

# CHILD LABOR EXPLOITATION AND CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION: A STUDY IN SELECTED PRIMARY SCHOOLS AT DEBUBE OMO ZONE

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**Abstract:** As is the case with other developing countries of the world, child labor is also a problem in Ethiopia. Child labor is mainly caused by poverty and the socio-cultural perspectives of society, where inhabitants require the labor of their children for household tasks and agricultural activities than sending them to school. The study was conducted to assess the general situation of child labor exploitation and children's participation in primary education in selected primary schools at Debub Omo Zone and thereby to recommend mechanisms to alleviate the problem. This study has used both primary and secondary data sources. The methods used to collect primary data include: in depth-interview, focus group discussion, and observation. Informants were selected by purposive and available sampling techniques based on variables: age, sex, religion, education, occupation and marital status and a total of 58 informants participated in the study. Findings of the study revealed that child labor became a major problem in the study area, where it is closely associated with poverty and socio-cultural viewpoint of the society, which value children as an economic asset of their families. As a result of this, children were forced to drop their schooling or not got the chance to go to school. As the study reveals, children were expected to perform both domestic activities (such as cooking, fetching water and fire wood, caring siblings and washing) and productive activities (like cultivating, planting, weeding, harvesting, and keeping cattle and goats). The finding also indicates that child labor affects the physical, social, emotional, educational and health conditions of the working child. Therefore, it needs collaborative effort of all governmental, non-governmental and family's effort in the fight against child labor, so as to ensure children's school participation.

**Keywords:** Child labor, Exploitation, Participation, Debube Omo, Zone.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Child labor is a persistent problem found throughout most of the developing world, and to a lesser extent in developed countries. According to [1] currently 168 million children worldwide are in child labor, which is 11% of the child population as whole. Many of them worked under hazardous and unhygienic conditions and for more than 10 hours a day [1]. As a result, the issue of child labor has attracted increasing attention in the past decades from policy makers, advocates and researchers.

A number of local researchers indicated that Child labor is a pervasive problem throughout Ethiopia, for instance, [2], [3], [4] and [5] conducted a study in different parts of the country, both in rural and urban areas to access the causes, nature and magnitude of the problem encountered by child laborers. These studies underlined that poverty and socio-cultural

perspective of the society are causes of the problem. In addition, these papers highlighted the impacts of child labor as physiological, psychological and impacts on children education. In line with this, a recently released data by [6] indicates that from the total children in the age group (5-14) almost 22% are engaged in child labor, which is supported [5], [4], and [1]. The survey also discloses that 54% of them are attending school and on the other hand from the age group (7-14) 17% are combining work and schooling. The document underlines that Ethiopia has been taking a number of measures to overcome the problem of child labor in cooperation with domestic and international aid organizations however; the problem goes on despite the fact that there is moderate advancement.

Child labor is extensively practiced throughout Southern Nations Nationalities and peoples Region (SNNPR); in this regard Wolayita, Gamo Gofa and Gurage [7], [8], and [9] are known for child labor and trafficking in the region, where highland girls fetch wood and water, which may require them to walk long distances with heavy loads and carryout household chores [10]. Among the lowland pastoralists, boys; especially, the first born, are often withheld from school for cattle herding from eight year upwards. What is more, children herding livestock may suffer injuries such as being bitten, butted, gored, or trampled by animals [11].

On the other hand, South Omo *Zone*, which is known with its multi-lingual ethnic groups, diversified culture and different life styles; has attracted many anthropological studies. Different studies on cultural similarities and differences, cultural practices and languages have been undertaken by anthropologists: Ivo Streker on Hamer, Tadesse Wolde and his co-researchers on Erbor, Melesse on Tsemay, Marko Bassi and Uri Almagor on Omorate, and Gebre Intiso on Ari [12].

However, none of these studies dealt with child labor and its impact on children's school participation. Subsequently, after having a good understanding on the limitations of these studies, the present research tried to assess the general situation of child labor exploitation and children's participation in primary education in selected primary schools at Dehub Omo *Zone*.

## II. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES OF CHILD LABOR

Existing literatures on child labor indicates that scholars of the field have different views on what causes child labor, what constitute it, how it affects children and the society and how best to deal with it. Similarly, review of literature on child labor reveals that the most commonly used approaches on child labor can be described in terms of four general perspectives. Each of the perspectives has different views on the work of children and on how the problem can be addressed. These general perspectives are, namely: the human capital, the labor market, the social responsibility and the child-centered.

The focus of the human capital perspectives is under development. According to this perspective; poverty is one of the chief causes of child labor. On the other hand, the labor market perspective is mainly concerned about the potential impact of child labor on adult labor. Social responsibility perspective on its part is concerned about marginalization and exclusion of children from the protection and essential services that should have been given to them by the society. Lastly the child-centered perspective argues that there is a need to actively participate children in community development to ensure that their interests are met [13] and [14].

As it is mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph these perspectives have their own philosophy in dealing with the problem of child labor though they contradict in some cases (consider the labor market perspective, which is anxious about adult unemployment because of child labor). Hence, the researchers believe that the aforementioned theoretical perspectives offer an intellectual tool to analyze the impact of child labor on children schooling in socio-cultural perspective of agricultural, pastoral and agro-pastoral communities of Dehub omo *Zone*.

## III. SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL CONTEXT OF THE STUDY AREA

South Omo *Zone* is one of the 13 *Zones* and 8 *Woredas* of SNNPR. It is bordered on the south by Kenya, on the west by Bench Maji, on the northwest by Kaffa, on the north by Konta, and Gamo Gofa, on the northeast by Dirashe and Konso, and on the east by the Oromia Region. Jinka is the administrative center of Dehub Omo *Zone*. It is located 781 km from Addis Ababa and 550 km from the regional city of Hawassa [12]. This *Zone* is named for the Omo River, a river that flows south into Lake Turkana on the western side. According to [12] there are 16 different ethnic

groups with their own distinct languages and traditional practices. The names of the ethnic groups are: Hamer, Erboore, Karo, Muriel, Bena, Tsemay, Biralle, Mursi, Bodi, Dime, Bacha, Koygo, Dasench, Nyangatom, Ari, and Malle.

With respect to the land size; the total land area of South Omo *Zone* is estimated at 22,361 km<sup>2</sup> and lies from 380 to 3300 meters above sea level. The categories of land are: 0.5% highland (*Dega*), 5.1% mid-highland (*Woinadega*), 60% lowland (*Kolla*), and 34% semi-arid (*Bereha*). Average annual rainfall is 450 mm to 1500 mm and temperature ranges are between 22 and 30°C. 19.36% of the land is arable, 2.84% cultivated land, and 23% grazing land, 1.8% covered by forest and the remaining 42.9% is rocky or covered by small bush [12]. According to the study by [6] for such a large *Zone* there is only 462 kilometer of all-weather roads and 412 kilometers of dry-weather roads, for an average road density of 37 kilometers per 1000 square kilometers. However, currently because of the launching of mega sugar projects in the *zone*, the government of Ethiopia is mainly focused on construction of asphalt roads which leads to the project area. Plus to this, the Universal Road Access Project (URAP) is also expected to alleviate the problem.

On bases of [15], this *Zone* has a population of 573,435 of whom 286,607 are men and 286,828 women. The zonal population density ranges from about 19.3 persons/km<sup>2</sup> in the most populous *woreda* that is Bako -Gazer to 4.1 persons/km<sup>2</sup> in the most dispersed *woreda* that is Salamango. With respect to their language; Ari is spoken as a first language by 44.34%, followed by Male which has 14.25%, Hamer 8.17% , Daasanach 8.16% , Amharic 5.07% , Banna 4.49%, Tsamai 3.03% , and 2.94% speak Nyangatom; the remaining 9.55% spoke all other primary languages reported [15]. What is more, according to this report, from the total population 50.86% practiced traditional beliefs, 30.44% were Protestants, and 12.23% practiced Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, and 1.33% was Muslim.

The inhabitants of this *Zone* are mainly known for their pastoral life, which is practiced in five *woredas*. From the rest three, Dehub Ari is the only *zone* for its agricultural economy and Salamago and Male are agro-pastoral areas which produced: maize, sesame, cotton, banana and animal herding. All the pastoral, agricultural and agro-pastoral communities of this *Zone* thought that children are source of wealth (mainly girls). As a result, because of their socio-cultural perspectives, inhabitants of these agricultural, pastoral and agro-pastoral communities need the labor of their children for household chores, agricultural activities and cattle keeping. This is clearly seen from their way of socializing children. For instance, in the Hamer community the socialization of boys comprises to learn to take care of the cattle, learn apiculture and hunting and to become a man of the community through observing and imitation of the older members. Most of the time the boys live in cattle camps until they pass the initiation [16].

#### IV. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to assess the general situation of child labor in Dehub Omo *Zone* and to identify the cause and impact of child labor on their educational participation. In order to achieve the stated objective, a cross sectional survey design was used. Because of time and financial constraints reaching all *woredas* and schools of Dehub Omo *Zone* is practically impossible. As a result, researchers initially used purposive sampling techniques to select the *Zone* and five *woredas* from the total of 8 *woredas* in the *Zone*. Likewise, in order to get six primary schools from sample *woredas* researchers used the following criteria: magnitude of the problem, socio-economic activity of the community, cultural and traditional practice of the community, the existence of hidden child labor exploitation and transport accessibility. On the other hand, since the number of head masters in each school is very limited as a result there is no better way other than incorporate them using available sampling techniques so as to tap vital information to achieve the objective of this research. Household children were also selected using similar technique. On the other hand, school children and parents were selected by employing purposive sampling techniques. In all this, to ensure the credibility of the samples, the researchers have tried to cover the participants (the study group) they are interested in through a strategy known as maximum variation sample, which involves selecting key demographic variables that are likely to have an impact on participants' view of the topic. Consequently, the researchers created a sampling 'grid' and recruited individuals that reflect various combinations of variables: age, sex, income, ethnicity, marital status and residency. This study has used both primary and secondary data sources. Essentially, the study is based on primary data that obtained by in-depth-interview, focus group discussions and observation.

***In-Depth-Interview:*** Oral interviews with (45) participants were conducted through direct contact and the use of field assistants. Guideline questionnaires were prepared in advance, but sometimes modified when the interview was in progress based on the response of the informant. Questions pertaining to personal and family background, living conditions, and prevailed impact of child work on the children's participation were included in the interview schedule. Interviews were conducted in their mother tongue with the help of assistance.

***Focus Group Discussion (FGD):*** For the purpose of data triangulation and methodological merit, focus group discussion (FGD) has 'high face validity'. As a result, the researchers had employed it as one data collection tool. Employing FGDs as one data collection tool assisted not only to generate primary information that would complement the data coming through other methods but also to check and counter-check the reliability of data gleaned from the participants. In the FGD, the researchers took parents who have a good deal of knowledge about the issue at hand as participants. As focus groups take a long time to arrange and to transcribe the recordings that was made, small number is recommended when participants are likely to have a lot to say on the topic and when the research topic is controversial. [17] suggests the typical group size is 6-10 members. Viewed from the above vantage point, the topic at hand needs to take small participants. Accordingly, the researchers had taken small number of participants within the stated size range (6-10) and a total of 13 informants of which 7 in Dakubu and 6 in Shala primary participated.

***Observation:*** Observation was used as a method of data collection to enrich the information gathered through the other methods. The above methods of data collection tools: interview and focus group discussion gave an opportunity for the researcher to get the picture of the situation and impact of child labor on their education through observation, because there was a face to face interaction between the researchers and the children. Hence, the researchers took notes on such observable phenomena that were stumbling upon conducting interviews, facilitating focus group discussions and visiting the study site. The researchers also used document analysis to come up with a comprehensive picture of the child labour practice, type, and effect. This kind of data collection instrument would be helpful to obtain data from documents like study reports and school documents. Besides, in order to put in context the research problem and to inform the study with clear theoretical insight different books, periodicals, and statistical publications were used.

***Ethical considerations:*** Participation of respondents was strictly on voluntary basis. Informed consent was solicited orally. Different measures were taken to ensure the respect, dignity and freedom of each individual participating in the study and to assure confidentiality. Participants were informed that the information they provide kept confidential to the research team, and would not be disclosed to anyone else. Finally, before collecting the data the researchers expressed thankfulness to them for their willingness to participate in the study.

## V. DATA CHECK AND ANALYSIS

Qualitative data was recorded by taking detailed notes and sound recordings. At the end of each field work, researchers and supervisors discussed the findings, described respondents in terms of key variables, ordered the data, reduced them and classified or coded (sorted-out), displayed and summarized, and finally interpreted and drew conclusions about the data. Generally, the data obtained from the school-aged child, the household, the school administrators and the local community; through interviews, document analysis, observation and focus group discussions were analyzed using percentiles and qualitative descriptions.

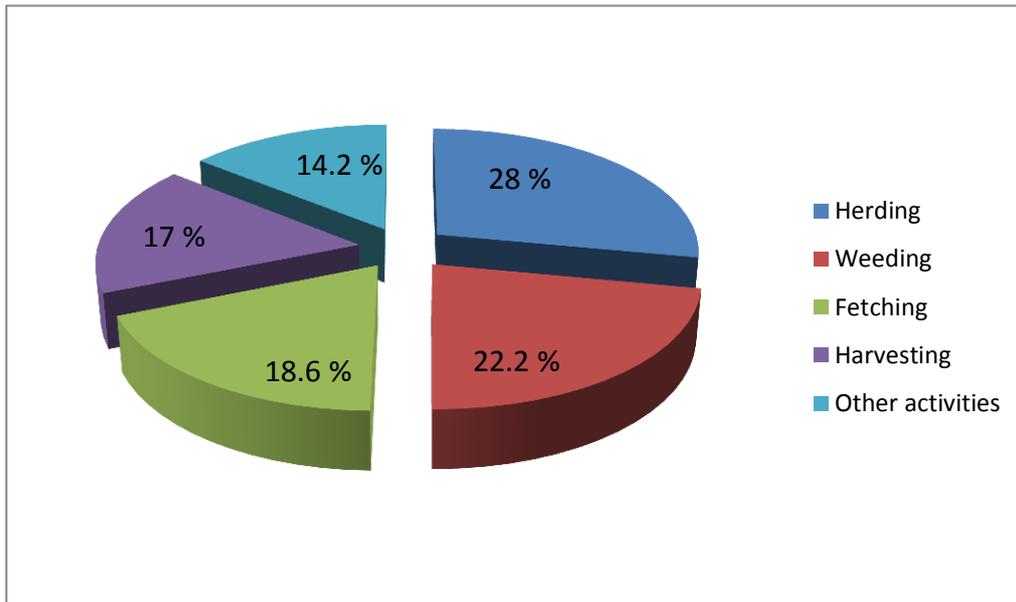
## VI. FINDINGS

The final analysis was made using a sample of 45 interviewees and 13 participants in focus group discussion. From the total (58) participates; 6 are head masters, 24 are parent, 18 are school children and the remaining 10 are children from the household.

### *The Situation of Child Labor in the Study Area*

The analyzed sample is composed of 28 children (18 school children and 10 from household), of which 25 of them involved in domestic and agricultural activity and nearly all (27) of them are working for their family. The average number of hours spent in work during the day is 7 hours. Majority of them had started working at the age of 4-5 by

herding goats and calves. They keep cattle and goats from dawn to dusk in the pastor fields, which is similar to the findings of [18], [7], [8], [19], and [20]. This is to free the adults in the family to do the hardest work of subsistence crop production. Majority of respondents indicated that the major source of employment in the area is domestic and household activities. Along with this, respondents also posited that the bulk of child labor in the rural sector takes place in households or domestic activity where livelihoods depend on smallholder farming and agricultural labor markets. Poor rural households in particular draw heavily on child labor. Within rural households; young girls usually dominate the collection of firewood, fetching water, and sibling caring. Young boys are more likely to be involved in herding and agricultural production (Refer Graph.1). This finding is go in line with [21] and [22]. Similarly, in pastoralist areas of northern Kenya, young boys represent a significant part of the labor force responsible for herding cattle long-distances during the dry-season [23], [24], and [19].



Source: Field data May 2014

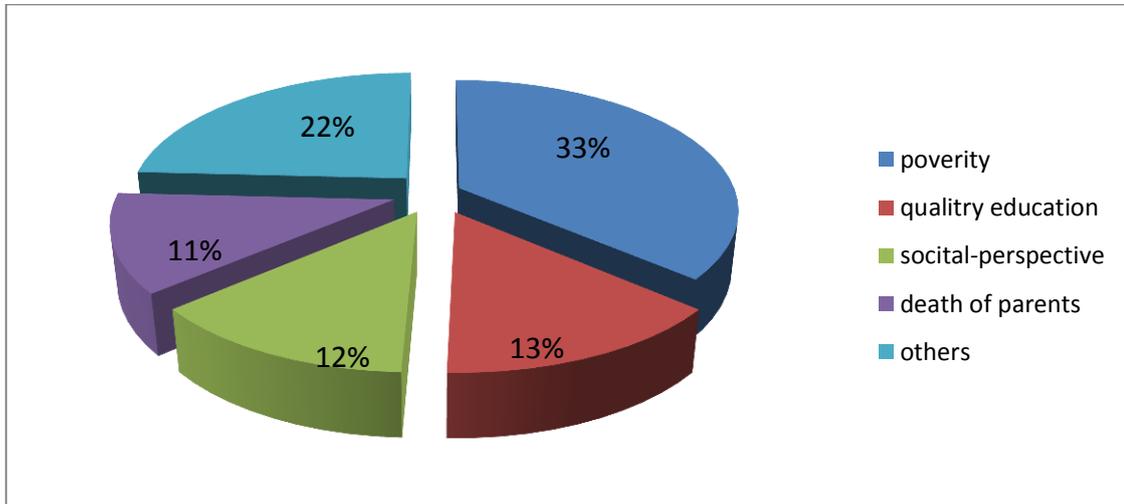
**Graph 1.** Types of Child labor as identified by respondents

According to informants, work is important for children; for their over whole development and to the economy of their family. In line with this, some of the respondents said that work can be a means for children to learn about challenges of life and it help children to prepare themselves for adult roles or it is a means for preparation for adult roles. This idea was also supported by focus group discussants. From this, what we deduce is that such views are an indication of the societal attitude towards child labor. This shows us that the socio-cultural perspective of the community mold children with the very need of that particular society. However, still informants underlined that they never consider the negative effects of child labor on their children. In this regard researchers like [25] reported that children in rural parts of the country (Ethiopia) work under hazardous conditions and most commonly for a long time. Here, they argue that the problem lies however, in rural Ethiopia, where child labor is not considered as hazardous; rather it is considered as one aspect of educating children to socialize and taught the essentials of life skill as they grow adults.

**Causes of Child Labor**

It is true that child labor is universal phenomenon that one can find at every corner of the world. Nonetheless, the nature of the work performed by children, their working condition and the situation that pull or push them to work varies from society to society. In this regard respondents confirmed that poverty, quality of education and socio-cultural reasons causes child labor in the study area (Refer Graph 2). Indeed, the researchers have observed that no single factor can fully explain the persistence of child labor. However, only by considering the predominant causes of child labor it is possible to make out a solution that makes significant progress in addressing the issue. As it is indicated by the respondents, the living condition of their family is very poor, as a result of this; children are forced to engage in activities which

substantiate family's economy. This finding go in line with different studies such as [26], and [27] who claim that poverty, lack of educational opportunities, and, social and cultural pressures, are reasons behind child labor.



Source: Field data May 2014

Graph 2. Causes of child labor as identified by respondents

### The Impact of Child Labor on Children

Most respondents underlined that work has an impact on children health and physical well-being, emotional development, and schooling. With respect to health and physical well-being the respondents briefed that children can experience injury, loss of weight and drowsiness, headache, congestion of nose, sore throat, shortness of breath, eye irritation, cough, and ear pain, which is similar to the findings of [28], [29], and [30]. With respect to psychological problems of child Laborers, nearly all of the respondents indicated that child laborer can have low self-esteem, stigmatization, and personality crises. At the time of observation the researchers too observed that most of the children in the study area were physically weak, restless and sleepless. As a result, they often see and hear things beyond their maturity. Correspondingly, the child centre perspectives substantiate this finding by arguing that child labor undermines children's wellbeing and individual and social development. Yet, whatever the problem is, the community of the study area never considers it as a threat to their children development rather as a challenge that a child has to face courageously in his life. From this, what the researchers perceive is that the community in the study area perceives them (children) as having a fundamental lack in their training and upbringing if children do not take part in labor works. All these posit a huge challenge that negatively affects children's cognition and retention abilities. Generally, working children are known perceive themselves as less fortunate and less privileged than their non-working counterparts.

### Child Labor and Education

Out of the total children participated in the study, 18 are currently at school. It represents 64.3 % of children surveyed and the remaining 35.7 % includes drop outs and those never go to school. The average age of these children is nine years old and 80.5% of them are boys. This indicates that significant number of children spend their time at household by doing different home chores rather than attending school. It is because of this that human capital perspectives' argue against child labor, which deny the right of children to educate. Children at their early age are expected to be in school and perform other constructive activities like playing with their peer groups. However, this fact is not true in the present study, because most of the children who participated in the study mentioned that they are forced by their parents to take up responsibilities at their early age. The report from school administrators also indicate that the dropout rate among working children is very high, given the fact that the proportion is still higher for girls than the boys. As reported from head masters; the main reason given by most child workers for not attending school is poverty. That is because, they come from poor family background, consequently they have to abandon school or their study so as to work and support themselves and their family. They may decide to do so either on their own free will or their parents or relatives may require them to support their family. Children in the household were requested about whether they are interested to return to school or not, and 90% of the children responded that they could be very happy, if they return to school.

It is important to notice that many studies consider education and working as mutually exclusive activities: “if you go to school you don’t work and if you work, you don’t go to school”. It considers school going children not to be working. There is evidence, however, that school-going children are often also working [6] and [20]. Here, we can argue that child labor is not the inverse of school attendance. It is important to specify that school schedules are really accommodating agricultural seasons and weather condition. These help children to go school and help their parents during agricultural seasons without having to drop out of school [1].

The head masters were requested to mention the service that is available for children in their respective schools. Accordingly, they replied that, the type of service given by school for their children is not adequate. Similarly, in their field observation, researchers experienced that most of the visited schools lack materials and facilities to satisfy students need. Among the expected services from elementary schools for instance; play ground with playing materials, pure water supply and toilets are not available in most of the visited school. This indicates that lack of materials and services in the schools could be one additional factor that hinders children participation in education.

Across the country, generally there is a significant increase in the rate of children enrolling in to primary education; nevertheless there is also a substantial dropout rate which in turn leads to low completion rates. This is particularly true with regard to Debeu Omo *Zone*, where many children are constrained to abandon school without acquiring the basic skills necessary for their meaningful participation in the countries future in general and the communities in particular. Even more, this would not only limit opportunities but also amounts to a waste of the limited resources that the country may be willing to expend for the provision of primary education. Furthermore, the researchers understand that the majority of those who attend school still go late owing to the fact that first they have to do some household tasks (sweeping, grinding, cooking, water fetching and fire wood gathering etc.) before going to school.

## VII. CONCLUSION

In the study area almost all child work is performed for the family and this may because there is no a potential labor market that may employ children in the study area. The finding indicates that division of labor is based on age and sex and the main activities of children in the study area are sweeping, grinding, cooking, water fetching and fire wood gathering, agricultural activities, herding cattle, looking after siblings and related activities. Adult males are primarily involved in farming and herding while adult females take care of the domestic works. This division of household activity should be analyzed carefully so that, asset targeted poverty reduction policies could focus on “assets” that reduce the demand for child labor, which in effect results in increased school participation. It is because of this that the human capital perspectives’ argue that increased income contributes to economic development thereby breaking the vicious cycle of poverty, can play role in sending children to school.

The study shows us that the problem of child labor is closely associated with poverty which is main cause for child labor in general. Another related factor contributing towards the high level of child labor in the study area is the widely held conception of the society, which perceives children as economic assets of their family. Hence, children are expected to contribute to the family income and child work is often viewed as part of the socialization process and an entry point into adulthood. In line with this, the social perspectives stated the problem of child labor as it caused by social differentiation within the society, racial and cultural domination, dysfunctional family, and community relationships, decline of social values and moral fibers. They contend that overcoming such problems may contribute children’s schooling. Also, the finding of the study indicated that child labor can affects the physical, social, emotional and health conditions of the working child. In Respect to their physical conditions the study indicated that working children are vulnerable to injuries and abuses like cuts, burns and lacerations, fractures, tiredness and dizziness, excessive fears and nightmares. Even more, the study shows that working children lack of schooling; results in missing educational qualifications and higher skills thus, perpetuating their life in poverty.

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