
- Address barriers to education to reduce the number of children forced to drop out of school.
- Help parents and children to appreciate that schooling is valuable and can lead to improved living standards.
- Focus on creating jobs that require a more educated labour force to encourage adolescents to remain in education and seek training.

INFLUENCE ON POLICY AND PROGRAMMING

The research maps existing policies and strategies related to child labour in Ethiopia and indicates that action is needed in key areas such as better enforcement of existing laws and new child-centred policies.

The report also calls for action by government and by non-governmental organizations to address the underlying issue of poverty and to support families in meeting their most basic needs - including those of their children. As Ethiopia currently has no education law, it is also necessary to develop legislation guaranteeing equal access to inclusive, high-quality education, irrespective of gender, ethnicity or family background.

LOOKING AHEAD

Findings from this research will be presented at the Child Research and Practice Forum in Ethiopia. Participants in the Forum include non-governmental organizations working with children living or working on the streets, and ministries of the Government of Ethiopia such as the Federal Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, and the Ministry of Women, Children and Youth Affairs. The research results and recommendations will also be discussed with high-level officials at these ministries.

Videos and short animations to raise public awareness of the negative effects of child labour are also in development.



[Download original report](#)

