

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Children's Toiling Bodies behind the Tobacco Industry

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Abstract

This study on the tobacco-growing communities in the Northern part of the Philippines unveiled the stark reality of child labor among poor families in rural villages. These children found the tasks of the industry as normal and obligatory. They were made to earn their own money for school, food, and other basic needs such as clothes and personal belongings. This study aimed to give perspective on a child worker's life from their own lens, humanizing the face behind child labor. It unveiled issues, feelings, and deep-seated longings of typical children in tobacco-growing communities: wanting sustenance for their education despite the risks involved, easing their family's burden, finishing studies and preferring work over play. The study also looked at possible mechanisms towards addressing the issue of child labor, which include nurses and social development workers advocating for access to government instruments and raising awareness on the matter.

Introduction

This study gives life to statistics on child labor by the National Statistics Office (NSO), National Statistical Coordination Board (NSCB), Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), International Labor Organization-International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labor (ILO-IPEC), and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Based on real life experiences, this study gave the authors an intimate view on the child laborers and their families while offering a rare glimpse on the kind of life that they live.

Given the studies made on child labor in the tobacco industry, there are not much about the children's lived experiences. This study will document these stories to describe the incidence and gravity of the statistics, providing a perspective on the child laborer's life and work through their own lenses-particularly the story of the children in La Union's tobacco industry.

Dissecting the customarily prevailing situation in tobacco-growing communities would unravel some untold pains and experiences of those involved, which parents usually do not consider as abusive or hazardous. Children are made to think

that they need to share in the responsibility of their families' labor regardless if it is appropriate for their young bodies to bear. The aim of this phenomenological study is to enter the realm of child laborers in the tobacco-growing industry and understand what it is like to be in their field.

Despite of the Philippines' modern and advanced effort to reduce the prevalence of child labor, the Bureau of International Labor Affairs (2019) said children remain to be engaged in dangerous forms of child labor including dangerous tasks in agriculture. Palatino (2015) also echoed this sentiment, saying that the situation continues to worsen. This statement is backed by statistics gathered by an ILO program estimating that at least 2.3 million children in the country are entrapped in child labor (Understanding Child's Work Programme [UCW], 2015). Citing a study by the Ecumenical Institute for Labor Education Research (EILER), Palatino (2015) said that child workers go through harsh conditions and long working hours. The Center for Trade Union and Human Rights (CTUHR) also revealed in 2012 that there is no health and safety orientation to child laborers concerning

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possible hazards or effects. There seems to be a mishandling of the standards and no personal protective equipment, an imperative in the palm-oil industry. They did not have gloves, helmets, goggles, and boots, causing them added vulnerability from long and sharp thorns, and insects. Aside from these minor injuries, there were also reported cases of stomach problems.

These conditions run counter to the principle of child protection and is veering towards abusing the child's performative ability as posited by Esguerra (2003). The former said that children forced to work on a regular basis for their sustenance made them "educationally and socially" disadvantaged. There also remains a gap in child protection systems in the country especially within the Philippines' labor ministry which may hinder enforcement of child labor laws (Bureau of International Labor Affairs, 2019).

To address these gaps, Yacat (2011) identified specific components significant in achieving an effective child protection system: 1) legal and policy framework; (2) effective regulation and oversight; (3) preventive and responsive services; (4) effective coordination; (5) knowledge and data; (6) a skilled child protection workforce; (7) children's voices and protection; (8) an aware and supportive public; and (9) adequate funding.

This study is geared towards the above-mentioned objectives as it reveals an insider's perspective on the realm of child labor while pushing for better child protection programs to address the possible hazards faced by these juvenile laborers in various sectors of the country.

The significance of this study lies in the understanding of child laborers' situation and predicament and how parents and employers alike come to recognize the difficulties experienced by these child laborers. This can also potentially lead to the cessation of their engagement in work that is harmful and violative of their rights.

Methodology: Exploring the realm of child labor

Speziale and Carpenter (1999) defined phenomenology as a science that aims to describe particular phenomena as lived experience. This method of research allows the explanation of the "structure or essence" of a phenomenon's lived experience and its accurate description (Rose, et al., 1995, p.1124). Morse & Field (1996) relates that understanding the lived experience of individuals and their intentions is the goal of phenomenological tradition.

This study incorporates a design combining descriptive phenomenology and phenomenology of essences. This is ideal in understanding the lived experiences of the child laborers in this study. The combination of the two is also best in illustrating

the world where these child laborers live. Descriptive phenomenology will allow for the participants' common themes, essences and core experiences to be easily derived.

In general, the strength of qualitative research lies in its ability to present multiple realities, "to provide complex textual descriptions of how people experience a given research issue." It provides information about the "human" side of an issue – that is, the often contradictory behaviors, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals" (Mack, et al., 2005, p.1). With this design though — and this poses as the potential limitation — "gaining a rich and complex understanding of a specific social context or phenomenon typically takes precedence over eliciting data that can be generalized to other geographical areas or populations" (Mack, et al., 2005, p.2).

As lived experience becomes the description of a particular phenomenon, the investigator takes on specific responsibilities in transforming the information. Reinharz (1983) articulated five steps that occur in phenomenological transformation as the investigator makes public what essentially was private knowledge: 1) transformation occurs as people's experiences are transformed into language, allowing for the lived experience to be shared; 2) transformation occurs as the researcher transforms what is seen and heard into an understanding of the original experience; 3) the researcher transforms what is understood about the phenomenon at hand into conceptual categories that are essences of the original experience; 4) the researcher transforms those essences into a written document that captures what the researcher has thought about the experience and reflects the participants' description or actions; 5) the researcher transforms the written document into an understanding that can function to clarify all preceding steps. The intent of this written document, often referred to as the exhaustive description, is to synthesize and to capture the meaning of the experience into written form without distorting or losing the richness of the data.

Van Kaam's (1959) modified procedural interpretations of the phenomenological method guided the study. Van Kaam's method has five steps: (1) obtain a core of common experiences; (2) list and prepare a rough preliminary grouping of every expression presented by participants; (3) reduce, eliminate, and test each expression for two requirements: (a) does it contain a moment of the experience that might eventually be a necessary and sufficient constituent of the experience? (b) if so, is it possible to abstract this moment and to label it, without violating the formulation presented by the participant? Expressions not meeting these two requirements are eliminated. Concrete, vague, and overlapping expressions are reduced to more exactly descriptive terms; (4) tentatively identify the descriptive constituents; bring together all common relevant constituents into a cluster labeled with more abstract

formula expressing the common theme; and (5) finally, identify the descriptive constituents by application; this said operation consists of checking the tentatively identified constituents against random cases of the sample to see whether they fulfill the following conditions: (a) be expressed explicitly in the description, (b) be expressed explicitly or implicitly in some or the large majority of descriptions, (c) be compatible with the description in which it is not expressed. If a description is found incompatible with a constituent, the description must be proven not to be an expression of the experience under study, but of some other experience that intrudes it.

The little voices

The participants were helped to describe what life was like as a child laborer in the industry through a series of in-depth interviews with the help of an interview guide. This was then transcribed and translated from the tape-recorded interviews where important statements were cited. The data was organized by creating a conceptual file through classifying and indexing important statements. Finally, the description of the phenomenon was derived from the crucial relationship among the statements.

The study was conducted in barangay Pantar Sur of Balaoan, La Union, a known tobacco-growing area. This is among the areas where the DOLE Regional Office I provides educational and livelihood assistance to a number of child laborers and their families under its Eliminating Child Labor in the Tobacco Industry (ELCTI) project, thus providing a contrast to participants who are not benefiting from the project.

Purposive sampling and the use of key informant is used in this study. The first half of the population is selected through purposeful sampling, while the second half was selected with the aid of a key informant, the president of the ECLTI Livelihood Association in Balaoan. The samples were drawn from the beneficiary barangays of the ECLTI Project in Balaoan, La Union. The participants' ages ranged from 12-16 years old.

All the participants have experienced the phenomenon under investigation and are able to clearly communicate what it is like to have lived that experience. The participants are children working in the tobacco field and/or are performing work related to tobacco growing or production with ages ranging from 12-16. A study done by PARTNERS, International, Inc. (2002), noted that "the age at which children begin work in tobacco production varies widely", thus the researcher has set the age range to older children who are better able to clearly communicate their experiences. In the study are a total of seven working children.

The consent forms for the children and their parent or legal guardian were explained to those who met the criteria which they were asked to sign. The interview was audio-taped in

person in a place and time that was most convenient and comfortable to the participants. The researcher located a place with the least distraction.

To facilitate their description of their lived experience, the researcher conducted a semi-structured open-ended interview. The open-ended interview paved the way for unhindered discussion on the part of the participant. An interview guide was developed for easier facilitation of the interview. The questions also probed the physical effects of doing the work they do, the difficulties and hazards they encountered if any, and the effect of work on their schooling and playtime. An audio recorder was used during formal interviews. Interviews were checked and listened to for audibility and completeness after the conduct of the interview. A second interview was also conducted in the event that "additional questions come to mind after reflecting on the information, or in case interpretations of the information need to be verified" (Polit & Beck, 2004, p. 348)

Handling with care

The taped interviews were transcribed verbatim (using the speaker's exact words) by the researcher after interview, noting Morse & Field's (1996) remark that qualitative analysis requires the researcher to be completely immersed and familiar with the data. Reflecting on Polit & Beck (2004) which posited that researchers must carefully read and scrutinize the data for greater understanding, the researcher began with a search of themes to organize and analyze the information at hand. This thematic analysis is described by Morse & Field (1996) as "the search for and identification of common threads that extend throughout an entire interview or set of interviews" (p.114). Significant statements were later lifted, their meanings formulated, and statements categorized into theme clusters. The result was validated by child laborers who participated in the study through number check.

In the analysis of qualitative data, the suggestions for managing and organizing data posited by Polit & Beck (2004) were utilized. Organization was through classification and identification based on a scrutiny of actual data. Polit & Beck also described the process of designing conceptual categories wherein "researchers must break the data into segments, closely examine them, and compare them to other segments for similarities and dissimilarities to determine what type of phenomena are reflected in them, and what the meaning of those phenomena are."

Following Polit & Beck, the next step is coding the qualitative data. After developing the categorization scheme, data are then reviewed and coded according to the identified categories. In developing the conceptual file, the researcher then constructs a physical file for each category in the coding

scheme and inserts all material relating to that category into the file. Each file should have the appropriate ID number for easy retrieval of information from the master copy when necessary.

Risks and consent

Participants and their parents were fully informed about the nature, purpose, risk, and potential benefits of this research in order for them to make a rational decision on taking part of the study. Invoking Polit & Beck (2004), the study asked for the participants' informed consent which meant that they have adequate information, capable of comprehending it, and empowered with free choice. Heightened sensitivity is considered since the participants of this study are children, a vulnerable group.

This study would not be beneficial to its intended audience if the findings are unreliable, inaccurate, biased and not representative of the experiences of the participants. Thus, the following criterion is used in evaluating the dependability of a qualitative study:

Truth value or credibility: Truth value is subject-oriented and not defined in advance by the researcher. Lincoln and Guba (1985) used the term credibility, which they related to internal validity in empirical research. In empirical research the assumption is made that there is only one tangible reality to be measured. In qualitative research one recognizes that there are multiple realities, so the researcher's job becomes one of reporting the perspectives of the informants as clearly as possible.

Applicability: Applicability is the criterion used to determine whether the findings can be applied in other contexts or settings or with other groups.

Consistency: Consistency is the third criterion used to evaluate trustworthiness. Here the emphasis is on whether the findings would be consistent if the inquiries were replicated with the same subjects or in a similar context. In field research where one assumes multiple realities, the notion of reliability is no longer as relevant. Qualitative research emphasizes the uniqueness of the human situation, so that the variation in experience rather than identical repetition is to be expected.

Neutrality or confirmability: Another criterion used to establish rigor is freedom from bias in the research procedure and results. Qualitative researchers try to increase trustworthiness by prolonged contact with the informants or by using long periods of observation. Researchers also try to identify their own biases through the use of memos and through consultation with other researchers. The truth value or credibility of the study was established by the researcher by transcribing verbatim after each interview. Informants' verbatim were also quoted to convey their perspectives as clearly as possible. The researcher has

also noted that the result of the study correlates with previous studies from before, affirming the applicability and consistency criteria of the trustworthiness of the study. The researcher also established sufficient contact with the informants, visiting them several times during the study and immersing with them in their natural setting to establish rapport and closely observe them.

Findings

This study focused on providing an insider's perspective into the situation of child labor in the tobacco industry of La Union. Talking about their lives under the sun while surrounded by the stink of tobacco is not something they do every day. The same way their voices are not heard this way every day. Now that they are given the opportunity to speak, this is what they have to say. From the analysis of the interviews, the following themes were lifted:

Theme 1: Poverty is the Driving Force That Led Them to Work

Poverty is the overriding reason and cause why the children in the study become involved in tobacco growing. Lack of resources whether for school or household needs pushes them to work to gain income.

When asked what his reasons were for working in the tobacco industry, respondent AR says, "*Kayatko matulungan diay pamilyak*" (I want to help my family) and his parents also tell him to work (*Ibabaondak met*) so that he will have money for his uniform (*Inka makitudok tapno adda igatangmo ti unipormem*). Respondent CR also relates that when she does not have an allowance to go to school, she misses school to work (*no awan kuarta ken mabalon*). A similar reason was given by Respondent E, "*Imbaga ni papak apanak makitudok tapno adda mabalon*" (My father tells me to go stick tobacco leaves so I can have money for my allowance). She even prefers sticking tobacco leaves over playing so she can add the money she received from working to her allowance.

CR laments that as much as possible children should not be working but since they do not have money for allowance they choose to work. Seeing the need to augment their family's income and their desire to become self-sufficient—being able to provide for their own school needs like supplies, uniforms, and snacks—has made them decide to work.

Theme 2: Acceptance of Their Fate/Situation

Another common theme throughout the interview with the respondents is the general feeling of acceptance of their situation. This can be seen in how respondent AR shook his head when asked if they can decline the work asked of them.

Even if they are initially compelled to work as AR said “*Ibabaondak met*” (they [the parents] asked me to work), it seems that they had already resigned to their situation as child workers. AR tells “*Kayatko met latta*” (I still want to go) since the “*tangdan*” or remuneration would pay for his uniform.

Even as they related their reasons for working, they show no signs of resentment or hints of complaints from their answers or way of stating it. It can be described as a general feeling of acceptance.

Theme 3: The Duty to Help Family

Young as they are, the children in the study have acknowledged the need to help their family. They consider it their duty to help their family, even financially. That is the reason why they work. ROMR simply states that he prefers sticking tobacco leaves “*tapno matulongak isuda*” (so I can help [my family]).

RR relates the same by saying he prefers working during tobacco season “*diay adda tabako*” (the part where there is tobacco) to earn money. He deems this as necessary and as a responsibility on his part “*ta makatulongak met*” (so that I can help too). Helping his parents is a prime motivator in doing the job.

Without exception, the above children chose tobacco season over any other season when tobacco is not planted with one goal in mind: an opportunity to earn income. For them, tobacco season is the most opportune time to help their family by becoming “gainfully employed” children.

Theme 4: Work is Beneficial Because of the Compensation

The respondents commonly think that working is beneficial for them due to the compensation. This translates to the opportunity to ease their parents' financial burden by sustaining themselves or even their family. When asked which life they prefer, life involved in tobacco growing or life without it, they unanimously chose the former.

They reasoned that life is better in tobacco growing because of the remuneration. As E has said, “*diay adda ti tabako ta adda ti pangalaan ti kuarta*,” (life with tobacco (is preferred) because we can get money from it). AR echoes their sentiments, “*diay adda tabako ta adda matangdan*,” (life with tobacco (is preferred) because of the compensation we can get) and RR explains that he works so he can help his parents, “*tapno tulungak met diay magulang ko*” (so that I could help my parents too.)

When asked if doing tobacco-related work, which is deemed hazardous, is something they or other kids should do, they explain that if possible they should not be doing it but are constrained to continue since they have little source of allowance

as CR explained, “*no mabalbalen Ma'am saan kuma, ngem gapu ta awan ti mabalbalonda a padak isu siguro* (they shouldn't, if possible, but if they're like me who has no allowance, they might be forced to do the same.)

For them, work is not only beneficial but a necessity because it gives them something that enables them to continue their schooling and help their parents simultaneously.

Theme 5: Perception on Play

When asked about their playtime, majority of the respondents said that they no longer play. The most common answer given was, “*haanak ag-ayayamin*,” (I don't play anymore).

When E was asked why she doesn't play anymore, she explained that her parents forbade her (*ipagel da*).

- I: *Katno ka ngay nga agayayam ngarud? Katno ti panagayayam mo?* (When do you play?)
- E: *Ma'am, saan ak agay-ayam.* (Ma'am I don't play.)
- I: *Saanka agay-ayam?! Apay ngay?* (You don't play anymore? Why?)
- E: *Ipagelda Ma'am.* (They forbid it, Ma'am.)
- I: *Ipagpagel ni papam ta...?* (They forbid it because...?)
- E: *Adu pay kano maaramid.* (There are a lot of things to do.)

When CR was asked if her playtime was affected by work, she just kept silent. Further probing led to her explaining that she played when work is done, “*adda met, Ma'am, nu awan ti kukuaek*,” (I did [have time to play], when I wasn't doing anything.)

Questions on the effect of work on AJ's playtime were initially met with silence as well. When asked whether playtime was lessened because of his work, he said it had no effect. AR's reason for not playing anymore is different. He explains that he is a bit shy to be playing at his age because he is already a teenager, “*mabain ak lang*,” but that he used to play when he was in elementary. RR had a similar response when asked about her playtime, saying that she stopped playing when she was about 8 years old since she is “*bumalbalasangen*,” (almost a teenager.)

ROMR and JA gave the same reason why they stopped playing, “*bumalalangan*.” JA explained that her mother told her to stop playing because she's a “*balasang*” (teenager) already, “*saanka agayayamen ta balasangkan*,” (don't play anymore because you're already a teenager), and not because of work.

It is clear from their statements that play, or leisure is not a priority—given their tasks, like schoolwork, housework, and

tobacco-related work. Not being a priority and supposedly having outgrown it or having to outgrow it because they have entered puberty, play does not figure much in the lives of these children at this point in their lives.

Theme 6: Injuries, It's All Part of the Job

Injuries sustained while doing tobacco-related work, particularly sticking tobacco leaves, are common for the children. All the respondents reported being injured at some point and the way they related such experience was in a matter-of-fact manner that is similar to saying that getting injured is all part of the job.

The children deal with their injuries in the manner they think best, and the interviewer sensed that each believes that his/her method is the correct and sufficient treatment. AR related his experience when his hand got "*nadugsodugsol*" (struck) during work, explaining "*diay pinagtudok ko ngamin ket napartak*" (I was sticking the leaves too fast) while trying to outdo a fellow worker or "*agdidinnaras*" to see who can stick the most. He managed to aid his injury by using gas and coffee "*tapno rumuar diay darana*" (so that the blood will come out), a method he learned from his aunt.

E shared her experience when she injured herself during work, "*maiwa diay kua [fingers]*" (the fingers were sliced) due to the sharpness of the sticks they use. She later on asked for help to tend to her wound.

CR relates that when she injures her hand or fingers while sticking tobacco leaves, she immediately tends to the wound, "*Apan ko agasan na dagusen*" (I immediately tend to my wound) and for the meantime stops sticking the leaves because it is painful when it gets struck again (*Nasakit gaminen a maitudoken Ma'am*).

Theme 7: Life Beyond Tobacco Growing

All the respondents can see a future beyond working in the industry. Each of them has plans of pursuing higher studies and look at tobacco-growing only to achieve their goals. Doing tobacco-related work has, for them, become a means to reach a destination.

Respondent E, EC and RR all want to be a nurse someday while ROMR wants to be a caregiver; AR wants to take up Architecture; CR plans on taking up Criminology; JA wants to take up a course in Tourism; and AJ dreams of becoming a doctor someday.

Summary of findings

To summarize, these are the common themes that emerged from conversations with the respondents:

1. The dialogues between the researcher and the respondents only centered on the aspect or stage of child labor during

leaf gathering and leaf-processing (sticking the leaves). It did not include other aspects such as during planting, watering, and applying pesticides or deworming of plants.

2. The respondents portrayed that they are prodded or urged by their parents to go and earn from their neighbors to stick tobacco leaves for them to earn for their school allowance.
3. The respondents feel they are obliged to earn due to poverty.
4. Some have outgrown their desire to play as their priority is helping out in the tobacco work while there were others who felt that they were robbed of their chance to play.
5. Respondents learned to care for themselves when they got injured by doing things that most people do in treating injuries, such as applying kerosene and coffee powder (the powder as a blocking mechanism to the cut) or the use of *pandakaki*, an efficient herb to treat cuts or wounds.
6. Respondents forget to be careful and get wounded due to rushing to accomplish more. Payment is piece meal; the more accomplished, the more money.
7. Respondents look forward to the coming of the next season so they could have another chance to earn.
8. The task of sticking tobacco leaves usually takes hours, as work has to be rushed for the curing barn; so, children who work are denied of a good sleep and tend to skip classes the following day.

Discussion

Clearly, these are children compelled to work due to poverty and to having a sense of responsibility to help their parents. They labor for the compensation, despite getting injured and the difficult work conditions. In their minds, they understand their fate and reasons for working, albeit some do so voluntarily, foregoing playing as common among children in their ages.

The perspective of child laborers as they shed light on the phenomenon is defined. Child labor refers to economic activities or "those activities which are socially useful and remunerable, requiring manual and/or intellectual effort, which result in the production of goods or performance of services" (Diokno, 1984). In this case, work such as doing household chores and mendicancy do not fall under child labor since they are neither remunerable nor socially useful and does not include the production of goods and services.

Caution must be exercised however with the term "economic activity." Child labor has another dimension. The ILO-IPEC said

that child labor is work situations where children are “compelled” to work regularly to earn, thereby disadvantaging them “educationally and socially,” forcing them to lead adult lives in their age. Carefulness is needed in treading this other dimension. Diokno (1984) argues that economic exploitation is essentially a cultural decision reflected in the community's daily practices. Thus, in the case of the said child laborers, regardless of exploitative nature of working in the tobacco growing industry, they are compelled to do so because of poverty, and in turn becomes a duty. In this case, the exploitative nature of the said activity is elevated and juxtaposed against the largely exploitative circumstances surrounding the community. Furthermore, through the eyes of the child laborers, combatting child labor would then necessitate tackling another dimension which is eliminating the exploitative circumstances that surround these children and their families as well.

While Esguerra (2003) cited at least 38 studies and one national survey on child labor in the Philippines conducted since 1986, there are not much input on the social costs of this phenomenon. Discussions on the consequences of child labor among these studies focused on the phenomenon's effects to the child's education and health. This study unraveled certain consequences of child labor to the society, specifically institutions like family.

The growing tobacco industry proved to be lucrative enough for the dwellers of La Union, which gave them a livelihood that is consistently and relatively not backbreaking. However, behind this are the small, juvenile bodies of toiling children. They have set aside their concepts of play and desire to learn in exchange for what they thought was also their responsibility. Findings showed that the supposedly easy tasks of tobacco growing transformed to hazardous activities for the children as they became more involved. Though this led to increased yield and profit, it also resulted to unpleasant repercussions as shown in their testimonies.

Contrary to one's expectations and ideals, the situation is not getting any better. According to the CTUHR (2012), as poverty continues to rise, there remains little opportunity for livelihood and other food sources, mostly in part of the non-ownership of lands by the impoverished communities. There are little to no alternative sources of income. In Balaoan, the people are left with the tobacco industry. All the participants in this study expressed little dissatisfaction with their job. It was not about their dissatisfaction from their work but rather with the situation in general. They are in this situation and while they cannot really do anything to reverse it, they know that they can do something to at least live decently every day. As written in *Children of the Sunshine Industry* (2012), “No one expressed satisfaction, but insisted that their work is very important.”

No matter how seemingly skewed this insight is, it is their truth and it is from the mouths of the children. Now that we have heard what they have got to say, that they think their work is important, maybe it is our turn as outsiders to make them feel more *important* than their daily labor.

Transferability of Findings

In her report for the UNICEF, Bellamy (1997) posited that the reduction of child labor in developed countries occurred simultaneously with the following changes:

1. economic development that raised family incomes and living standards,
2. widespread, affordable, required and relevant education,
3. enforcement of anti-child labor laws (along with compulsory education laws),
4. changes in public attitudes toward children that elevated the importance of education.

Given the context of the Philippines as a developing country, the above changes that took place in developed countries may give ideas on solving the child labor problem plaguing the least developed countries today.

While child labor legislations and regulation exist, there is a need to strengthen this with economic aid, massive education campaigns and strict enforcement. Information-Education Campaigns (IEC) will play a major factor among children who are persuaded or compelled to enter such hazardous conditions to help the family enterprise, and altogether lift themselves up from the impoverished conditions they are born in.

A careful examination from a public health perspective is needed to identify and to address the roots of the child labor problem (Leinberger-Jabari, et al., 2005). This must be carried out along with overcoming intrinsic cultural values, particularly for the parents of child laborers who by nature and law are tasked to provide, protect, and care for their children.

Reducing the Push and Pull Factors to Work

Given that poverty is the driving force which compels these children to work, it follows that increasing family incomes would address the hazardous child labor problem. 30% of children involved in hazardous working condition cited supplementing family income as their main reason for working. This was followed by their other reason of helping in their own household-operated farm or business as the top reason (Ericta, 2011).

One concrete measure to address this is to build the capacity and empower the parents and adults of a household to venture into effective livelihood projects. This may come in the form of trainings, seminars and workshops on alternative ventures appropriate and sustainable in the area. Cooperatives and associations may increase their chances of survival, and attain funding from the barangay or LGU, and establish accountability.

Increased funding for education and other services may also be beneficial considering that the primary motivation of entering child labor common among respondents is to sustain their schooling and provide for other needs. This can be achieved through various schemes, like the government Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) or the DOLE's ECLTI Project, through the Eliminating Child Labor in Tobacco Growing (ECLT) Foundation.

Under the 4Ps, a household beneficiary receives the following: P6,000 every year or P500 every month as health and nutrition expenses and an additional P3,000 for 10 months or P300 per month for education expenses of one child. Thus, a household with three qualified children receives as much as P1,400 a month.

The 4Ps as a tool to remove children from hazardous working condition would be more effective if 4Ps claims can also be increased to effectively replace the loss of the income of the child who ceased to work whether by choice to concentrate on their schooling, or because of an agreement made by their parent to remove them from hazardous working conditions.

If they are not recipients of the 4Ps, communities may partake from the DOLE's ECLTI Project, through the Eliminating Child Labor in Tobacco Growing (ECLT) Foundation. Through this, parents are provided with livelihood assistance in exchange of not letting their children get involved in the hazardous industry at their age. Likewise, educational assistance in the form of supplies, needs and funding are provided.

Raising awareness, changing values

The general feeling of acceptance of their situation is among the themes that emerged from this study. This could be linked to three things: the socialization of children to work (Boquiren, 1987) as part of their role as obedient sons and daughters (PARTNERS International, 2002); traditional expectation (Bellamy, 1997); and, possibly the desensitization of the family to the idea of a working child.

Bellamy (1997), in her report, stipulated that work is effective in teaching the nuances of life and world. However, the downside to this is teenage children are expected to take on jobs alongside schooling in order to understand how the world and its economy functions. The report further explains:

“There is a darker side to the expectation about children's work. The harder and more hazardous the jobs become, the more likely to be considered traditionally the province of the poor and disadvantaged, the lower classes and ethnic minorities” (p.31)

The continued phenomenon of child labor can be attributed to the lack of awareness on information, legislation, and regulations on the matter. According to studies by Boquiren (1987), all people involved regarding the employment of the child laborer (i.e., the parents, employer) showed no awareness of policies and programs for working children. Meanwhile, the view that if children are capable of working then they should be allowed to work is shared by almost all parents in the study. The parents support their children's decision to work because this will give them the chance to earn money for themselves and help the family.

This notion could be changed through an IEC, where children's rights, hazards of child labor and related laws are tackled. Parents and their children can be equipped with information that could potentially combat the desensitization and traditional expectation intrinsic among them. This can be made mainstream through existing institutions, such as the barangay local government unit (BLGU), schools, and even non-government organizations (NGOs).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Child labor is a problem that cannot be easily solved by a magic wand, especially since it is not just about poverty, but also time-honored values of teaching children the value of work and of cooperation towards a family's survival.

These children work because of poverty, motivated by their desire to sustain schooling and help their families. They view this as a call of duty due to the compensation, notwithstanding the injuries and the hardships they sustain. They accept their fate and have full understanding of it; some doing so voluntarily, some out of obedience, doing away with playtime in exchange for work.

The themes that emerged from this study point to the family's welfare as a major concern of the children. Nurses and social development workers can focus their advocacy work towards policy makers and project/program implementers to take these into consideration when drafting projects/programs for child laborers. Expanded social welfare programs such as the 4Ps and the ECLTI can address the concerns rising from this study.

These are the children's voices, articulated as close to reality as possible. It is important that their voices form part of any decision-making on projects and programs that concern them. As Boyden and Ennew (1997) stipulated, "Children's voices are seldom heard in research and yet it is important to know what they think and do in order to plan effective interventions" (p.16).

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