

IMPACT OF CHILD DOMESTIC LABOUR ON CHILD POVERTY : A CASE STUDY OF LUSAKA CITY IN ZAMBIA

Patrick Chanda, M.Sc.
University of Zambia, Zambia

Abstract

The challenge posed by child domestic labour remains very large in Zambia. Children forced out of school and into labour to help their families to make ends meet are denied the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed for gainful future employment, thereby perpetuating the cycle of poverty in the family. Child labour therefore not only violates children's rights, but also has consequences for social development in Zambia. This study therefore sought to investigate the impact of child domestic labour on child poverty in Lusaka City of Zambia. The study employed an exploratory qualitative case study design. Data collection methods included semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Child domestics, parents and social workers were purposively sampled for study. Snowball was also applied to locate children. The results of the study showed that children who engage in domestic work come from households affected by HIV/AIDS, and families whose income and education levels are very low. Child domestic employment perpetuates child poverty, resulting in cycle of poverty among children and their families because it deprives children of schooling opportunities and lifelong skills which they can use to fight poverty. Inadequate government legislation poses a challenge to address child poverty and protect the rights of children against child labour and abuse. In order to address poverty and other vulnerabilities that lead children to engage in domestic work, child-sensitive social protection policies and poverty alleviation programmes should be devised by the Zambian government.

Keywords: Child, domestic labour, poverty, rights

Introduction

Child domestic labour is one of the most widespread and exploitative forms of child work in the world today, and is also one of the most difficult to tackle (Blagbrough, 2008). Child domestic workers may be especially prone to exploitation and abuse due to the invisibility and inaccessibility of the work setting. To this effect, the ILO has identified a number of hazards to which domestic workers are particularly vulnerable. Some of the most common risks children face in domestic service include, long and tiring working days; carrying heavy loads; handling dangerous items, such as knives, axes and hot pans; inadequate food, and humiliating, inhuman or degrading treatment, including physical and verbal violence, and sexual abuse. These hazards need to be seen in association with the denial of fundamental rights of the children such as access to education and health care, the right to rest, leisure, play and recreation (ILO, 2011). Child domestic work is therefore a child labor issue, as well as a children's rights issue. It is a child labor issue as it involves economic exploitation and hazardous working conditions. It is a children's rights issue because the nature and condition of the work is unfavorable for child development (Flores-Oebanda, 2006).

Empirical evidence (ILO, 2011) has asserted that there are many root causes of domestic child labour, include poverty and its feminization, social exclusion, lack of

education, gender and ethnic discrimination, violence suffered by children in their own homes, displacement, rural-urban migration and the loss of parents due to diseases such as HIV/AIDS. The available research (UNICEF, 1999) suggests that child domestic workers most commonly come from poor, often large, rural families. However, other factors that determine the likelihood of children becoming domestic workers must also be taken into account, such as orphanhood.

In Zambia, the challenge posed by child labour remains very large (ILO, UNICEF and World Bank Group Report, 2012). Empirical evidence (Oyaide, 2000) has shown that in Zambia child domestics are often exploited, maltreated and sexually, physically and psychologically abused. They miss out on schooling and skill training opportunities, family life, play and recreation. The children generally get very low wages, and work very long and irregular hours (Matoka 1994). The implications are that the work is harmful and not in the best interest of the children involved. Furthermore, it is harmful on the long run to the society at large because it generates a reservoir of future unskilled labour force (Oyaide, 2000).

Despite that empirical studies (Oyaide, 2000; and Matoka, 1994) have revealed the causes of child domestic work, conditions of work and gender dimension of child domestic work, none of them have unearthed the impact of child domestic labour on child poverty in Zambia. This study thus sought to investigate and analyze the impact of child domestic work on child poverty. The findings of the study would generate interest and create awareness about the impact of child domestic work on child poverty among child rights advocates, social workers, policy makers and the public. In this regard, the following research questions guided the study: (1) What is the impact of domestic work on the livelihoods of children and their families? (2) What are the challenges affecting the protection of the rights of child domestic workers?

Research Design

This study employed an exploratory case study approach and qualitative research study to investigate the impact of child domestic work on child poverty. Key (1997) affirms that qualitative research study produces more in-depth, comprehensive information and seeks to understand people's interpretations, perceptions and lived experiences. Zainal (2007) asserts that the case study method enables a researcher to closely examine the data within a specific context, and thus gives in-depth information on the subject under investigation.

This study therefore employed the case study approach and qualitative research study because the design enabled the researcher to explore and examine in-depth the lived experiences of child domestic workers in Lusaka City of Zambia. More so, qualitative case study allowed the researcher to collect data using different methods (such as interviews and document review) so as to provide the complete story (Neale, Thapa, & Boyce, 2006). Additionally, the approach allowed the researcher to use different sources of information (such as child domestics, parents and social workers) in order to obtain in-depth information about the impact of child domestic labour on child poverty.

Sample Size and Sampling Design

Purposive sampling was employed because the researcher intended to get insightful information about the impact of child domestic labour on child poverty. Snowball sampling was also employed as a back up to purposive sampling because child domestics were very difficult to locate in private homes in which they work. Bryman (2008) asserts that with this approach to sampling, the researcher makes initial contact with a small group of subjects who are relevant to the research topic and then uses these to establish contacts with others.

Mark (2010) asserts that samples for qualitative studies are generally much smaller than those used in quantitative studies. According to Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007), sample

sizes in qualitative research should not be too large as it may be difficult for the researcher to extract thick and rich data. Marshall (1996) affirms that an appropriate sample size for a qualitative study is one that adequately answers the research question. In this study, the researcher purposively sampled 10 live-out child domestic workers on the basis of their experiences. Specifically, children aged between 10 and 14 years were sampled for the study since the Zambian Constitution and the Employment Act set the minimum age for employment at 15. The study also purposively selected 9 parents and 5 social workers on the basis of their knowledge of child domestic labour. This sample size was easy to manage during data analysis since the study was qualitative in nature.

Data Collection Methods

Data collection methods included semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were used to collect data from child domestic workers, parents and social workers. Kvale (1996) asserts that qualitative research interviews enable researchers to understand something from the subjects' point of view and to uncover the meaning of their experiences. Interviews also allow people to convey to others a situation from their own perspective and in their own words. Berry (1999) also asserts that in-depth interviewing is a type of interview which researchers use to elicit information in order to achieve a holistic understanding of the interviewee's point of view or situation. This method therefore allowed the researcher to ask open-ended questions, probe and ask follow questions in order to solicit for in-depth information from participants. This method also allowed the research participants to freely express their views, feelings, opinions and share experiences. The face-to-face interview also enabled the researcher to take field notes during the interviews.

The researcher also conducted document study to collect data on the impact of child domestic work on child poverty. Payne and Payne (2004) describe the documentary method as the techniques used to categorize, investigate, interpret and identify the limitations of physical sources, most commonly written documents whether in the private or public domain (Mogalakwe, 2006). In the current research, official and public documents, including reports from the Zambian government, articles, newspapers and organisational documents were used to give the researcher a deeper understanding of the subject under investigation. Document analysis provided access to empirical evidence based on the earlier studies carried on child domestic work in Zambia and other parts of the world. It also enabled the researcher to formulate and refine research questions based on the existing knowledge on child domestic labour.

Data Analysis

Thematic content analysis was used as a method for analyzing qualitative data in order to allow the researcher to extract conceptual categories of data with similar meaning. This is called meaning categorization according to Kvale (1996). In this regard, categories were established, resulting into content themes, consistent with the value of thematic content analysis in qualitative methods. Categories of data with similar meaning generated themes that were used to interpret data based on research questions. The themes summarized the meaning of the data which addressed the purpose of the study during interpretation of data.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues such as informed consent, confidentiality and consequences for the interviewee should be taken into account with any qualitative interview (Kvale, 1996). In this study, ethical issues were considered when carrying out this study as all the research participants were informed about the purpose of the investigation and the features of research

design. Informed consent was obtained from individual children and their parents in writing in the local language which research participants understood better. The researcher also ensured that confidentiality and anonymity were employed in which the information collected was strictly used for research purposes. More so, identities of children, parents and key informants were not disclosed.

Results

Effects of Child Domestic Labour on the Livelihoods of Children and their Families

The study investigated the effects of child domestic labour on the livelihoods of children and their families. Data from the study revealed that child domestic work perpetuates poverty among children and their families because it deprives them of opportunities to go to school and acquire lifelong skills. Consequently, domestic work results in capability poverty as children are deprived of capabilities or vocational skills which they can use to fight poverty and become socially and economically empowered. Social workers who participated in the study said that child domestic work also results in income poverty since the income that children get through domestic employment is not enough to sustain the livelihoods of children and their large families. Hence, children and their families hardly survive as they are not able to meet all their basic needs. In this regard, child domestic work results in family poverty, and eventually families remain in the vicious cycle of poverty. One of the social workers remarked:

“Poverty becomes a vicious cycle because children are not going to school, and therefore they will not get education and appreciate the importance of education. This is because they consider work as the best opportunity to earn a living.”

In terms of gender, the study revealed that most of the girls drop out of school, while others never even enroll for education because of poverty. This leads to high illiteracy levels in the country, child poverty and feminization of poverty. There is feminization of poverty in the sense that more girls than boys drop out of school to engage in domestic work in order to earn a living. There is also child poverty because children drop out of school and engage in exploitative domestic work which doesn't give them enough money. In this regard, children's rights are affected in that children are forced to do domestic work for the upkeep of the family.

However, the study also revealed that domestic work helps to keep children away from begging in the streets and indulging in vices such as stealing, child prostitution and drug abuse. Therefore, domestic work acts as a source of livelihood for most of the children from poor family backgrounds, especially orphans and vulnerable children who have no other means of sustaining their livelihood. One of the parents remarked:

“My child has been forced to work because I am not employed and we have no money to pay house rentals, buy food, clothes and other basic needs. We have no any other means to sustain our livelihoods apart from sending children to go and work as domestic workers in private homes.”

Responses of child domestic workers confirmed that domestic work enables children to earn money in order to buy food, clothes and meet other day to day requirements. It also emerged from the study that child domestic work helps children and their families to survive as they are able to earn a living even though domestic work is exploitative and unfavourable for children's psychosocial wellbeing and development. Therefore, child domestic labour acts as a buffer for poverty reduction for poor households in high density areas of Lusaka City from where child domestics are recruited.

Challenges of Protecting the Rights of Child Domestic Workers

The objective was to examine the challenges of protecting the rights of child domestics. It emerged from this study that inadequate government policies on education and child protection pose a challenge to address child poverty and protect the rights of children against child labour and abuse. For example, one of the social workers said:

“The biggest challenge faced by government and NGOs is that government policies and programmes on social protection are inadequate to cover orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) who opt for domestic work as a means of sustaining their livelihoods at the expense of schooling. More so, the policy or legislation on universal primary education is not effectively implemented by government and NGOs.”

All the social workers who took part in the study indicated that education for all in terms of access and quality is not effectively implemented through existing educational and child policies. There is therefore no opportunity for orphans and vulnerable children to access education because school fees are very high. More so, there are few facilities to cater for a large number of vulnerable children. In the end, these children opt for domestic work to earn a living. To this effect, it is the inadequate legislation on education and child protection which greatly hinders the protection and promotion of children’s rights in Zambia. On a related issue, one of the social workers revealed that protecting children from the worst forms of child labour and promoting their rights pose a challenge since the welfare state in Zambia collapsed when state owned companies were privatized. To this effect, the government has left the huge responsibility of taking care of children to NGOs which do not have the capacity or resources to deal with child labour related issues.

The findings of the study also revealed that the social structure or the extended family system and its norms and values have been eroded. Thus, families and communities, especially in urban areas no longer take the responsibility to take care of children of their relatives once their parents die. This leaves children alone without financial and social support. As a result of lack of family and government structures to deal with child labour and promote child welfare, children are left at the mercy of the community, more so to fend for themselves.

In view of the above, one of the social workers remarked:

“The collapse of the welfare state in Zambia, as well as the disintegration of extended family system due to poverty and HIV/AIDS makes it difficult to address child labour issues in Zambia.”

It is clear from the above statements that social safety nets (such as the extended family system) have disintegrated because of liberalized economy, high poverty levels and HIV/AIDS which deprived children and their families of breadwinners. In this regard, the high prevalence of HIV/AIDS coupled with high levels poverty pose as a major challenge for the Zambian government and NGOs to deal with child domestic labour in Zambia.

Discussion

Effects of Child Domestic Labour on the Livelihoods of Children and their Families

In this study, it was established that child domestic work perpetuates child poverty and eventually results in family poverty because it deprives children of opportunities to go to school and acquire lifelong skills which they can use to move out of poverty. Therefore, poor family background and lack of vocational skills put children in the position of vulnerability and force them to occupy low class jobs that exacerbate poverty in their families. The implications of child domestic work for child welfare is that children are subjected to poor terms of employment and working conditions which deny them the right to better salaries, social and economic security. Hence, children are trapped in the vicious cycle of family

poverty. In this regard, child domestic work is a violation of children's right to adequate standard of living as children and their families struggle to earn a living. They hardly survive because their monthly income is not enough to carter for large families. In light of the above, domestic work perpetuates socio-economic inequalities and injustice among children. This in turn results in children becoming vulnerable to various forms of abuse, discrimination, marginalization and oppression in society.

Furthermore, results of the study showed that domestic work exacerbates feminization of poverty because it deprives many girls of the right to education which is the key to enjoyment of other rights. There is feminization of poverty in the sense that more girls than boys drop out of school to engage in domestic work in order to earn a living. In this regard, domestic work cannot help these children to move out of poverty as they remain illiterate and work in these low class jobs for the rest of their lives. Child domestic labour therefore jeopardizes children's rights, including the right to education, adequate standard of living, psychosocial wellbeing and development. To this effect, domestic work is not in the best interests of the children because it denies them schooling opportunities and skills training which they can use to fight poverty. The implication is that many girls remain poor as they lack education and vocational skills which they can use to find better employment with higher income. This therefore results in gender, social and economic inequalities among girls in society. This also has negative consequences on the social development of the country since majority of the girls and their families remain in abject poverty.

It is clear from these findings that child domestic work perpetuates child poverty and eventually families remain in the vicious cycle of poverty. In this regard, domestic work results in capability poverty as children are deprived of schooling opportunities and lifelong skills which they can use to fight poverty. More so, child domestic labour exacerbates income poverty since the income that children get through domestic employment is not enough to sustain the livelihoods of children and their large families. Capability poverty is understood as "capability deprivation, which expresses itself in restriction in freedoms or capabilities, inequality and denial of human rights" as conceptualized by Sen (2001, p. 366). Child domestic work therefore limits children's freedoms, that is, better opportunities, choices, privileges, and the full development of their capabilities which they can use to realize their aspirations. In this case, children do not have the capabilities or opportunities to engage in better employment which can enable them to get enough money and have a sustained livelihood. Basing on Sen's capability approach, child domestics are incapacitated by lack of education and vocational skills to fight abject poverty. The only opportunity or option that children have is domestic work which acts as source of livelihood for them and their families. Hence, children and their families hardly survive as they are not able to earn enough money to meet all their basic needs.

The results of this study were corroborated by empirical evidence provided by ILO, UNICEF, and the World Bank Group Report (2012). The evidence indicated that child labour not only harms the welfare of individual children, but also slows broader national poverty reduction and development efforts. Children forced out of school and into labour to help their families to make ends meet are denied the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed for gainful future employment, thereby perpetuating the cycle of poverty in the family. Moreover, child labour can lead to social vulnerability and social marginalization, and can permanently impair the attainment of personal and productive potential, in turn influencing lifetime patterns of employment and earnings, and generating important constraints to national development goals. This has a long term bearing on children's future aspirations and social development in the country.

Notwithstanding the empirical results that child labour perpetuates child poverty, it is also established that work enables children and their families to earn a living as they are able

to find money to meet their day to day needs. Thus, without engaging in domestic work, children and their households can hardly survive. In this regard, domestic labour enables them to meet their basic needs though it is not in a sustainable way. The findings of the current research therefore revealed that domestic work acts as a source of livelihood for most of the children from poor family backgrounds, especially orphans and vulnerable children who have no other means of sustaining their livelihood. Domestic work therefore helps to keep children away from begging in the streets and indulging in vices such as stealing and child prostitution. Domestic work also enables children to find money to pay school fees and buy materials required for school. Further, single mothers, widows and old grandmothers look at children as the only helpers or people who can help in bringing income in the households. In this case, child domestic work helps children and their families to survive as they are able to earn a living, although domestic work is considered to be abusive and exploitative form of child labour by various stakeholders such as governments, civil society organisations and UN Agencies. Consequently, child domestic labour can be seen as the only option for vulnerable children and their families to make ends meet. The earlier research conducted by Oyaide (2000) in Zambia corroborated the findings of the current study. The empirical results showed that the fundamental reason why children are engaged in domestic work is because child domestic labour is one of the ways that families cope with poverty. Therefore, child domestic work is good as it removes children from streets and destitution. As a result, some tend to regard it as a better alternative to poverty and destitution.

However, domestic work is not in the best interest of the child because it jeopardizes children's right to adequate standard of living, health and psychosocial wellbeing as guaranteed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2009). Domestic work therefore perpetuates child and family poverty as it deprives children of their right to education which is the key to success and enjoyment of other rights. Moreover, the money that children earn through domestic work is not enough to address abject poverty that affects households and communities where these child domestics come from. To this effect, domestic work makes children to be trapped in the vicious cycle of abject poverty.

Challenges of Protecting the Rights of Child Domestic Workers

Articles 32 and 36 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) stipulate that children should be protected from work that is dangerous or harmful to their health, education, welfare and development. Additionally, article 4 states that governments have a responsibility to take all available measures to make sure children's rights are respected, protected and fulfilled (UNICEF, 2009, pp. 79-80). More so, article 26 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) stipulates that children have the right to help from the government through social protection if they are poor or in need. In this regard, the best interests of the child must be the primary concern in making policies, programmes, laws or decisions that may affect children's psychosocial needs and development. However, the results of the current study revealed that the Zambian government and civil society organisations are faced with challenges in their quest to protect children from child domestic work that is harmful to their health, education, welfare, adequate standard of living, psychosocial wellbeing and development. The findings showed that inadequate government policies on education and child protection is the biggest challenge for the NGOs and government institutions to address child labour, abuse and neglect. In this regard, the existing policy on child protection doesn't give maximum protection to children since the legal and policy frameworks for coordination, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of child protection and welfare programmes are not adequately addressed. The empirical work by Mulili (2010) on the psychosocial consequences of domestic labour on children in Kenya affirmed the findings of this study.

The evidence indicated that there are major gaps in eliminating child domestic labour due to inadequate implementation of the child labour policy. More so, there is a gap in providing viable alternatives such as formal and informal education that would empower child workers with vocational skills.

Further, the findings of the current study revealed that another major gap in protecting children's rights is that the Zambian government has left the huge responsibility of taking care of children to NGOs which do not have the capacity or resources to deal with child labour related issues. Most of the vulnerable children and their households do not receive maximum social protection from the Zambian government despite that poverty levels are so high among people, especially child-headed households and homes headed by widows and old grandparents. Therefore, absence of social protection policies and programmes contribute to social and economic inequalities, injustice, exploitation and violations of children's human rights. This is because children who are the most vulnerable members of society are not protected by government through its policies and programmes that can address their vulnerability. In this way, children are left alone to fend for themselves since the social structure or the extended family system and its norms and values have been eroded. Mainly, social safety nets such as the welfare state and the extended family system have disintegrated because of liberalized economy, high poverty levels and HIV/AIDS which deprived children and their families of breadwinners who used to provide for them.

In the Zambian society beset with high levels of poverty and HIV/AIDS, families and communities, especially in urban areas no longer take the responsibility to take care of children of their relatives once their parents die. This leaves children alone without financial and social support. As a result of lack of family and government structures to deal with child labour and promote child welfare, children are left at the mercy of the community, more so to fend for themselves. Above all, the empowerment of children orphaned by HIV/AIDS has not been addressed adequately, and hence children are left alone without support. To this effect, children decide to work at tender age, while some become street kids and homeless, and end up engaging in ant-social vices. In this case, children are neglected and their rights are violated since they are left alone without protection from exploitation and abuse. To this effect, children take up domestic work to earn income in order to meet their basic needs, though their income is not adequate to sustain their livelihoods

From the findings of this study, it is established that the biggest challenge faced by government and civil society organisations in protecting children from child labour is lack of effective implementation of child labour policies and programmes. More so, effective educational policies that would promote free compulsory education and provide children with lifelong skills which they can use to fight poverty are absent in Zambia. Therefore, the only way children can be protected from exploitative forms of child domestic labour is to put in place inclusive educational policies, as well as child-sensitive social protection policies and programmes that would cover all orphans and vulnerable children in Zambia. By and large, the government should take all necessary measures to ensure the best interests of the child. More so, financial support as well as skills training should be given to parents or guardians whose children are engaged in domestic work so that they can be self reliant and lead sustained livelihoods.

Conclusion

It has been established from this study that child domestics come from households affected by HIV/AIDS, and families whose income and education levels are very low. It is also revealed established that child domestic labour perpetuates child poverty because it deprives children of schooling opportunities and lifelong skills which they can use to fight

poverty. However, domestic work acts as a source of livelihood for most of the children from poor families, especially orphans and vulnerable children who have no other means of sustaining their livelihood. Thus, domestic labour acts as a means to earn ends meet for children and their large families. Largely, it is established from the study that domestic work exacerbates feminization of poverty because it deprives many girls of the right to education which is the key to enjoyment of other rights. The implication is that these children remain poor as they lack education and vocational skills which they can use to find better employment with higher income. This therefore results in gender, social and economic inequalities among girls in society.

It is also discovered from this study that the biggest challenge faced by government in protecting children from child labour is lack of effective educational policies that would promote free compulsory education and provide children with lifelong skills which they can use to fight poverty. Therefore, the only way children can be protected from exploitative forms of child domestic labour is to put in place inclusive educational policies, as well as child-sensitive social protection policies and programmes that would cover all orphans and vulnerable children.

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