

Gender Differences in Child Labour in Ethiopia

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Abstract

Child labour has a strong link with children's well-being, education, production system and culture of the society. It also has implications on the country's level of development. This paper looks at gender differences in child labour in Ethiopia having analysed data obtained from 77,008 children of age 5 to 17 included in the 2013 National Labour Force Survey. Findings of the study reveal that there are statistically significant differences in child labour in Ethiopia across gender, age group, educational level, living arrangements and region of residence. Girls are involved in labour quite often than boys due to heavy labour demand at the household level among females than males. Given the fact that gender differences in child labour have impact on girls' academic achievements and active participation in acquiring knowledge whilst in the school system, there is an urgent call for devising mechanisms of introducing and improving household labour saving technologies.

INTRODUCTION

About 264 million children (comprising 16.7 per cent of those aged 5 to 17 years) took part in economic activities in the world in 2012 (Diallo, Etienne and Mehran, 2013). Africa and Asia together account for over 90 per cent of the total child employment. Child labour is especially prevalent in rural areas where the capacity to enforce minimum age requirements for schooling and work is lacking (Naeem, Shaukat, and Ahmed, 2011). A study conducted on determinants of child labour in developing countries has shown that child labour has strong link with GDP per capita, life expectancy, and GDP growth rate of a given country (Saad-Lessler, 2010). For that reason, children in developing countries are commonly involved in fetching water, firewood, and dung both for household usage and for sale to supplement family income (Woldehanna et al, 2005.). Apart from engaging in tiresome work that takes much of their energy, children's work exposes them to danger as walking being unaccompanied far from the home has the potential of exposing them to violence and sexual abuse as well as wild animals attack (Woldehanna et al, 2005). In addition, involvement of children in work denies them the liberty of benefiting from education, protecting their health and safety, undergoing growth and development having enjoyed rest and recreation that every child must have as a component of human rights (Sorsa and Abera, 2006). The effect of child labour does not only affect the child but it has an impact on maternal health and child mortality (Leinberger-Jabari, Parker and Oberg, 2005).

Child right advocates in developing countries particularly in Africa and Asia (Abebe and Bessell, 2011) argue that child labour shall be subsumed in the context of integrated approach of development and attention must be paid to the reduction of child work by recognizing the socio-economic, culture, politics and family settings that perpetuate child labour. Different reasons were of course described as factors prolonging child labour in developing countries

like Ethiopia. A research from three major towns of Ethiopia reveal that poverty (60.7%), loss of parents (17.3%), disagreement with parents (8.4%), parental separation (6.5%), shortage of food (5.3%) and displacement due to war (1.5%) are major causes of child work (Sorsa and Abera, 2006).

The reasons behind child work are many and pervasive in the context of developing countries like Ethiopia. Specifically, child work is a serious problem for Ethiopia that has a population size of over 90 million, limited employment opportunities and the economy is highly dependent on subsistence agriculture (PRB, 2015). Consequently, a better understanding of the nature and diversity of gender in labour force participation at early ages could be essential to mitigate the impact of child work.

Even though efforts were made to account for child work in Ethiopia (Bequele and Boyden 1988), sex-disaggregated data on Children's work is scanty and very little is known about the gender perspectives of child work. This study, therefore, aims at identifying socio-economic and demographic factors affecting children's work. It specifically attempts to indicate the levels and patterns of children's work in Ethiopia and identify socio-economic and demographic determinants of children's work in the country.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Globally, the issue of child labour is contentious for two main reasons. Firstly, many children in developing countries work illegally despite the existence of laws that prohibits work of minors. Secondly, children's work involves abuse and exploitation as some of them work under difficult circumstances (Bequele and Boyden 1988, Invernizzi 2003). A World Bank report (2013), for instance, noted that nearly one-tenth of the total child population (i.e., 264 million children aged 5-17 years) had involved in child labour in 2012, and some of these children were working under harmful and exploitive conditions (Rogers and Swinnerton, 2002). The fundamental question with regard to child work is, therefore, why children engaged in work and what factors are associated with child work including the gender disparities.

According to the model developed by Basu and Van (1998), there are two fundamental assumptions explaining the rationale behind child work. Firstly, the household subsistence requirements cannot be met with the substitutes at the household level and these calls for involvement of children into the labour market. Secondly, adult wage in developing countries often falls to the point where their earning could not cover household earnings without the income generated by the children (Anker, 2000). In this regard, it is possible to argue that children living in rural areas participate in the labour force since there is heavy demand for labour at household level whilst the enforcing factors among urban children could be the insufficiency of periodic earnings of households heads or other adult members unless it is supplemented by the labour or financial contributions of children living in the household. Contrary to the argument of Anker (2000), Rogers and Swinnerton (2002), however, constructed a model of abusive child labour that shows parents' imperfect information about the employment opportunities of their children and associated working conditions. Children's work for the latter group increases consumption of their leisure time than contributing to the increment of goods and services that improve the wellbeing of the society at large. Hence, it shall be banned for the mere reason that it does not contribute to economic wellbeing but destruct human capital development. Both of the models, in one way or another, explain

about parental reasons for child work, and its importance to determine the status of child work. Their reference group, however, is largely untouched by the experience of well educated, and the influence of other family members as well as socio-cultural factors that dictate the involvement of children in work.

Another group of child-work analysts such as Jenks (1996), James and Prout (1997) and Grier (2006), on the other hand, argue that children's work is highly linked to the social and cultural context in which it is operating. According to them, children's work shall be understood from the perspectives of different material and cultural conditions as well as expectations at the household and societal levels in accordance with the age, gender, capability, birth order and the like of the children involved. Children's work is rather seen as an integral part of their everyday life, and is taken as crucial for the sustainability of family livelihoods. Any effort to prevent children from working, according to them, is tantamount to jeopardizing the family life and their existence (Bourdillon, 2006; Nieuwenhuys, 1994). Hence, child work is a prerequisite of entrance into the adult world that increases their competence and opportunities to be part of the social system. Advocating for this, Bass (2004), for instance, indicated that in sub-Saharan Africa children's work in the family holdings is seen as part of the household production and an on-going process of training and socialization of the cultural heritages. Hence, in Sub-Saharan Africa, children's participation in work is vital not only to maintain subsistence economies but also ensuring the continuity of certain cultural skills. Given the low status of women in Sub-Saharan Africa and gender inequality in the continent, it is possible to expect wider involvement of girls in work than boys for there is gender bias favouring sons to daughters. Haile and Haile (2012), for instance, found out that in Ethiopia male children are given priorities of being sent to school than their female counterparts. The gender disparity in work could, therefore, be a manifestation of the cultural setting of the traditional societies like Ethiopia than a reflection of competence or capabilities to undertake a given task. Despite explaining child work as integral part of the socio-cultural and production system of the societies in the developing world, the socio-cultural perspective of child labour, however, ignores the right of children to protection from exploitation (Abebe, 2009).

This study, therefore, considers both the household economic and socio-cultural rationales of child work in developing countries. Though both of the theoretical explanations have their own shortcomings to totally explain the functional relationship between child work and its determinants, they have the potential to partly explain the reasons behind children's engagement in work during childhood ages.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

This study uses the 2013 National Labour Force Survey (NLFS) of Ethiopian data set on children's work among those in the 5 to 17 age group. Data collection on children's work status was lowered down to five years since children in rural and urban areas of Ethiopia engage in collection of fire wood, looking after cattle, shoe shining, street vendor, petty trading and the like at their early age (CSA, 2014). A structured household survey questionnaire was used to measure variables of child work and the socio-demographic characteristics of children and the households in which they were living. The NLFS data set was preferred to others due to larger sample size on child work and detailed information on individual child and household socio-economic characteristics.

The dependent variable of the study was children's work status during the survey. A dummy variable was coded as 1 if the child was working and 0 otherwise. The key independent variables were sex of child (male vs female) while other explanatory variables include age group of children (5-9, 10-14, 15-17), migration status (migrant vs non-migrant), living arrangement (with both parents, only single parent and non-parents), school attendance at the time of the survey (attending vs not attending), educational level (no education, first primary cycle (1-4 grades) and second primary cycle (5-8 grades)), place of residence (rural vs urban) and regional administrations¹ (the nine national regional states and two city administration that are functional at the moment). As Addis Ababa City Administration does not have respondents living in rural areas, parallel models were fitted to capture the effects of place of residence and region separately.

The proportion of working children was cross-tabulated by explanatory variables to illustrate the background characteristics of respondents while the relative risk of being engaged in work was estimated using binary logistic regression model. Accordingly, the odds ratio that shows the probability that the child was working as compared to that who was not working was used to interpret the results of this study.

RESULTS

From a total of 77,008 children between age 5 and 17 years included in the analysis, half of them were females and 64.3% of the girls were working. There was considerable variation in the percentage of working children by demographic and socio-economic characteristics of children and the community in which they were living. About three-fourth of the children in the 15-17 age group were working while the proportion was reduced to 48.3% among those in the 5-9 age group (Table 1). The proportion of working children among migrants was 67.5% compared to 62.0% among non-migrants.

As shown in Table 1, the prevalence of working was the lowest for children living with both parents (61.8%) followed by those living with single parent (62.1%) and the highest among those living with non-parents (68.7%). Similarly, the proportion of children working is higher (65.4%) among children not attending school at the time of the survey compared to those not attending schooling by then (61.5%). The percentage of working children, however, increases with educational attainment of children probably due to the effect of age as late admission to school is common in Ethiopia (Shibeshi, 2010). Nearly 60% of children without education take part in work while the proportion went up to 63% among those attaining first primary cycle (grade 1-4) and reached 67.7% among those having at least second primary cycle (grade 5 and above). The positive relationship that prevails at the moment might disappear in the multivariate analysis whilst controlling for age.

The vulnerability of children to work is the highest in rural areas where 70.7% of the children were working. Different from this, only about half (52.7%) of the children were working in urban areas (Table 1). Highest rate of children's working (74.6%) was observed in Oromia region, followed by Dire Dawa (73.6%) and Amhara (72.9%) regions whilst the lowest prevalence of work among children was observed in Addis Ababa City Administration (26.2%) and Gambella region (46.0%).

¹ The current Ethiopian Government is based on federalism that takes ethnicity as a major classification of regions forming the national regional states.

Table 1 – Work status of children by sex and other characteristics: 2013

	Number of cases	Children's work Status	
		Working	Not Working
Sex			
Male	38391	61.2	38.8
Female	38617	64.3	35.7
Age Group			
5-9	31919	48.3	51.7
10-14	29827	72.0	28.0
15-17	15262	74.9	25.1
Migration Status			
Migrant	9958	67.5	32.5
Non-migrant	67050	62.0	38.0
Living Arrangement			
With both parents	52091	61.8	38.2
With single parent	14626	62.1	37.9
With non-parent	10291	68.7	31.3
School attendance			
Currently attending	52973	61.5	38.5
Not attending	24035	65.4	34.6
Child Education			
No Education	30755	59.6	40.4
First Cycle (1-4)	27304	63.0	37.0
Second cycle and above (5+)	18599	67.7	32.3
Place of residence			
Urban	34007	52.7	47.3
Rural	43001	70.7	29.3
Region			
Tigray	5964	58.5	41.5
Afar	2753	57.4	42.6
Amhara	13199	72.9	27.1
Oromiya	17953	74.6	25.4
Somali	4768	55.1	44.9
Benishangul Gumuz	3197	57.1	42.9
SNNP	14989	63.5	36.5
Gambella	3399	46.0	54.0
Harari	2206	59.4	40.6
Addis Ababa	6143	26.2	73.8
Dire Dawa	2437	73.6	26.4
Total	77008	62.8	37.2

Table 2 depicts about the different models predicting the likelihood of children's involvement in work. Following the pattern in the bivariate analysis, results of the multivariate analysis also confirmed that girls involve in work more often than boys (Table 2 Model I - IV). Being a female child significantly increased the odds of working at least by 15% ($p < 0.001$). The effect is statistically significant and consistent despite increasing the number of variables to be controlled for under different scenarios. Age of children is also found to have a positive relationship with taking part in the labour force. Compared with those in the 10-14 age group, younger children in the 5-9 age group were at least 68% less likely to work ($P < 0.001$) while

older children (i.e. those in the 15-17 age group) were at least 21% more likely to work ($P < 0.001$) (Table 2 Model II – IV). Migration appears to have an impact on child's work status. Being a migrant increased the odds of child's work by 52% ($p < 0.001$) than non-migrants (Table 2 Model II and III). The effect of migration was, however, vanished when region that reflects the cultural setting of the society in which the child lives was entered into the model (Table 2 Model IV).

Table 2 – Regression results of the effects of socio-demographic factors on child work in Ethiopia: 2013

Variables	Model I	Model II	Model III	Model IV
Sex				
Male				
Female	1.15***(.02)	1.16***(.02)	1.16***(.02)	1.18***(.02)
Age Group				
5-9		0.32***(.02)	0.32***(.02)	0.28***(.02)
10-14		1.00		
15-17		1.21***(.02)	1.32***(.02)	1.45***(.03)
Migration Status				
Migrant		1.52***(.03)	1.52***(.03)	1.04 (.03)
Non-migrant				
Living Arrangement				
With both parents				
With single parent		1.06** (.02)	1.07** (.02)	0.99 (.02)
With non-parent		1.28***(.03)	1.29***(.03)	1.25***(.03)
School attendance				
Currently attending		0.90***(.02)		
Not attending				
Child Education				
No Education			1.07**(.02)	1.12***(.02)
First Cycle (1-4)				
Second cycle and above (5+)			0.86***(.03)	0.72***(.03)
Place of residence				
Urban				
Rural		2.92***(.02)	2.97***(.02)	
Region				
Tigray				1.00
Afar				0.96 (.05)
Amhara				1.96***(.03)
Oromiya				2.24***(.03)
Somali				0.92 (.04)
Benishangul Gumuz				0.98 (.05)
SNNP				1.25***(.03)
Gambella				0.59***(.05)
Harari				1.07 (.05)
Addis Ababa				0.20***(.04)
Dire Dawa				2.17***(.06)
Constant	1.56*** (.01)	1.37***(.03)	1.26***(.03)	2.14***(.03)
-2 log likelihood	101608.9	92372.8	91874.1	88896.6
Number of cases	77,008	77,008	76,658	76,658

Living arrangement of a child had significant influence on the work status of children in Ethiopia. Controlling for all other variables, children living with non-parents were at least 25% more likely to work ($P < 0.001$) than those children living with both parents (Table 2 Model IV). Likewise living with single parent increases the odds of child work by at least 6% ($P < 0.01$) compared to those living with both parents (Table 2 Model II and III). The effect of living in a single parent on child work was, however, disappeared when region of residence is controlled for implying that cultural setting has partly influenced child's work among single parenthood. As shown in Table 2, education has also significant effect on children's work. Attending school reduces the likelihood of children's work by 10% and the effect is statistically significant ($P < 0.001$). Compared with children in the first primary cycle (i.e. grade 1-4), children with no education were vulnerable to work (at least 7% more likely to work ($p < 0.01$)). Unlike this, those attending second primary cycle and above (grade 5 and higher) had at least 14% less likely to work.

Place of residence was found to have significant effect on children's work. The odds of child work significantly increased by at least 92% in rural areas compared with urban areas ($p < 0.001$). The significant effect of place of residence was maintained when other variables were controlled (Table 2 Model II and III).

Region of residence is also another important factor predicting the variation in children's work. Compared with Tigray region, the odds of child working significantly increased in the agrarian regions of Oromia, Amhara and SNNP where agricultural activities predominate. The odds ratio of working was increased by 124% for children in Oromia region ($p < 0.001$), by 96% for children in Amhara region ($p < 0.001$) and 25% for children in SNNP ($P < 0.001$). The odds, however, decreased by 41% for children living in Gambella region ($p < 0.001$), and 80% for children in Addis Ababa ($P < 0.001$). There was no statistically significant difference for children living in other pastoralist regions of Benishgul Gumuz, Afar and Somali regions. It is also interesting to observe a higher likelihood of children's work in Dire Dawa City Administration where the odds ratio has increased by 117% ($P < 0.001$) despite expecting a contrary result for children living in urban areas like that of Addis Ababa. The unexpected finding for Dire Dawa City administration could be due to extensive commercial activities in the area related with illegal trading such as contrabandist movement in the Eastern part of the country (Belwal and Teshome, 2011).

DISCUSSIONS

Results of the multivariate analysis show that there is gender variation in child work in Ethiopia that is governed by the socio-cultural and institutional setting of their communities. Cultural norms and values that regulate sexual division of labour within the societal framework, educational attainment and engagement, age and living arrangement of the children as well as place and region of residence were found to determine children's work.

It is interesting to observe that girls involve in work more often than boys in Ethiopia, and the difference is statistically significant. Given traditional ways of life and lack of access to labour saving household and production technologies, girls of adolescent age are expected to take part in several domestic and household production activities. The patriarchal system in traditional societies like Ethiopia also imposes girls to labour much both within and outside the household (Arora and Rada, 2013). Sex preference and inclination towards protecting the

interest and safety of boys than girls put much pressure on the later to provide assistance to mothers on domestic chores and the household economy in agricultural fields in rural areas, and family owned enterprises in urban centres. The tendency to put much pressure on girls than boys is partly a function of patriarchal system that jeopardizes gender equity and equality in the society.

Child work in Ethiopia is also observed to be a function of age. The likelihood of engaging in work increases with age. Due to labour demanding domestic chores and economic activities both in rural and urban Ethiopia, older children are expected to take part in work that benefits the family and the community. Some of the works that such children are engaged in include activities that are prohibited by the international law for being dangerous and harmful to the health or moral of minors (Parker and Overby, 2005). Victims of child work are usually migrants and those who live with non-parents as the guardians may not give proper care for the timing, volume and type of work they are supposed to engage in.

The inverse relationship between educational attainment as well as school attendance and child work is a manifestation of time constraints among those attending school. Schooling is one of the crucial components that eliminate child work (Assaad, Levison and Zibani, 2005). Non-school attendees, on the other hand, have ample time to engage in work and are expected to support their families by taking part in economic activities. Widening educational opportunities for children irrespective of sex will reduce the chances that children engage in work that debilitates their time and energy to grow healthy and happily (Bakker, Elings-Pels and Reis, 2009)).

Unlike those living in urban areas, children living in rural Ethiopia were found to involve in work quite often and regularly mainly due to the prevailing life style in the country and the type of economic activities that rural residents are specifically engaged in. Children in rural areas, for instance, are expected to look after cattle, fetch firewood and water, and work on agricultural fields that are rarely practiced in urban Ethiopia. The scattered way of life in rural Ethiopia is also calling for more labour at household level as each and every activity needs the attention of some family members. Unavailability of hired labour or subscribed services in rural areas also put much pressure on rural children to undertake a given task starting from early age.

Differential in child work across regions of residence that serves both as a nucleus of government administration in Ethiopia and cultural orientations for the mere reason that the Ethiopian federal system is based on ethnic origin is a manifestation of societal norms and values that regulates gender division of labour. In regions where agriculture is the main activities of livelihood, children have more activities to perform as additional household labour is required to work on farm lands, gardens, cattle rearing and the like. Unlike this, the demand for child labour is found to be rare in pastoralist regions where looking after cattle could be performed by adults as the task involves not only feeding the cattle but also ensuring their security against theft and confiscation by other tribes as a result of clashes and conflict between different groups (Babiker, 2002). The typical case that was observed in Dire Dawa City Administration is a response for dynamic market condition in the area that

calls for child work as most of the illegal trading activities are supposed to be subsumed within the framework of family labour (Koettl (2009).

Conclusions: In summary, child work in Ethiopia is found out to be a function of gender, educational attainment, place and region of residence. Girls, uneducated children and those living in rural areas are vulnerable to child work. Although child work in general is a manifestation of poverty, labour mobility, social exclusion, discrimination, lack of adequate social and economic protection as well as opportunity, efforts need to be made to widen educational and skill acquiring opportunities for children to abolish their engagement in labour activities during their childhood and adolescence age. Government policies and development programs shall thus underscore the fact that child work, beyond a given limit, is violation of human rights and denial of access to universal education for all. Hence, the campaign against eradication of child work should equally focus on the mechanism of ensuring gender equity and equality in developing countries like Ethiopia.

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