Risks and Impacts of Children’s Engagement in Solid Waste Management Activities in Hawassa City, Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

There are a number of international conventions and national legislations in response to child labor. However, children are being vulnerable to different work related risks. The risks and impacts of child labor can be determined by the age of child, the type and hours of work performed and the condition under which it is performed. To explore these issues, this study was conducted on children aged 5-14 years who were engaged in solid waste management activities in Hawassa City Administration. The objective was to explore the risks and impacts of children’s engagement in solid waste management activities. A survey method, which is supplemented by ethnographic qualitative research, was applied to explore children work risks and impacts through the use of tools such as focus group discussion, key informant interview and observation.

KEYWORDS

Child, Child Labor, Donkey Cart, Exploitation, Hawassa City, Hazardous Work, Informal Sector, Vulnerability

INTRODUCTION

Child labor remains to be a serious problem in the world. As indicated in International Labor Organization (ILO) (2013), the exact number of working children in the world is unknown. However, some estimates have been made. For instance, 144.1 million children from age category of 5-14 years were involved in child labor by 2012. This represents 11.8 percent of all children in this age group. The overwhelming majority of these children were found in developing countries. The Asia-Pacific region has the largest number of children in employment (64.4 million) in 2012, followed by Sub-Saharan Africa (57.6 million), other Regions (13 million, of which 7.1 million for the Middle East and North Africa) and Latin America and the Caribbean (9 million).

In Ethiopia, children are engaged in the worst forms of child labor in both the urban and rural areas (Meskerem, 2013). According to Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs (MoLSA) (2001) child labor survey, the number of children engaged in child labor was around 15.5 million or 85.5 per cent and the overwhelming majorities were below 15 years. According to the report of Central Statistical Authority of Ethiopia (CSA) (2012) Demographic and Health Survey, this number has reduced to 6.8 million or 27 percent.

The government of Ethiopia has taken a range of measures in response to the problem of child labor in general and towards the elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labor in particular. The ratification and incorporation of international conventions and laws in domestic legislations is a good
example to be mentioned. Above all, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) (1995) constitution enshrined the basic rights of children in Article 36(d), which reads “not to be subject to exploitative practices, neither to be required nor permitted to perform work which may be hazardous or harmful to his or her education, health or well-being” (FDRE, 1995).

However, child workers are highly visible in both formal and informal sectors of Ethiopia. Informal sectors are the main consumers of child labor in the country. The situation is prevalent in areas like; works on the street as shoe shiners, food venders, and peddlers which expose them to severe weather, vehicle accidents, abuses and neglect, and other criminal elements.

Engagement of children in solid waste management activities are among the list of activities prohibited to children (MOLSA, 1997). This issue was chosen to be the focus of this study since there is influx of children engaged in solid waste management activity; which is categorized under hazardous children activities of the country. Children perform solid waste management activities through commission. Their employers have the desire to maximize profit from children’s cheap labor and weak bargaining power over their wages. Thus, this study was conducted in Hawassa City on child workers who were engaged in solid waste management activities to look in to the nature and condition of the work, possible effects on the health, education, physical and emotional wellbeing of the working children. Therefore, the major objective of the study was to explore vulnerabilities and risks of children who were engaged in solid waste management activities in Hawassa City.

Preliminary Discussion
Children are viewed in many African cultures as vital to family survival itself, in that they help to maintain household economies through their cheap labor at home, in family businesses, or in other formal and informal sector. Moreover, the situation is exacerbated by the devastation of the productive age group by the AIDS epidemic which makes children find themselves heading households (Howard, 2013).

Child labor is a widespread and growing phenomenon in Ethiopia. Even though the country has signed international convention to protect children from child labor, children are engaged in activities that are prohibited. This would interfere with the education and normal development of children; which in turn, negatively affects their health and morals. It is also one sign of deprivations of children right which can be an obstacle for the future development of the country. It is a serious issue requiring extreme action. Nonetheless, society and the government have failed to protect the right of the vulnerable children against exploitation and abuse for selfish purpose (USDLBILA, 2011; Musandirre, 2010).

According to Hawassa City Municipality (HCM), the actual statistics about child laborers who engaged in solid waste management activities is unknown. However, a significant number of children earn their livelihood from solid waste management activities. The number of donkey carts used to transport the solid wastes daily to the dumping site/ landfill which is about seven km’s far from the center of the city are 130-150 and most of the laborers work on these donkey carts are children (HCM, 2013). Despite children’s engagement in this activity has become serious which would affect their health, schooling, and moral wellbeing, it has got little research attention. This has attracted my attention to explore why children are pushed to the market, children’s work experience in solid waste management activities and, their vulnerability and risks.

The risks and impacts of engaging in solid waste management activities are not limited only for children, but families of the working children and adult population who were engaged in this activity can also be exposed to the risks and impacts of this work. However, children are more vulnerable to various work related risks than adults due to the hazardous nature of the work.
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